

Benjamin Britten's creative relationship with Russia

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Abstract

This thesis considers Britten's creative relationship with Russia, in the sense of aspects of Russian culture and politics, across his creative life. It makes particular use of the composer's collection of scores, the full text of his diaries from 1928 to 1938 and his correspondence in the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh. The author has also conducted over twenty interviews with those with a perspective on this aspect of Britten's creative sensibility, some of which are included as appendices, and carried out two research visits to Russia and Armenia. Particular attention is given to Britten's lifelong admiration for Tchaikovsky and to his creative relationship with Shostakovich. The latter is considered both in the 1930s and the 1960s by means of Britten's diaries, the correspondence between the two composers, Shostakovich's collection of Britten scores, and a series of articles about Britten published in the Soviet Union in the 1960s. An attempt is made to consider the relationship between Britten's and Shostakovich's vocal and instrumental works during this latter period, with particular reference firstly, to the influence of Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya and secondly, to the topic of death. Finally, the thesis considers Britten's creative relationship with Russia as an integrated phenomenon and explores some of the

ambiguities inherent in Britten's response and the wider question of Russian influence on his music.

Note on transliteration and appendices

I have largely adopted the Library of Congress System, but have broken away from this (a) when a name or work in Russian has a commonly accepted English spelling or translation (such as *Eugene Onegin*, *Melodiya*, *Pique Dame*, *Tchaikovsky*, *Vishnevskaya*, *War and Peace*, and *Yerevan*) (b) in citing the titles (and individual settings) of Shostakovich vocal works, with the exception of op. 140, I have generally followed Hulme (1991/2002), although in several cases (*Tsvetaeva*, *Lebiadkin*) I have chosen instead to adhere to the Library of Congress system.

Appendices I to XIII consist of interviews carried out and letters received in response to inquiries relating to the research. The author has based inclusion on a judgement as to which translate most effectively into written form and thereby illuminate the text as a whole. Repetitions in answers have been cut and the occasional factual error corrected; and, on occasion, the questions have been condensed to make a readable narrative. Where an appendix illuminates a specific point made in the text, this is referenced in a footnote.

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I was born on the day Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears arrived in Moscow from St. Petersburg, then Leningrad, during their final visit to the Soviet Union; and Britten's Te Deum in C was the first piece I sang as a treble nine years later. It is a pleasure to thank those who have supported and encouraged my work on Britten and Russia.

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I dedicate this thesis to my wife Tamsin and daughter Cecilia with affection, admiration and gratitude, and to the memory of my grandparents.

Easter Sunday 2011

Contents

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	2
Note on transliteration and appendices	3
Acknowledgements	4
Contents	7
Introduction	11
Chapter 1: Britten, Tchaikovsky and the Russian cultural tradition	
1.1 Introduction	16
1.2 Britten's diaries and miniature scores	19
Table 1: Numbers of Britten's miniature scores in the Britten Pears Library by composer and year of acquisition, 1925-32	25
1.3 Extra-musical considerations	25
1.4 The influence of Frank Bridge	33
1.5 The impact of Tchaikovsky's ballet scores	40
1.6 Britten and musical influence	49
Table 2: Numbers of references to Russian composers in Britten's diaries, 1928-38	50
1.7 <i>Rossini Suite</i> (1935), <i>Soirées musicales</i> (1936) and <i>Matinées musicales</i> (1941)	62
1.8 String Quartet No. 2 in C (1945)	65
1.9 <i>The Prince of the Pagodas</i> (1956)	67
1.10 Cranko's scenario	90
1.11 Musical structure and treatment of ballet forms	95
1.12 Musical language and place in Britten's output	103
1.13 Third Suite for Cello (1971)	112
1.14 Conclusion	117

Chapter 2: Britten and Shostakovich, 1934 to 1976

2.1 Introduction	119
2.2 Britten's political attitude towards Soviet Russia	122
2.3 Britten's attitude towards Soviet music	136
2.4 The social duty of the national composer	143
2.5 The murderous protagonist as victim	158
2.6 Britten's knowledge of Shostakovich's music prior to 1960	160
2.7 'Children of similar fathers'?	166
2.8 Parody and satire	177
2.9 Use of percussion and celesta	189
2.10 The challenge of modernism	205
2.11 Conclusion	215

Chapter 3: Britten, Rostropovich and Shostakovich, 1960 to 1976:

cello and chamber music

3.1 Introduction	217
3.2 Britten, Rostropovich and Tchaikovsky	219
3.3 Britten, Rostropovich and Shostakovich: Sonata in C (1961)	222
3.4 Symphony for Cello and Orchestra (1963): the influence of Rostropovich?	235
3.5 The influence of Shostakovich and Prokofiev?	241
3.6 Non-Russian eclecticism and programmatic basis	249
3.7 The Three Suites for Cello (1964-71)	256
Table 3: Scores of Shostakovich's string quartets acquired by Britten after 1960 (Britten-Pears Library)	260
Table 4: Chronology of Britten's cello music and Third String Quartet compared to Shostakovich's post-1960 chamber music and its performance at the Aldeburgh Festival	261

3.8 Shostakovich's knowledge of Britten's music prior to 1963	265
3.9 Shostakovich's relationship with Britten, 1963-66, with particular reference to the Second Cello Concerto (1966)	273
3.10 Conclusion	282
Chapter 4: Britten and Shostakovich: vocal composition, 1960 to 1969	
4.1 Introduction	285
4.2 <i>The Poet's Echo</i> (1965): context	286
4.3 Selection of poetry	298
4.4 Musical reference	307
4.5 Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok (1967) – a response to Britten's vocal music?	325
4.6 Conclusion	341
Chapter 5: Britten and Shostakovich: creative convergence and dialogues on death, 1969 to 1976	
5.1 Introduction	343
5.2 The Fourteenth Symphony (1969)	344
5.3 The Thirteenth String Quartet (1970) and Third Suite for Cello (1971)	353
Reproduction of Christmas znammeny chant sent to Britten by Bishop Pimen of Saratov and Volgograd in December 1968	357
5.4 The Fifteenth Symphony (1971) and <i>Death in Venice</i> (1972)	365
5.5 Creative divergence, 1973-76	375
5.6 Conclusion	385
Conclusion	388

Appendices	
I: Letter from Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 16 May 2010	394
II: Interview with Alan Brooke Turner CMG, 24 September 2009	396
III: Letter from Osian Ellis CBE, 5 February 2010	405
IV: Interview with Keith Grant, 25 September 2009	408
V: Interview with George, Earl of Harewood, 13 March 2009	421
VI: Interview with Lilian Hochhauser, 24 November 2011	427
VII: Interview with Victor Hochhauser CBE, 4 November 2009	432
VIII: Letter from Sir Charles Mackerras CH, 26 January 2010	436
IX: Interviews with Donald Mitchell CBE, 11 August 2008 and 8 July 2009	437
X: Interview with Irina Shostakovich, 31 March 2009	445
XI: Letter from Boris Tishchenko, 21 May 2008	449
XII: Interview with Oleg Vinogradov, 8 September 2010	452
XIII: Interview with Galina Vishnevskaya, 11 June 2010	456
XIV: Britten's volumes of <i>Tchaikovsky: Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii</i> (Moscow/Leningrad: Musgiz/Muzyka, 1940-71) in the Britten-Pears Library	469
XV: (i) Unfinished composition sketch of 'The Nightingale and the Rose' from <i>The Poet's Echo</i> in the possession of Alexander Arutiunian (ii) the equivalent passage in the autograph score, in the possession of Edward Mirzoian	476
Bibliography	481

Introduction

This thesis assesses the origins and development of Britten's interest in Russia, particularly in Russian music, over the course of his creative life. In the first instance, it makes use of two sources: the full text of the composer's diaries written between 1928 and 1938 and his collection of miniature and full scores of Russian music in the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh. In the latter respect, particular care has been taken to differentiate Britten's scores from those of Peter Pears and from acquisitions made after Britten's death. This evidence highlights the importance of Britten's admiration for Tchaikovsky (as opposed, for example, to Musorgsky), which has hitherto received limited scholarly attention, and this phenomenon is evaluated in the first chapter and placed in the wider context of the question of musical influence on Britten. Particular reference is made to the conception, structure and instrumentation of *The Prince of the Pagodas* (1955) in an assessment of how far and in what ways Britten drew upon Tchaikovsky as well as Stravinsky and Prokofiev, with whose music he enjoyed a more complex relationship. Britten's admiration will also be placed in the context of his creative relationship with Mstislav Rostropovich and Galina Vishnevskaya from 1960 onwards; and his quotation of Tchaikovsky folk

song arrangements in the Third Suite for Cello (1971) will be assessed in this light.

The second chapter will assess and compare Britten's attitude towards Shostakovich in the 1930s and during the period of their personal association after 1960. It builds upon the scholarship of Donald Mitchell (1984), Eric Roseberry (1995) and Liudmila Kovnatskaia (1974; 1996/2000; 2009) by means of a series of interviews with those who worked with or who were close to Britten and/or Shostakovich during the latter period, and by close reference to the Britten-Shostakovich correspondence in the Britten-Pears Library. Additional use is made of material relating to the Foreign Office and British Council in the National Archives, interviews with three of the British Cultural Attachés in Moscow between 1962 and 1975, and a series of articles about Britten published in the Soviet Union between 1963 and 1973. This evidence is employed to consider Britten's post-1960 attitude towards the Soviet Union and to place it in a cultural and political context. The chapter also compares the use Britten and Shostakovich made of satire and parody, and of percussion, across their creative lives, and their attitudes towards the social role of a composer. These are areas in which they have sometimes been linked, and will be

employed as a means of assessing the extent of convergence between the composers both in the 1930s and after 1960.

The third chapter places Britten's cello works for Rostropovich in the context of the Britten-Shostakovich relationship, making particular use of the Britten-Rostropovich correspondence in the Britten-Pears Library and the striking evidence for Britten's increasing interest in Shostakovich's chamber music after 1960. It goes on to consider the evidence for Shostakovich's knowledge of and admiration for Britten's music from 1960 onwards and a consideration of how far he may have been influenced by Britten in the instrumentation of the Second Cello Concerto in 1966.

The final chapter places Britten's *The Poet's Echo* in the context of his knowledge of Russian music by means of an assessment of context of the work's composition, its selection of Pushkin's poetry, and Britten's collection of Russian vocal music. Two research visits to Armenia enabled the author to draw upon the testimony of Edward Mirzoian and Alexander Arutiunian and to study a composition sketch of the fourth Pushkin setting; and the author also retraced Britten's 1965 journey from Dilizhan to Mikhailovskoe. The chapter further considers the possibility

of Peter Pears's influence in these areas, making use of his collection of Russian vocal music and Russian literature in the Britten-Pears Library as well as material in the Archives of Lancing College.

The chapter goes on to consider how far Shostakovich was influenced by Britten in his increasing preoccupation with vocal music after 1960, particularly in the conception of *Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok* in 1967. The final chapter will then consider the interpretation that Britten and Shostakovich's closest creative convergence was from 1969 onwards and in their responses to the topic of death. It will particularly assess how far these took different forms and were shaped by the contexts of their upbringing and creative lives.

Britten's works, including of individual settings within vocal cycles, are cited according to Banks (1999). Works are also dated on their first appearance in the text by year of completion of the autograph full score (see Banks, p.x).

All correspondence from Britten is addressed from Aldeburgh (1947-57: Crag House, 4 Crabbe Street; 1957-76, The Red House, Golf Lane) unless stated otherwise. Britten's spelling and punctuation have been preserved

in all quotations from his letters and diaries. The addresses of other correspondents to Britten are cited as in the letters. All correspondence in the Britten-Pears Library is cited by date and reference to the title of the file in which the letter is to be found. Catalogue numbers are given when available for other documents.

The following abbreviations are employed in the text and footnotes: AFMA for Aldeburgh Festival of Music and the Arts; BPL for the Britten-Pears Library, Aldeburgh; CCBB for M. Cooke, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten* (1999); CCDS for D. Fanning and P. Fairclough, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Shostakovich* (2008); DMHK for D. Mitchell and H. Keller, eds., *Benjamin Britten: a Commentary on His Works from a Group of Specialists* (1952); GMI for Gosudarstvennoe Muzykal'noe Izdatel'stvo; NA for the National Archives, Kew; PS for the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel; PSS/NSS for Polnoe/Novoie Sobranie Sochinenii; R for rehearsal mark; and ROHC for Royal Opera House Collections.

Chapter 1: Britten, Tchaikovsky and the Russian cultural tradition

1.1 Introduction

It is revealing that when asked in 1961 whether he had any favourite composers Britten cited Tchaikovsky but not Shostakovich, yet it has remained more common to link Britten with the latter than the former.¹ This important and unusual aspect of Britten's creative sensibility has not been analysed in depth, and scarcely features in the most comprehensive review of Britten's music undertaken by Peter Evans,² yet Donald Mitchell regards Britten's attitude towards Tchaikovsky as one of 'total admiration', the composer being 'a constant presence' in his creative life; and in this respect, and from personal knowledge of all three composers, Mstislav Rostropovich linked Britten's admiration with that of Prokofiev and Stravinsky.³ Striking evidence for his enthusiasm – which, in contrast to the composer's early admiration for Beethoven and Brahms, for example, he retained throughout his life - is Britten's near-complete collection of the *Collected Works of Tchaikovsky* published by

¹Mozart, Purcell, Schubert, Bach, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Berg'. Of the fifteen British composers interviewed by Murray Schafer in 1961, two (Rubbra and Arnold) cited Shostakovich, and only Britten Tchaikovsky; Schafer, pp.22-3.

²Whilst Peter Evans highlights the influence of the neo-classical works of Stravinsky on Britten's music up to 1940, he only makes brief references to Tchaikovsky in the context of three works: *The Prince of the Pagodas* (1956), *The Poet's Echo* (1965), and the *Third Suite for Cello* (1971); Evans, pp. 224, 228, 328, 383.

³Appendix IX, and for Rostropovich's testimony, see AFMA 1979, p.41.

Muzgiz/Muzyka in the Soviet Union between 1940 and 1971.⁴ These eighty-five volumes were acquired by Britten and Pears from 1955 onwards, partly by means of subscription to Musica Rara in London, and also during their later visits to the USSR between 1963 and 1971.⁵

Nevertheless, in the first symposium on Britten's music published in 1952, the sole reference to Tchaikovsky was Lord Harewood's observation that when choosing music for the Aldeburgh Festival '[Britten's] predilections are for what he has described as "the clear and clean – the 'slender' sound of, say, Mozart or Verdi or Mahler – or even Tchaikovsky, if he is played in a restrained, though vital way"'.⁶ However, very little Tchaikovsky was performed at Aldeburgh before 1960, and Harewood is unable to shed light on the origins of Britten's admiration for the composer.⁷ A longer-term perspective is therefore appropriate, assessing this phenomenon as a significant element in the formation of Britten's musical sensibility during his formative years as a

⁴Britten's copy of Tchaikovsky: PSS is held by the BPL but currently uncatalogued (appendix XIV).

⁵The earliest indication of Britten and Pears obtaining a volume is the Musica Rara invoice dated 15 July 1955 inside Volume 46A, which confirms Britten's statement to Anthony Wright in the summer of 1955 that he had recently subscribed to a complete Tchaikovsky edition; Anthony Wright, 'Britten and Home', *Music and Musicians*, August 1955.

⁶ The Earl of Harewood, 'The Man' in DMHK, pp.6-7. Harewood is quoting Britten verbatim from 'Conversation with Benjamin Britten', *Tempo* I/6 (February 1944), pp.4-5, reproduced in Kildea, pp.43-4.

⁷Appendix V. The only Tchaikovsky work performed before 1960 was the 'now almost unknown' Piano Sonata in G op. 37 on 24 June 1953; AFMA 1953, p.35.

composer not discussed by, for example, Carpenter (1992), Mark (1995) and Rupprecht (2001). This aspect of Britten's musical personality also provides an illuminating comparison with his later and more celebrated admiration for Shostakovich; and to this end, the diaries kept by the composer on a daily basis between January 1928 and June 1938 and his collection of miniature and conducting scores will be employed as evidence, together with Britten's choice of programmes and programme notes for the Aldeburgh Festival. This evidence has not been consulted in detail for this purpose, and the published edition of the diaries is highly selective.⁸

Britten's admiration for Tchaikovsky can also be assessed as aspect of a wider interest in Russian culture which pre-dates his political admiration for the Soviet Union and remained a vital aspect of his mature creative personality thereafter. Graham Johnson (2003), for example, ignores Britten's existing admiration for Tchaikovsky in highlighting *Russian Funeral* (1936) as Britten's 'earliest known link' with Russia and views the composer's relationship with Russia as political as well as musical.⁹ Elsewhere it has been assumed that Britten 'became a keen Russophile in

⁸'Diaries of Mr. Benjamin Britten, 1928-38' (BPL) and *Journeying Boy: The Diaries of the Young Benjamin Britten, 1928-1938*, select. and ed. J. Evans (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p.xix.

⁹Johnson, p.177.

the 1960s'.¹⁰ In order to assess this question, three works in which Britten alludes to Tchaikovsky in different ways across his creative life - the Second String Quartet (1945), *The Prince of the Pagodas* (1956), and the Third Suite for Cello (1971) – will be examined and placed in the context of Britten's longer-term interest in Russian music and his overall creative output. This will also enable a consideration of the wider question of influence on Britten, particularly as it related to Russian music.

1.2 Britten's diaries and miniature scores

It is likely that Britten was acquainted with some of the Tchaikovsky's music before he began to keep a diary in January 1928, although this aspect of the formation of the composer's musical sensibility is not discussed by Christopher Mark in his two studies of Britten's juvenilia (1995 and 1998).¹¹ The domestic music making which Britten highlighted as a fundamental part of his musical upbringing, coupled with the wider popularity of Tchaikovsky's music in England since the 1880s, were of

¹⁰L. Walker, programme note to 'Britten, Rostropovich and the Cello: Britten's Cello Suites', AFMA 2011, p.159.

¹¹In *Early Benjamin Britten: A Study of Stylistic and Technical Evolution* (New York: Garland, 1995) and 'Juvenilia (1922-1932)' in CCBB, Mark highlights the influence of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Chopin, Schumann and Brahms up to the middle of 1926, and a wider range of stylistic reference prior to Britten meeting Bridge in October 1927, including Berlioz, Debussy and Wagner. Donald Mitchell nevertheless regards Britten's admiration for Tchaikovsky as 'long standing, beginning during childhood', appendix IX.

fundamental importance in this regard.¹² Britten also started collecting miniature scores in 1925, and he continued to employ them as a means of familiarising himself with a work up to mid-1973.¹³ He was given his first Tchaikovsky miniature score, that of the Violin Concerto op. 35, a year later by Laurie Austin, one of his godparents as well as an amateur musician.¹⁴ His reaction to the work at this time is not recorded, and the score is not annotated, but eight years later Britten was to describe its slow movement in his diary as ‘a miracle of beauty’, and his mature creative personality suggests that he would have responded to what he saw as the emotional restraint with which Tchaikovsky achieved this effect.¹⁵ Austin was also to give Britten scores of the Sixth Symphony (on 31 July 1928)¹⁶ and Fourth Symphony (on 22 November 1929).¹⁷ In the case of the Fourth Symphony, a work which he never conducted, Britten

¹²‘Britten Looking Back’, Kildea, p.250.

¹³See, for example, ‘Interview with Charles Osborne’ (1963), Kildea, p.248: ‘Alas, I haven’t time to go to many concerts, or to listen to records. But I read many scores, old and new’. Cf. Britten’s interview in *Sovetskaiia muzyka* in the same year: ‘When I read scores – sometimes very complex - I can easily hear them in my mind, although this does not happen with dodecaphonic music. For me it lacks a musical colouring’, ‘Britten rasskazyvaet’, p.102. Rita Thomson recalls that from 1974 onwards Britten tended instead to listen to records which he had been sent, or of Pears singing, whilst preferring to be read to or to devote his energies to composition (interview with the author, 4 August 2009).

¹⁴BPL: 2-9204919. The score is signed ‘E.B. Britten from Miss Austin (Laurie)’ and given the number 10 by Britten.

¹⁵Diary, 31 December 1935 (BPL).

¹⁶BPL: 2-9204110, signed ‘E.B. Britten From Miss Austin (Laurie) July 31 1928’ and given the number 61 by Britten.

¹⁷BPL: 2-9204112, signed ‘E. Benjamin Britten November 22 1929 from Laurie’ and given the number 86 by Britten. Britten refers to receiving the score in his diary on 26 November 1929 but does not record his opinion of the work (BPL).

made several annotations in pencil to the first and second movements which suggest a particular interest in the composer's textures, particularly his woodwind and string writing. In the first movement, for example, Britten circled the flute, oboe clarinet and bassoon parts in bars 70-1 and bar 79 and the flute part in bar 203, and in the second movement, he highlighted the double bass line in bars 134 and 144 ('CB (powerful?').

In his diaries, Britten's first references to Tchaikovsky are visits to Morlings music shop in Lowestoft to play the First Piano Concerto in two piano duets (1-20 August 1928)¹⁸ and playing the composer's *Chant sans paroles* op. 2 no. 3 in a trio arrangement during his first term at Gresham's School (27 October 1928). Britten did not comment on these works in his diary, nor does he record his reaction to the Tchaikovsky scores he received from his godmother in 1928 and 1929. However, he clearly retained a considerable affection for the First Piano Concerto, listening to gramophone records of the work with Solomon as soloist on 22 April 1931, and further performances on 9 March 1932 and 9 May 1934; and if on the latter occasion, he described it as 'a work which I admire but cannot like very much – only because I have heard it too often', he

¹⁸Britten's diary indicates that he did not obtain the score of this work until 29 October 1930. Britten's copy is signed 'Benjamin Britten' but otherwise not annotated (BPL: uncatalogued).

nevertheless listened to two further broadcasts over the next year.¹⁹ Moreover, on 9 July 1934 Britten even performed in his own piano and organ arrangement of the first movement, and John Waterhouse recalled that three years later 'Britten...produced from memory and *con evidente amore* what I still regard as one of the most masterly and revealing performances of the solo part I have ever heard'.²⁰ Although the diaries suggest that Prokofiev's Third (1921) and Shostakovich's First (1933) Piano Concertos, together with Stravinsky's *Capriccio* (1929), were more important Russian influences on Britten during the composition of his own Piano Concerto in 1938,²¹ his original programme note, and the expressive romanticism of the original third movement, suggest that he was also conscious of the model of the Tchaikovsky Concerto.²² Indeed, Britten may allude to the work in the virtuoso piano part of the first

¹⁹On 24 June 1934 and 5 January 1935. Cf. E. Blom (1927), p.13: 'There are few works...of which musicians are more weary than the first of Tchaikovsky's three piano Concertos, the only one that is ever played, and played to excess'.

²⁰Britten's diary, and John F. Waterhouse, 'Soirée Musicale', *Birmingham Post*, 18 November 1963 in *Letters from a Life* III, p.76. For a contrasting anecdote of Britten in 1952 giving a performance of the opening of the work as rendered by an inebriated pianist see Harewood, p.135.

²¹For Britten's knowledge of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, see his diary entries on 7 January and 11 October 1934 and 19 September 1935, and for his familiarity with a two-piano arrangement of Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto, 24 February 1936. Britten heard Stravinsky himself as soloist and conductor respectively in the *Capriccio* on 27 January 1932 and 27 March 1936, a work which he described as 'really lovely' when he subsequently heard it on 23 September 1937, shortly before beginning work on his own Piano Concerto in February 1938 (BPL).

²²'NOTE BY THE COMPOSER' for the first performance on 18 August 1938, in which Britten described the work as 'a bravura Concerto with orchestral accompaniment', *Pictures from a Life*, plate 111. See also letter from Britten to Ralph Hawkes, 30 December 1937: '...the scores you chose [not identified] were very much my cup of tea...I suppose it was a subtle hint, of course, for me to make my concerto as good as those masterpieces. Well – sir, I'll do my best, but I can't guarantee it' (BPL: BH).

movement between R13 and R15 and from R17 to the cadenza (Example 1; cf. Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto R290: bars 7 to 9), juxtaposing percussion in the latter case to accentuate its sense of parody; and the piano part of *Young Apollo* (1939) may also recall the Tchaikovsky concerto (at R7: bars 1 to 5). Britten clearly retained an affection for the Tchaikovsky work thirty years later: Ronan Magill, whose performance Britten prepared in 1972, recalls his keen interest both in its unconventional structure and the pianistically less successful original version of the piano part. He also notes that the composer was impressed by Sviatoslav Richter's insistence that the first movement's cadenza should be played a tempo, as indicated in the score, rather than *accelerando*, as was then commonly the case in performance.²³

Example 1: Britten: Piano Concerto in D major, I: R17: bars 10 to 13

The image displays a musical score for Example 1, consisting of two systems of music. The top system is labeled 'Piano' and shows the piano part (left) and violin part (right) for bars 10 to 13. The piano part begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a series of eighth-note chords. The violin part enters in bar 11 with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and a *cresc.* marking. The bottom system continues the piano part, showing a triplet of eighth notes in bar 12 and a final cadence in bar 13. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

²³Interview with the author, 19 September 2010. See Britten's copy of Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 28 (1955), pp.5-161, with the piano part of the original version; the revised version is included as *ossia* or *footnotes*.

However, it should also be acknowledged that the numerical evidence of Britten's miniature scores suggests that up to 1932 Tchaikovsky was a lesser influence compared to Beethoven, Wagner and Brahms (Table 1), and it is certainly the influence of Beethoven which is most conspicuous in the Cello Sonata in A of 1926 and the String Quartet in F composed two years later. On the other hand, the diaries indicate that by 1938 Britten had largely rejected these composers whilst retaining his admiration for Stravinsky and Tchaikovsky.²⁴ Moreover, it is indicative of a particular interest on Britten's part that in April and July 1934 he made two Tchaikovsky arrangements for performance: *Romeo and Juliet* and the first movement of the First Piano Concerto.²⁵

²⁴Cf. Sir Charles Mackerras: 'At the time I was working with him [1955-9], I always had the impression that Ben's tastes in music were definitely anti-Germanic and that he was more inspired by the passionate nature of Tchaikovsky's music, apart from the fortuitous bond of homosexuality, as well as by Italian composers such as Verdi', appendix VIII.

²⁵Of the two arrangements, both for organ and piano, only three pages (pages 1, 10, 11, comprising 91 bars, n.d.) of the organ part of the *Andante non tanto quasi moderato* section of *Romeo and Juliet* survive (BPL: 2-02052487). According to Britten's diary, this was made between 23 and 25 April 1934 (BPL).

Table 1: Numbers of Britten's miniature scores in the Britten-Pears

Library by composer and year of acquisition, 1925 to December 1932

Year	Bach	Beethoven	Brahms	Haydn	Mozart	Schubert	Stravinsky	Tchaikovsky	Wagner
1925	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
1926	1	3	0	1	2	0	0	0	7
1927	0	11	2	11	1	0	0	0	3
1928	0	9	1	0	1	0	0	1	2
1929	0	2	4	1	0	0	0	1	1
1930	5	2	6	0	0	1	1	0	0
1931	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
1932	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0
Total	7	31	13	5	5	2	4	4	14

1.3 Extra-musical considerations

Britten's earliest perception of Tchaikovsky and Russia may also have been influenced by his copy of May Byron's *A Day with Tschaikovsky*, which projects a Romantic and idealised idea of the composer and his country, not least by means of its striking painted colour illustrations.²⁶

The form of Britten's signature ('E. Benjamin Britten') suggests that he acquired the book during the middle to late 1920s, and certainly before

²⁶M. Byron, *A Day with Tschaikovsky* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d., c.1910) (BPL: 1-9501505). Britten was also to acquire a copy of *The Life and Letters of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky by Modeste Tchaikovsky*, ed. R. Newmarch (London: John Lane: The Bodley Head, 1906), possibly from his sister Beth (signed 'B[eth] Britten 1937) (BPL: 1-900495).

January 1931, after which he tended to sign himself 'Benjamin Britten'. The text, based upon a selective quotation of the composer's letters, paints a personal and professional portrait of Tchaikovsky with which one can assume the young composer empathised at a stage in his life during which he self-consciously 'lived the lives of the great artists'.²⁷ The evidence of his own working life suggests that Britten would have been sympathetic towards three aspects of Tchaikovsky's creative personality which are emphasised in the book: his professionalism and willingness to write to commission; his admiration for Mozart; and his empathy towards children. Indeed, of the four Tchaikovsky orchestral suites, Britten only ever chose to conduct *Mozartiana* in its entirety.²⁸ He had, in fact, possessed a copy of the miniature score since the 1930s, and made an arrangement for piano and organ of the finale of the Mozart E flat Symphony at the same time as his two Tchaikovsky arrangements in 1934, suggesting that he felt that a natural affinity existed between the two composers.²⁹ Britten's annotations in his conducting score are more numerous than in his other Tchaikovsky scores, indicating both an

²⁷Beth Welford interviewed by John Amis in *Evaluations and Comparisons*, recorded 20 November 1973 and broadcast on BBC Radio Three on 25 November 1973 (BBC Sound Archive: 35808/9).

²⁸On 17 June 1962; AFMA 1962, pp.39-40.

²⁹BPL: 2-9204114. The score's price markings suggest that Britten may have purchased it during his visit to Austria in October-November 1934. The Mozart arrangement, currently uncatalogued, was made between 13 June and 4 July 1934 and performed alongside the Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto arrangement on 9 July (list of Britten's arrangements between 1929 and 1934 supplied by the BPL).

awareness of the Mozart originals as well as a meticulous attention to Tchaikovsky's own dynamics and phrasing.³⁰ Indeed, Britten made a point of defending the validity of Tchaikovsky's orchestrations in his programme note: 'The works of great creative artists have a way of appearing in a new light to each generation and it is fascinating for us to see a great eighteenth-century master through the eyes of a nineteenth-century romantic'.³¹

It is equally revealing that the only other extract from these works Britten chose to conduct was 'Rêves D'Enfant' from the Second Suite, and Britten's programme note further suggests a shared creative preoccupation: 'All his life Tchaikovsky kept this understanding of young people; indeed, in spite of the sophistication of his technique, there was always something childlike in his inspiration, in its clear colours and its changing and violent moods, from the wildest gaiety to the darkest despair'. Although Britten may only have become acquainted with the latter work in the 1950s, he seems to have related to its 'absorption with

³⁰Britten's conducting score is Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 20 (1946). On p.244, for example, Britten has annotated the Allegro giusto of Tchaikovsky's 'Theme and Variations': 'Mozart (Allegretto) not too fast' (BPL). See *Britten the performer: 2* (BBCB 8002-2) for Britten's recording of this work following the Aldeburgh Festival performance.

³¹Although the programme note in AFMA 1962, p.40 is not initialled, it is likely to have been written by Britten himself, as was his practice during the earlier period of the Aldeburgh Festival with works he particularly admired.

childish imaginations', an attribute he clearly valued in a creative artist.³² On the other hand, this should not be overstated: whereas for Britten children and the juvenile imagination can be viewed as a fundamental aspect of his creativity, evident as early as 1928 in his vivid setting of Hugo's 'L'enfance' in the *Quatre chansons françaises* and his lifelong admiration for the poetry of Walter de la Mare, one could argue that for Tchaikovsky these were not central, featuring only in marginalia such as *Album for children*, and that *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* in fact address 'adult' themes. Robin Holloway thus views the Act II pas de deux from the latter, which Britten particularly admired, as 'worthy of Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, or indeed Paolo and Francesca, in its serious passionate and erotic adulthood – something Britten never addresses'.³³

To an extent, of course, Byron presents an edifying and incomplete portrait of Tchaikovsky: not only is her reference to the composer's works highly selective, as one would expect, there is no reference to his

³²AFMA 1962, p.40. Britten's conducting score is Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 19B (1948). For Britten's admiration for Walter de la Mare's 'unique insight into a child's mind' and his poems which 'have meant so much to me all through my life', see his 'Prefatory Note' to *Tit for Tat* (London: Faber, 1969) and AFMA 1969, p.66. See also Britten's description of Mahler's Fourth Symphony in AFMA 1961, p.60, which employs similar terms to his Tchaikovsky programme note.

³³Letter from Robin Holloway to the author, 1 November 2009. For Britten's admiration for the Act II pas de deux from *The Nutcracker*, see Mitchell, 'Catching on to the Technique in Pagoda-Land', p.19.

homosexuality. Whether Britten's understanding – if indeed it existed at this stage - of this aspect of Tchaikovsky's character enhanced his empathy towards the composer is therefore speculative. Britten's diaries only suggest the development of sexual consciousness from 1935-6 onwards, and there is no reference to indicate that Britten's earliest admiration for Tchaikovsky was from anything other than a musical perspective. On the other hand, John Amis, Sir Charles Mackerras and Donald Mitchell believe that an appreciation of Tchaikovsky's homosexuality may have enhanced an existing sympathy towards his music, certainly by the time they enjoyed a degree of intimacy with Britten in the 1950s.³⁴ The case of Shostakovich illustrates that extra-musical considerations could play an important part in influencing Britten's existing empathy towards a composer's music, and his friendship with Poulenc from 1945 to 1963 suggests that an appreciation of a composer's individuality, vulnerability and pessimism were particularly important.³⁵ Indeed, as early as 1950 Donald Mitchell had noted Britten's 'tragic inflection' and both he and Dietrich Fisher-Dieskau emphasise that his pessimism increased by the time of their association, suggesting that in this respect his identification with Tchaikovsky may

³⁴Letter to the author from John Amis, 13 January 2010 and appendices H and I.

³⁵Cf. Britten's tribute Poulenc in AFMA 1964, p.24, and Elizabeth Wilson's observation that 'Britten's sensitivity to others was his big human quality', letter to the author, 2 October 2008.

have become closer from 1960 onwards.³⁶ It is striking that Britten's sister concluded the BBC's sixtieth birthday tribute with the observation that 'I think [Ben's] life lately has become really so hard and so public that he's become more of a melancholic than he was', although, ironically, it was over the previous decade that Britten would have encountered at first hand the sanitised image of Tchaikovsky promoted in the Soviet Union, which overlooked his homosexuality and tended to place his pessimism in a social context.³⁷

Byron's book is also significant in presenting an exotic notion of Russia: its landscape is described in fairy-tale terms, and Tchaikovsky's own musical character is seen as belonging 'to the borderland between the Teutonic and the Slavonic; but it is the latter element, with its fatalism, its ineradicable pessimism, its underlying latency of savage primitive emotion, which mainly tinges his greatest music'.³⁸ This may well have stimulated an incipient interest on Britten's part of the Russian landscape

³⁶D. Mitchell, 'A Note on St. Nicolas: Some Points of Britten's style', *Music Survey*, New Series (spring 1950), p.226, and Fischer-Dieskau, p.262: 'Ben found it difficult to deal with the world. Though he was careful never to let anyone see that side of him, darkness reigned the more frequently in his music, speaking of the shadow side of life'.

³⁷Beth Welford interviewed by John Amis in *Evaluations and Comparisons*. For a characteristic Soviet view of Tchaikovsky, see D. Shostakovich, 'Thoughts about Tchaikovsky', *Russian Symphony: Thoughts about Tchaikovsky* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), p.3: 'Tchaikovsky's music was by no means marked by fatalism, gloom or faith in a blind fate. His most tragic works are permeated with the spirit of struggle, the striving to overcome the blind elemental forces'.

³⁸Byron, pp. 10, 30.

and cultural tradition, supplemented by his early familiarity with Chekhov between 1929 and 1933.³⁹ In this respect, as shall be seen, Britten's experience closely paralleled that of Peter Pears at Lancing College between 1927 and 1928. Thirty years later, as he prepared to make his first visit to the Soviet Union, Britten declared that 'it will be exciting...& lovely to see...what goes on in that mammoth extraordinary country – so different from ours, & yet with so many significant links', and in a subsequent interview with *Sovetskaia muzyka* he stated that his 'utmost dream would be to create an opera form equivalent to Chekov's dramas. And [in my chamber operas] I hope I have already achieved some success in this respect'.⁴⁰ Thus, whereas Graham Johnson identifies the origins of Britten's 'emotional attachment to an idealised Russia' in his association with Auden from 1935 onwards and his rapid subsequent politicisation as a creative artist,⁴¹ Britten's possession of Byron's book, coupled with the evidence of the diaries and miniature scores, suggests that it significantly pre-dated this period and should not necessarily be seen as politically inspired. On 2 October 1928, for example, Britten

³⁹Diary entries for 22 October 1929, 14 May 1931 and 25 October 1933 (BPL), and *The Cherry Orchard: and other plays*, transl. C. Garnett (London: Chatto and Windus, 1928), which Britten was awarded as a Mathematics prize in July 1930 (BPL: 1-9501590).

⁴⁰Letter from Britten to Elizabeth Mayer, 1 March 1963, reproduced as no. 1061 in *Letters from a Life V*, pp.466, and A. Afonina, 'Govorit Benjamin Britten,' *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1965/3, p.63. See also Britten's handwritten draft of message to the Anglo-Soviet Journal, n.d. [sent 23 May 1967], highlighting 'the character & circumstances of that great people, &...their beautiful country' (BPL: Anglo-Soviet).

⁴¹Johnson, p.179.

recorded that he played the (Tsarist) Russian national anthem (no. 218 in his copy of *The Public School Hymn Book*) at house prayers at Gresham's,⁴² and thirty five years later he was to describe the opening Andante (to R6) of Shostakovich's Second Piano Trio as a 'solemn "Russia" tune':⁴³ both are liturgical in character and it may be the exoticism of this element which appealed to Britten given his later use of the Russian Kontakion in the Third Cello Suite. Certainly, when Britten visited the Soviet Union with the English Opera Group in 1964, his wider interest in Russian culture was conspicuous and the composer made a point of visiting the Tchaikovsky Museum at Klin a year later.⁴⁴ Moreover, in the same year Britten described the effects of the Iron Curtain in artistic as much as political terms: '...our two parts of Europe have been separated too long, and we can learn so much from each other. They have missed so many later developments of the technique of the art, and we have lost so much of the immediate contact between the audience and contemporary art that they have'.⁴⁵ Thus, whereas Donald Mitchell regards Britten's 'passionate, and selective, interest in things Russian' as part of a wider

⁴²Britten's diary (BPL). Britten's copy *The Public School Hymn Book with Tunes* (Novello, n.d.) is preserved in the BPL.

⁴³AFMA 1963, p.24.

⁴⁴On 4 August 1964 (BPL: Britten's appointment diary for 1965), described in Pears, p. 102. For Britten's wider interest in Russian culture, see appendix IV, and for his impressions of Moscow's 'amazing monuments of antiquity' during his 1964 visit, see A. Afonina, 'U nas v gostiakh - Benjamin Britten', p.129.

⁴⁵'Musician of the Year', Kildea, p.268.

cultural-political phenomenon stemming from the Russian Revolution,⁴⁶ he underestimates the extent to which Britten's initial interest in Russia was artistic and non-political and should also be placed in the longer-term context of the reception of Russian music in the United Kingdom from the 1880s, including Tchaikovsky and the considerable impact of the Ballets Russes in their pre-and post-war London seasons up to 1929.⁴⁷

1.4 The influence of Frank Bridge

Britten's response to Tchaikovsky's music from 1928 seems to have developed as a result of his study of composition with Frank Bridge from November 1927 onwards. Bridge's wider influence on Britten in terms of compositional technique and awareness of contemporary European music has been acknowledged, and the diaries indicate an unqualified admiration for a figure whom Britten regarded as his 'musical father'.⁴⁸ However, with regard to Tchaikovsky, Bridge's importance is difficult to assess. His correspondence with Britten seldom refers to the works of other composers, and Britten's letters to Bridge are, with very few exceptions, lost.⁴⁹ Moreover, the reassessments of Hindmarsh (1983) and Payne (1984) do not devote any attention to this aspect of Bridge's

⁴⁶Appendix IX.

⁴⁷See J. Pritchard, ed., *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballets Russes 1909-1929* (London: V & A Publishing, 2010), pp.222-3.

⁴⁸Diary, 23 October 1936 (BPL).

⁴⁹BPL: correspondence from Frank Bridge to Britten.

influence. One should also acknowledge that Donald Mitchell does not recall Britten specifically mentioning that Bridge was influential in terms of his admiration for Tchaikovsky, nor did Britten suggest this in his articles on Bridge in 1947 and 1963 - the latter written at a time when a significant amount of Tchaikovsky's music was beginning to be performed at the Aldeburgh Festival.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Mitchell does believe that it is likely that Tchaikovsky was discussed 'given Bridge's extraordinarily wide interests and knowledge'.⁵¹ Indeed, as a highly accomplished viola player Bridge's familiarity with the *Serenade for Strings* is, to a degree, reflected in the Suite for String Orchestra (1910)⁵² and some of the composer's other pre-1914 orchestral works such as *Mid of the Night* (1904) and *Isabella* (1907) strongly suggest that Tchaikovsky was an important influence. The former, for example, resembles *Francesca da Rimini* in its orchestral specification and duration, as well as individual details of scoring and general tone (cf. EE: bars 1 to 4). Bridge was also highly familiar with Tchaikovsky's music as a conductor, and in 1938 would write from New York that he 'could knock a few good spots into Toscanini's idea of Tschaikovski's Romeo & Juliet'.⁵³ One can therefore

⁵⁰Appendix IX, and 'Frank Bridge and English Chamber Music' (draft n.d. for BBC Third Programme broadcast 9 November 1947) and 'Britten Looking Back', Kildea, pp.75-7 and 250-3.

⁵¹Appendix IX.

⁵²Hindmarsh, p.64.

⁵³Letter from Frank Bridge to Marjorie Fass, Barbizan Plaza Hotel, New York, n.d. [18 October 1938] (BPL: Frank Bridge – Marjorie Fass correspondence).

assume that Bridge did encourage Britten's existing interest in Tchaikovsky, and in this respect was more influential than John Ireland, Britten's composition teacher at the Royal College of Music from September 1930, notwithstanding the latter's particular admiration for Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony.⁵⁴

Britten attended a number of BBC studio concerts conducted by Bridge in the 1930s and his diaries indicate that Bridge included a number of popular Russian works, particularly by Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin, in his repertoire, which Britten recorded with conspicuous interest and enthusiasm. If Bridge's conducting is difficult to assess given that, in contrast to Britten, recordings and conducting scores have not survived, it clearly captured the younger composer's imagination; indeed, over thirty years later Britten was to recall Bridge's 'remarkable gifts as a conductor'.⁵⁵ Britten responded enthusiastically to Bridge's conducting of three Tchaikovsky works in particular: *Francesca da Rimini*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Capriccio Italien*.⁵⁶ It is also significant that Bridge gave a miniature score of *Francesca da Rimini* to Britten as a Christmas

⁵⁴Schafer, p.31.

⁵⁵AFMA 1967, p.48.

⁵⁶See diary entries for 1 January 1932, 4 February 1934 and 17 January 1935 (BPL), though cf. Paul Hindmarsh's observation that 'How good a conductor [Bridge] actually was is uncertain...Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC were not always happy with his work with the BBC Orchestras. He was usually given the lighter programmes to do', P. Hindmarsh, 'Frank Bridge: Seeds of Discontent', *The Musical Times*, vol. 232, no. 1775 (January 1991), p. 697.

present in 1932 and Britten's diary suggests that he was stimulated by the 'functional hysteria' which characterises much of the work.⁵⁷ In any case, he has made several annotations in pencil which reflect a particular interest in rhythm and instrumentation and indicate that he has gone through the score very thoroughly: on page 76, for example, a crescendo is marked in bar 1 over the second cello phrase and a decrescendo over its equivalent in bar 2, and in bar 3 the *p* cello quaver and double bass crotchet rest are circled. Britten clearly retained a lifelong admiration for the work, programming it alongside his own Piano Concerto during the 1971 Aldeburgh Festival, and it seems to have been the only Tchaikovsky score he seriously contemplated conducting in the Soviet Union, in the same year.⁵⁸

Bridge's correspondence with Britten corroborates the diaries in also highlighting his particular affection for the Fantasy-Overture *Romeo and Juliet*, a work whose chorale-like coda he may unconsciously have recalled five years later in the *Lento e solenne* coda of his own Violin

⁵⁷Eulenberg 4409 (BPL: 2-9200074), Britten's diary, 25 December 1932, and D. Mitchell, *The Language of Modern Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), p.44. Cf. Britten's reaction in his diary to Bridge's conducting of the 'wonderful' *Francesca da Rimini* on 29 January 1933, 'which F.B. made sound terrifying' (BPL).

⁵⁸On 13 June; AFMA 1971, p.44. In the event, Britten did not conduct his Piano Concerto as a result of the cancellation of Richter's visit by the Soviet authorities. For Britten's original intention to conduct *Francesca da Rimini* during his 1971 visit to the Soviet Union, see typewritten carbon copy of letter from Barrie Iliffe, Music Department, British Council, London, to E.J. Field, Cultural Attaché, British Embassy, Moscow, 13 January 1971 (NA: FCO 34/109).

Concerto (R47: bars 1-3; cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, bars 494-9).⁵⁹ Britten certainly discussed at least one other Tchaikovsky score – the Violin Concerto – with Bridge, accompanying Remo Laticella on two occasions in his teacher’s presence in December 1932.⁶⁰ Although there are notably fewer references to Tchaikovsky works in Britten’s diaries from 1936 to 1938, this appears to be a reflection of his considerable involvement in film, theatre and radio work and his far greater preoccupation with the international situation during this period. Thus, whereas the influence of the Tchaikovsky model is not apparent in Britten’s own ‘very serious’ Violin Concerto (1939), its lyricism was to resurface in a different context, the violin solo which accompanies Belle Rose’s arrival in Pagoda-Land in Act II of *The Prince of the Pagodas* (Examples 2 and 3).⁶¹

⁵⁹See letter from Frank Bridge to Britten, 11 December 1939 (BPL: Frank Bridge correspondence) and Britten’s diary entries for 23-25 April 1934.

⁶⁰Diary entries for 5, 7 and 13 December 1932 and 19 January and 29 November 1933 (BPL).

⁶¹Britten’s description in a letter to Ralph Hawkes, St. Jovite Station, Quebec, 1 June 1939 (BPL: BH).

Example 2: *The Prince of the Pagodas*, Act II: R68 bars 1-7

In the darkness, Belle Rose nervously explores the stage.

Very free (senza misura)

The musical score is divided into four systems. The first system shows the Violin I Solo part with a *pp* dynamic, triplets, and a sextuplet. The other instruments (Violin I the rest, Violin II, and Viola) are marked *pp* and *pizz.*. The second system features a *cresc. and accel.* section for Violin I, with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *f* and *p*, including trills and wavy lines. The other instruments remain at *pp*. The third system shows Violin I with *pp* and *espress.* markings, and trills. The other instruments are at *pp*. The fourth system shows Violin I with *pp* and trills, while the other instruments remain at *pp*.

7
 Vln. I *pp cresc.* *f*
 Vln. I
 Vln. II
 Vla.

Example 3: Tchaikovsky: Violin Concerto: Canzonetta, bars 15-29

Canzonetta
 Andante ♩ = 84

Horn in F *p*
 Violin Solo *tr*
p molto espress
con sordino
 Violin *pp con sordini*
 Viola *pp con sordini*
 Violoncello *pp con sordini*
 Cl. *solo*
pp
 Hn.
 Violin Solo *tr*
 Violin *p*
 Viola *p*
 Violoncello

The image displays two systems of musical notation for a string ensemble. The first system includes parts for Violin Solo, Violin, Viola, and Violoncello. The Violin Solo part features a melodic line with a trill and grace notes. The Violin part has a sustained chord. The Viola and Violoncello parts provide harmonic support with moving lines. The second system continues the music, with the Violin Solo part marked with *cresc.*, *f*, and *dim.* dynamics. The Violin part has a sustained chord, and the Viola and Violoncello parts continue their harmonic roles.

1.5 The impact of Tchaikovsky's ballet scores

In addition to Bridge's influence, Britten's admiration for Tchaikovsky was stimulated by the impact of the composer's ballet music in live performances in the theatre. Although there is no evidence to suggest that Britten attended a Ballets Russes performance during their pre-1929 London seasons, his diary refers to a Tchaikovsky ballet performance as early as 21 April 1930, when he recorded attending the 'Russian Ballet at Marina Theatre [Lowestoft]. Tschaikovsky and Co. Very attractive & beautiful'. Indeed, the chronology suggests that this visit may have encouraged Britten's interest in the creative possibilities of ballet as early as August 1930, an interest which was to find expression in *Plymouth*

Town a year later and the incomplete Ballet on a Basque Scenario of June 1932.⁶² Britten first acquired the score of a Tchaikovsky ballet in the form of the Suite from *The Nutcracker*, and probably in the same year.⁶³ A single but telling annotation in Britten's handwriting again suggests detailed familiarity with the score, and it is significant that when in 1957 Britten came to consider a suite drawn from *The Prince of the Pagodas*, he envisaged it in the light of this Suite and similarly 'light-weight in character'.⁶⁴

The diaries particularly suggest that Britten's appreciation of Tchaikovsky as a ballet composer deepened from 1936 onwards. He did not refer to *The Sleeping Beauty* at any stage between 1928 and 1938, but described *Swan Lake* in July 1936 as 'perhaps [the] loveliest Ballet music ever' and the final act of *The Nutcracker* as a 'dream of music' three months later.⁶⁵ Britten attended the latter performance with Ralph Hawkes, who offered Britten an exclusive publishing contract in November 1935 and may have been an additional influence in fostering Britten's interest in Tchaikovsky's ballets and Russian music more

⁶²See diary 5 August 1930: 'Am considering writing of a ballet. I am searching Anderson' (BPL).

⁶³BPL: 2-1000560, a 1932 edition of the E.F. Kalmus miniature score.

⁶⁴On page 17 (at bar 124) of the miniature score Britten has added three semiquavers on the triangle line (BPL: 2-1000560). For Britten's view of the projected suite see letter from Maurice Johnstone, BBC, Great Portland St., London, to Anthony Gishford, 4 February 1957 (BPL: BH).

⁶⁵Diary, 3 July and 16 October 1936 (BPL).

generally, not least by employing Britten to study a number of Russian scores – most importantly Shostakovich’s *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, but also more conventional works such as Glière’s ballet ‘Komedianty’ (1930) - with a view to ascertaining whether Boosey & Hawkes should become agents for their publication.⁶⁶

However, one should also acknowledge that Britten’s interest in Russian ballet during his formative years as a composer focused on Stravinsky to a greater extent than Tchaikovsky, and certainly up to the middle of 1936.⁶⁷ Britten first referred to *Le Sacre du Printemps* in his diary on 28 January 1931 and he was taken with Bridge to attend a performance of *Pétrouchka* on 17 June, which he described as ‘an inspiration from beginning to end’. Moreover, over the next fifteen months he acquired gramophone records of *L’Oiseau de Feu*, *Pétrouchka*, and *Le Sacre du Printemps*.⁶⁸ Britten’s interest in Stravinsky’s ballet scores clearly continued to develop during the 1930s: as well as continued references to these three scores, he recorded listening to a broadcast of *Apollon Musagète* (‘which has some v. lovely things in it’) and attending

⁶⁶See diary entries for 13 November, 3 December and 13 December 1935 and 20 March 1936, and letter from Ralph Hawkes, Boosey and Hawkes, Regent St., London, to Britten, 21 November 1935 (BPL: BH).

⁶⁷Cf. R. Duncan, *All Men Are Islands* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1964), p.132: ‘At that time [1936-7] he believed only in Berg, Mahler and Stravinsky’.

⁶⁸Diary entries for 22 November 1931, 7 January and 13 February 1932, and 1 September 1932 (BPL).

performances of *Pulcinella* ('superb all round') and *Jeux de Cartes* ('...a charming and delightful work – worthy of the master'). Indeed, the latter performance, as well as a performance of the suites from *Pulcinella* and *L'Oiseau de Feu* which Britten attended on 27 March 1936, were conducted by Stravinsky himself, whose conducting Britten also seems to have admired.⁶⁹ Britten had, in fact, encountered Stravinsky as a performer on four occasions between 1932 and 1937, and met the composer on 19 October 1937, although he does not record his impressions of this encounter.⁷⁰

It is therefore revealing that by the time Britten embarked upon *The Prince of the Pagodas*, his own full-length ballet in the Russian tradition, nearly twenty years later, Tchaikovsky appears a significantly greater source of creative reference than Stravinsky. Although in 1936 Britten described Stravinsky as 'A great man...sans doute' and the *Symphony of Psalms* as 'epoch making', by 1941 he had publicly questioned the consistency of the musical invention in *Le Sacre de Printemps*, as well as its harmonic embellishment of folksong material.⁷¹ Ten years later he had also begun to develop reservations about the development of the composer's

⁶⁹Diary entries for 24 February and 2 October 1935, and 19 October 1937 (*ibid.*).

⁷⁰Britten's diary, 27 January 1932, 13 March 1933, 27 March 1936, and 19 October 1937 (BPL).

⁷¹Diary, 27 and 10 April 1936 (BPL), and 'England and the Folk-Art Problem', *Kildea*, p.33.

compositional technique and his polemical disposition.⁷² Indeed, the latter may well have reinforced Britten's reservations about the former.⁷³ What is clear is that the composers' second meeting in November 1949 constituted a turning-point in the relationship, whether as a result of Stravinsky's apparent misunderstanding of *The Rape of Lucretia*, Britten's ambivalence towards *The Rake's Progress*, or Stravinsky's increasing intimacy with Robert Craft and his subsequent dislike of *Albert Herring*.⁷⁴ In any case, unlike Britten and Shostakovich, the two composers did not meet thereafter nor did they engage in any correspondence after 1962.⁷⁵

⁷²See Harewood's reference to Britten's 'present [1952] reaction against Stravinsky's more recent music (and also his writings)' in 'The Man', DMHK, p.7, and Britten's own criticism of 'the almost "bestseller" success of conversations with famous composers', a scarcely veiled reference to Robert Craft's *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky* (1959), in insert [n.d., 1963] to draft article for *The Observer*, BPL: 1-02053901.

⁷³See Britten's draft for his speech on receiving an honorary degree at Hull University in October 1962: 'Stravinsky, one of the greatest artistic figures of our time, has said some very silly things, and unless one is careful they are liable to prejudice one against his great music', BPL: 1-02053796, reproduced in Kildea, p.215.

⁷⁴The full nature of the exchange between Britten and Stravinsky in Los Angeles in November 1949 is difficult to fathom; see Craft, p.110, Harewood, p.132-3, *Letters from a Life* III, p.676, and Walsh pp. 252-5. For further light on the dynamic between the two composers at this point, see letter from Britten to Stravinsky, The Tower House, Los Angeles, 27 November 1949: 'I was most touched and honoured that you could come to my concert with the Philharmonia last night...I was unfortunately quite sick during the concert, and completely collapsed in the interval. For that reason I could not give myself the pleasure of receiving you in the Green Room', and Stravinsky's handwritten card, December 1949, the context of which is unclear: 'Generally speaking about Britten, his musical substance leaves me completely indifferent. Himself is a charming person and I wonder why to go as far as URSS to pick up Shostakovitsch when they have Britten' (PS: Igor Stravinsky: personal correspondence and material relating to Britten: 092.1-0061-0101, pp. 98-100 and 94-5). See also letter 1103 in *Letters from a Life* V, p.564, for Britten's view in February 1964 that Craft had 'wrecked one great man (admittedly the weakest of great men) and now tries to harm another great man [E.M. Forster] by cheap pin pricks'.

⁷⁵On 28 December 1962 Stravinsky sent Britten a handwritten card 'with sincerest thanks for his very kind [seventieth] birthday congratulations', presumably a reference to Britten's tribute in *Tempo*, New Series, 61-2 (spring-summer 1962), p.16.

Further, whilst apparently taking some interest in Stravinsky's later music, Britten seems to have obtained relatively few scores after the *Septet* (1953) and *Agon* (1957).⁷⁶ Indeed, the evidence suggests that it was Pears who showed a greater interest in Stravinsky's vocal music, recording the part of Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* under the composer in Cologne in 1951, although Neil Mackie adds that it was not a work with which he felt entirely comfortable.⁷⁷

By 1960 Britten was certainly conscious that, unlike Stravinsky, he continued to write in a relatively traditional idiom and rejected what he saw was the arbitrary application of serial 'rules' at the expense of musical communication. Thus, although Britten's satirising of twelve-note music in the 'Variation of the King of the West' in *The Prince of the Pagodas* is gently observed, it is revealing that John Cranko felt that it was 'an intellectual piece of music & not an intellectual dance' and not obvious enough to dance to...either rhythmically or melodically'.⁷⁸

⁷⁶BPL: 2-1000528 and 2-1000534. For evidence of Britten's continued interest in Stravinsky's music, see a reference to *The Flood* (1961-2) in his address to Kesgrave Heath School, Ipswich, Kildea, p. 242.

⁷⁷Interview with the author, 16 August 2011; see also Headington, pp. 162-3, 270. Pears possessed scores of, for example, the *Cantata* (1951-2), *In memoriam Dylan Thomas* (1954) and *Elegy for J.F.K.* (1954) (BPL: 2-9104195, 2-9500772, and 2-9501517). His two recordings as Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*, in 1951 and 1977, were issued as CBS Classics 61131 (1955) and Decca SET616 (1978).

⁷⁸Letter from John Cranko to Britten, 18 April 1955 (BPL: John Cranko correspondence). In the original production, this number seems to have been interpreted on two levels: 'At one point [the King of the West] is made to count up to twelve on his

Indeed, Britten's composition sketch for the work indicates that he had previously discarded fifteen bars of a significantly less contrived earlier version, and his own recording seems to highlight the aridity and angularity of this number.⁷⁹ Moreover, passages in two subsequent 'occasional' works, *Cantata academica, carmen basiliense* (1959) and *Cantata misericordium* (1963), recall the musical idiom of earlier Stravinsky works which Britten had admired in the 1930s, and the accented rhythms and ponderous Latin text of the former place a possible allusion to the declamatory choral writing of *Oedipus Rex* in sharper relief (Example 4).⁸⁰ This would confirm Britten's laconic tribute to Stravinsky on the composer's eightieth birthday in 1962: 'There can be few composers writing today who have not been influenced in one way or another by his astonishingly vital musical invention'.⁸¹ It also suggests a more complex relationship than that which he enjoyed with the music of Tchaikovsky

fingers...obviously counting up the notes of a twelve-note series, the completion of which, so dear to him, is jeeringly emphasised in the music by the fourfold repetition of the last note in descending octaves. There may be some satire here on the general interest in twelve-note technique among composers in the West, but Britten clearly intended this ridiculous figure mainly as a new Beckmesser, to make fun of those who are too eagerly looking for twelve-note series in his own music'; C. Mason, 'Britten Can Make It', in 'The Prince of the Pagodas – Two Views', *The Spectator*, 11 January 1957, p.51.

⁷⁹Draft holograph of *The Prince of the Pagodas* (BPL: 2-9300894), pp. 14-15, and Britten's abridged recording of February 1957 (Decca LXT5336-7), re-released on Decca CD 421855-2 in 1989.

⁸⁰Cf. Eric Roseberry's analysis of *Cantata misericordium*, in which he notes (with regard to R25 to R28) that 'A composer of our time can no more escape the towering shadow of *Oedipus Rex* than could his 19th-century counterpart escape that of Beethoven's 9th Symphony'; 'Britten's *Cantata Misericordium* and *Psalm 150*', *Tempo*, New Series, 66-7 (autumn-winter 1963), p.44.

⁸¹*Tempo*, New Series, 61-2 (spring – summer 1962), p.16.

and Shostakovich.⁸² Irina Shostakovich recalls that Britten disparagingly regarded Stravinsky as ‘a composer without national roots’, which is confirmed by the testimony of Pears and Johnson.⁸³ Moreover, although as early as 1941 Britten attempted to draw an unfavourable distinction between a work such as *Les Noces*, in which Stravinsky ‘breaks up his folk-themes into small phrases, and is consequently freer to develop the form’, and the ‘extravagant harmonies’ of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, his arguments discounted his own pragmatic approach towards folk song in the film documentary context of *Irish Reel* (1936) and were also partly intended to vindicate his own folk song arrangements, in which he showed a sustained interest from 1941 onwards.⁸⁴ These observations therefore invite a wider consideration of the complex question of musical influence on Britten.

⁸²Britten did not, for example, contribute to the *In Memoriam Igor Fedorovich Stravinsky Canons and Epitaphs* in the commemorative edition of *Tempo* on the composer’s death in April 1971, in contrast to six other British composers including Tippett.

⁸³For Britten’s view of Stravinsky, see appendix X, and Blyth, pp.21, 161.

⁸⁴‘England and the Folk-Art Problem’, *Kildea*, p.33.

Example 4 *Cantata academica, carmen basiliense*, VII Scherzo, R23: bars 1-6

Ritmico ♩ = 144

Piccolo

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B \flat

Bassoon

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Tuba

Cymbals

Harp

Piano

S & A soloists

Tenor soloist

Bass soloist

S. A. Choir

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Double Bass

senza sord.

solo

f pesante

ff

f pesante

(All soloists) (*ge*)

f

quo fi - des pro - pa - ge - tur, iu -

quo fi - des pro - pa - ge - tur, iu -

fz

fz

fz

ff pesante soli

Picc. *fz* *fz*
 Fl. *fz* *fz*
 Ob. *fz* *fz*
 Cl. *fz* *fz*
 Bsn. *fz* *fz*
 Hn. *fz* *fz*
 Hn. *fz* *fz*
 C Tpt. *fz* *fz*
 Tba. *fz* *fz*
 Cym. *fz* *fz*
 Hp. *fz* *fz*
 Pno. *fz* *fz*
 S. *fz* *fz*
 T. *fz* *fz*
 B. *fz* *fz*
 Choir
 sti - ti - a ser - ve - tur, ser - ve - tur,
 sti - ti - a ser - ve - tur, ser - ve - tur,
 Vln. I *fz* *fz*
 Vla. *fz* *fz*
 Vc. *fz* *fz*
 Db. *fz* *fz*

1.6 Britten and musical influence

Britten's diaries from 1928 to 1938 are explicit about his musical tastes and indicate that his attitude towards Russian composers was in fact

highly selective. The following table gives a revealing indication of Britten's attitude towards Russian composers based upon the number of single references in his diaries:⁸⁵

Table 2: Numbers of references to Russian composers in Britten's diaries, 1928 - June 1938 (Britten-Pears Library)

Composer	<i>Stravinsky</i>	<i>Tchaikovsky</i>	<i>Rimsky - Korsakov</i>	<i>Prokofiev</i>	<i>Shostakovich</i>	<i>Borodin</i>	<i>Rachmaninoff</i>	<i>Glinka</i>	<i>Musorgsky</i>
Years									
1928--1929	1	12	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
1930 - 1931	6	8	4	3	0	1	2	2	3
1932 - 1933	23	18	7	3	0	1	2	1	0
1934 - 1935	18	16	6	8	4	4	2	1	0
1936 - 1938	19	5	0	1	5	1	0	0	0
Total	67	59	18	15	9	8	6	4	3

As early as 1941 Britten had acknowledged that the assimilation of musical influences represented a necessary part of a composer's creative formation, but his statements in the diaries about the composers he liked and disliked should not necessarily be taken entirely at face value.⁸⁶ Britten's diary entry on 31 December 1935 is particularly striking: 'The rest of the programme was popular Tsch. but very great & lovely. This man is of course maligned & scoffed at out of all reason now. So it is

⁸⁵The table counts a maximum of one reference to a composer on a single day.

⁸⁶'England and the Folk-art Problem', Kildea, p.34.

really rather fun admiring him so – more than their ‘National’ Moussoursky [sic] – the Vaughan Williams in excelsis (tho’ of course of infinitely more value!).⁸⁷ The testimony of Ronan Magill certainly suggests that as late as 1971 Britten’s view of Musorgsky remained prejudiced.⁸⁸ He always appears to have regarded *Boris Godunov* as the embodiment of Russian national expression in opera rather than a psychological study or political commentary and, unlike at least one Soviet commentator, did not relate Musorgsky’s use of natural speech melody to his own vocal writing.⁸⁹ Moreover, Britten seems to have been unaware that the opposition between ‘nationalist’ and western-orientated outlooks in Russian music was, to an extent, an artificial one, fostered especially in the 1860s and 1870s by Vladimir Stasov, yet highly influential both on Soviet musicologists and their Western counterparts such as Gerald Abraham, with whom Britten enjoyed a limited correspondence in the post-war period.⁹⁰

⁸⁷Diary (BPL).

⁸⁸Magill recalls that on one occasion in 1971 he told Britten that he had been listening to a recording of Boris Christoff in *Boris Godunov*; the remark totally passed the composer by, but he concluded the conversation with the words: ‘You’d better go back to your Boris Christoff Godunov!’ interview with the author, 19 September 2010. In fact the bass performed a programme of Musorgsky songs during the Aldeburgh Festival two years later; AFMA 1973, p.55.

⁸⁹Appendix V, and Y. Grosheva, ‘The English Opera Group toured Russia: Realistic Traditions’, *Musical Events* 19 (December 1964), p.24.

⁹⁰BPL: Gerald Abraham correspondence. See Frolova-Walker, *passim*, for the artificial basis of Russian musical nationalism and its subsequent propagation by the Communist regime.

Britten's perspective reflected a somewhat contrived suspicion of 'theories of...“national” music' as well as a polemical stance against what he saw as the parochialism of the English musical establishment and its reliance on 'national' folk-song material at the expense of technique. Britten expounded a viewpoint most explicitly with regard to Russian music in the United States in 1941: 'People often cite the Russian school in defense of Nationalism, but it is worth noting that the composer who immediately strikes one as the most Russian of Russians is Tchaikovsky who all his life was berated for being too occidental. And it was the influence of Mozart on Tchaikovsky which helped to make the texture of his music so marvelously clear and his form so much more satisfactory than that of his Nationalistic compatriots'.⁹¹ Britten therefore seems to have ignored the fact that Tchaikovsky himself had written a significant amount of nationalist music in celebration of Russia and the Imperial Family and was highly interested in the potential adoption of folk music in art music.

On the other hand, the evidence of Britten's scores confirms Harewood's assertion that the composer '[n]ever made a judgement without having the knowledge to back it up': he had in fact acquired several Musorgsky miniature scores during the 1930s, and at some point he (or Pears)

⁹¹Diary, 3 March 1936 (BPL), and 'England and the Folk-Art Problem', Kildea, p.34.

acquired Lamm's as well as Rimsky-Korsakov's edition of the vocal score of *Boris Godunov*.⁹² Indeed, Musorgsky has plausibly been viewed as a significant influence on the crowd scenes and instrumental use of bells in the third interlude of *Peter Grimes*, which suggests that Britten's attitude towards the composer was more complex than merely representing an aversion to nationalism.⁹³ Britten himself wrote in his diary on 18 March 1936: 'It is the composer's heritage to take what he wants from where he wants – & to write music', a statement which he amplified in a letter written to Alan Bush four months later: 'It is the composer's right...to use any manner, of any composer or period (by 'manner' I mean, harmony, melody, form etc.)'.⁹⁴ Ronan Magill similarly feels that 'In the case of composers Britten came to reject, he had thoroughly immersed himself in their compositional technique and how they achieved their effects, so even if he did not choose them later as companions, he certainly understood them'.⁹⁵ Although Britten's diaries express disdain for the 'efficient tho' intellectually vulgar' music of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, this may primarily have been on account of what he

⁹²Appendix V. It is unclear which of the three editions (1910, 1928 and 1931) of *Boris Godunov* in the BPL originally belonged to Britten or Pears (BPL: 2-9202586; 2-1000777/8). Britten possessed miniature scores of *Pictures at an Exhibition* in Ravel's orchestration, *Night on the Bare Mountain*, and the Prelude to *Khovanshchina* (BPL: 2-1000265-7), and the collection also includes two vocal scores of *Sorochinsky Fair*, but these may have been acquired by Pears rather than Britten; BPL: 2-9202280 (1933), 2-1000779 (1970).

⁹³*Letters from a Life II*, p. 633.

⁹⁴Diary; and letter from Britten to Alan Bush, Quarryfield, Crantock, 2 August 1936 (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence).

⁹⁵Interview with the author, 19 September 2010.

viewed as the vulgarity of the orchestration, and he may have drawn from the composer in the Romantic 'big tune' in Variation X of *Diversions* (1940) (Example 5) and the original third movement of his own Piano Concerto (Example 6):⁹⁶

Example 5: *Diversions*, Variation X, R34: bars 1-7



Example 6: Britten Piano Concerto in D major: III, R44: bars 1-6



Moreover, although he did not show any significant interest in Glinka and Balakirev, he did not reject Rimsky Korsakov and Borodin on the grounds of their nationalism and in fact expressed conspicuous enthusiasm for their orchestral colour and melodic invention, suggesting that this represented a more important consideration for Britten than

⁹⁶Diary, 12 September 1935 (BPL).

whether a composer was nationalist or used folk song.⁹⁷ In the case of Kodály, for example, Britten could even argue that ‘turning his back on Austria and looking to Paris...he could free himself for Folk Song and National Expression’.⁹⁸ This again suggests the primary importance for Britten of what he viewed as a composer’s professionalism, creative spontaneity and, above all, their conception of musical sound. Britten’s judgement of Vaughan-Williams’s Fourth Symphony in 1935 is particularly revealing in this respect: ‘[Vaughan-Williams] has now “developed” & is writing everything in a contrapuntal mixture of worst Bach-Cherubini-Stanford with rhythms of early Stravinsky – but Lor’, the scoring!!! Harmoniums aren’t in it!’⁹⁹ Similarly, whereas by 1936 Britten described Brahms’s Second Symphony as ‘applied music – dull, ugly, gauch’, he would subsequently highlight that ‘From Russia, [we can learn] a vividness of colour & lack of inhibitions’.¹⁰⁰

Although a composer of Britten’s generation might be expected to share his admiration for Stravinsky, Britten does seem to have been conscious that admiration for Tchaikovsky on the part of a young composer in the

⁹⁷Britten nevertheless did possess miniature scores of Glinka’s overtures to *Ruslan and Liudmila* (signed by Britten and dated September 1935) and to *A Life for the Tsar* (BPL: 2-9900765; 2-9900763).

⁹⁸Note by Imogen Holst, Britten and Pears in AFMA 1965, p.12.

⁹⁹Diary, 10 April 1935 (BPL).

¹⁰⁰Diary, 9 December 1936 and autograph draft of Britten’s speech to the International Arts Guild (BPL: 1-02053793), c. 1944, Kildea, p.45.

1930s was highly unusual, and the critical rehabilitation of the composer did not begin until the second half of the 1960s.¹⁰¹ His references towards Tchaikovsky performances in the diaries suggest a particular sensitivity towards the phenomenon of 'popular' and 'hackneyed' Tchaikovsky.¹⁰² Britten's admiration is all the more striking given that his response was based upon a relatively small number of the composer's works, to an extent reflecting contemporary performance practice.¹⁰³ The operas, songs and orchestral suites are not mentioned in his diaries, nor are the first three symphonies and *Manfred*; and Britten's only reference to the chamber music is a performance of the A minor Piano Trio on 24 February 1931, which he described as 'Too long, & much too orchestral although beautiful in it's [sic] sentimental way', although he did possess a miniature score of the String Quartet op. 11.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, Britten's response to the performances of the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Symphonies he experienced was consistently reserved, and it is significant that he never chose to conduct a Tchaikovsky symphony. A performance of the Fourth Symphony on 22 September 1931 '...makes one long for Chamber

¹⁰¹Cf. E. Blom's criticisms of the 'ballroom music' and 'musical upholstery of the worst kind' in *The Nutcracker Suite*; Blom, p.47. For the beginning of the critical rehabilitation of Tchaikovsky, see H. Keller, 'Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky', in R. Simpson, *The Symphony*, vol. I (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1967), pp. 342-53.

¹⁰²Diary entries for 29 October 1930, 7 February 1932, 5 January 1935, and February and 26 October 1932, and 27 January 1938 (BPL).

¹⁰³For the neglect of the majority of Tchaikovsky's songs in the West during Britten's lifetime, see D. Jackson, 'Tchaikovsky: Ten Songs', in A. Blyth, ed. *Song on Record: 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.159.

¹⁰⁴BPL: 2-1000557, signed 'Benjamin Britten' but n.d.

music & Mozart, & makes one deplore the discovery of "Fate"; he regarded Wilhelm Fürtwängler's interpretation of the Sixth Symphony on 7 February 1932 as 'exaggerated and sentimentalised', and he described the Fifth Symphony as performed by Serge Koussevitsky on 15 May 1933 as 'an uneven work'. This may partly reflect a suspicion of the expressive potential of the symphonic form in its conventional nineteenth-century development, and as it had manifested itself in the Sibelius-influenced symphonies written in inter-war England, which is also suggested by the composer's apparent aversion to an unqualified use of the word 'symphony' in the titles of his works and apparent predilection for suite-like form.¹⁰⁵

Britten himself said very little about how his admiration for Tchaikovsky might have influenced his music, but there are three plausible areas of influence: clarity of texture, orchestral colour and melodic invention. In 1963 he observed: 'I love the clear and the resonant. This, I suppose I've learned from Mozart, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Debussy, Stravinsky and others'.¹⁰⁶ Certainly, the clarity of Britten's textures is a characteristic feature of his mature musical language, and whilst it is likely that the years 1928 to 1932 and Bridge's teaching were also significant in this

¹⁰⁵For Britten's sensitivity on this issue, see, for example, Harewood in appendix V.

¹⁰⁶Interview with Charles Osborne', *Kildea*, p.244.

regard, particularly given the clearer texture of *Plymouth Town* (1931) and the *Phantasy* in F minor for string quartet (1932) compared to the *Rhapsody* (1929), Britten's prior possession of the score of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto, together with the fact that the August 1928 diary references to the First Piano Concerto seem to imply an existing familiarity with the work, suggest that Tchaikovsky, together with Mozart and Schubert, may have begun to influence Britten in this respect rather earlier.¹⁰⁷ Thus, although commentators have tended to view Britten's film work or his admiration for Mahler as essential catalysts of his appreciation of the 'variety of orchestras' within the modern orchestra, his diaries and his pre-1935 scores suggest that to a degree it already existed, and also derived from Tchaikovsky.¹⁰⁸

In 1963 Britten specifically acknowledged his debt to Tchaikovsky's orchestration, and in this regard he may initially have been stimulated by

¹⁰⁷Cf. E. Sackville-West, 'The Musical and Dramatic Structure', in Crozier, pp.29-30: 'Britten's scoring has always been conspicuous for lucidity...though [in *Peter Grimes*] the tone-colour is in places very startling and unusual. But such effects are arrived at by imaginative combinations of two or three instruments or groups, rather than by a complicated mixture of tones such as we find in the scores of Richard Strauss'.

¹⁰⁸See, for example, Christopher Palmer's view of Mahler as 'almost certainly the leading influence' on Britten's 'chamber-music mentality', in 'Britten's Venice orchestra,' in D. Mitchell, comp. and ed., *Death in Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p.129; and Bayan Northcott, CD note ('Benjamin Britten: The Documentary Years') for *Britten on Film* (NMC D112; 2007), p.7: 'Having to make the best of the most limited instrumental resources...[fostered] his practice of breaking down the full orchestra into contrasting sections and smaller units – his lifelong preference for a slender sound'. See appendix IX for Britten's admiration for this aspect of Tchaikovsky's music.

Cecil Forsyth's *Orchestration*.¹⁰⁹ Britten recorded in his diary that he borrowed the book on two occasions in 1929-30, and he was given a copy on leaving Gresham's in July 1930.¹¹⁰ Forsyth specifically acknowledges Bridge in the preface and uses several Bridge scores such as *Isabella* as exemplars of string and woodwind writing, and one can therefore assume that Britten read the book on Bridge's advice. Forsyth makes considerable reference to Tchaikovsky's orchestration: *The Nutcracker*, for example, is praised for the 'light, easy writing' for three flutes with 'feather-weight' viola, cello and double bass pizzicato accompaniment at the opening of 'Danse des Mirlitons', and the 'charmingly unexpected' 'gobliness' effect of simple little scale-passages for bass clarinet in 'Danse de la Fée Dragée'. Elsewhere Forsyth highlights Tchaikovsky's writing for solo oboe, 'a most favoured instrument' for the composer.¹¹¹ Britten himself made minor annotations in the percussion chapter and retained the book throughout his creative life, and the three works he wrote for oboe between 1932 and 1935 clearly developed an idiomatic

¹⁰⁹'Britten rasskazyvaet', *Sovetskaia muzyka*, 1963/6, p.102: 'I have learned a lot about orchestration from Tchaikovsky. We are used to his music and as a result do not always realise what a great artist he is', and C. Forsyth, *Orchestration* (London: Macmillan/Stainer and Bell, 1914). Sir John Tooley recalls that when attending a performance of *The Sleeping Beauty* at the Royal Opera House with Britten in February 1971 the composer was 'absolutely fascinated by the colour Tchaikovsky obtained through his orchestration', interview with the author, 26 January 2010.

¹¹⁰Diary, 24 September 1929 and 15 May 1930 (BPL). Britten's copy was a gift from H.D.F. Taylor, one of the music staff, and is signed 'E. Benjamin Britten' (BPL: 1-9501490).

¹¹¹Forsyth, pp. vi, 65, 195, 275, 392-3.

understanding of the instrument he had already demonstrated in *Plymouth Town*.¹¹² On the other hand, Pears recalled that Britten always considered existing studies of orchestration inadequate and it is equally likely that he came to admire Tchaikovsky's orchestration independently, through his copies of miniature scores of works such as *Capriccio Italien* and the impact of hearing them conducted by Bridge.¹¹³

Finally, Britten also seems to have strongly identified with Tchaikovsky's melodic invention, considering him 'one of the great melodists of the nineteenth century'.¹¹⁴ In his reflections on his fourth visit to the Soviet Union in 1965, Britten added that 'It is difficult to write Tchaikovsky-like symphonies today, as Russian audiences (one is told) seem to demand; good big tunes, for one thing, are difficult to find'.¹¹⁵ Moreover, whereas in the 1930s Britten's admiration for this aspect of Tchaikovsky's music partly reflected his disdain for works such as the 'dry & academic' Sixth Symphony of Glazunov (diary, 12 June 1931), by the 1960s it may have been given further impetus by the entrenchment of a modernist aesthetic in the musical establishments of Western Europe.

¹¹²See, for example, the five-bar *dolciss e vibrato* oboe solo at R:G1 in *Plymouth Town*.

¹¹³Peter Pears in Blyth, p.21. Britten's copy of *Capriccio Italien* is not annotated (BPL: 2-9204096).

¹¹⁴AFMA 1971, p.52.

¹¹⁵'A Composer in Russia', Kildea, pp. 283-4; see also Pears, pp. 121, 126.

Such observations raise the wider question of how to assess the influence of Tchaikovsky's music on Britten. In her analysis of the influence of Verdi on the composer, Jane Brandon highlights a complex phenomenon of various levels of absorption, transformation and allusion. She employs three broad categories that are useful for the consideration of Britten's work: firstly, near-quotation, where a significant amount of the original is present; secondly, allusion, both specific (to a work or composer) and generic (to a wider generic category or to a historical period); and thirdly, 'assimilation', which was employed positively by Britten himself with regard to artistic influence. Pivotal to the first two categories are varying degrees of transformation, parody and subversion on Britten's part.¹¹⁶ This provides a useful point of reference in examining the influence of Tchaikovsky in four different contexts across Britten's creative life: the *Rossini Suite* (1935), which he subsequently adapted to form *Soirées musicales* (1936) and *Matinées musicales* (1941); the String Quartet No. 2 in C (1945); *The Prince of the Pagodas* (1956); and the Third Suite for Cello (1971).

¹¹⁶Brandon, p.24.

1.7 *Rossini Suite* (1935), *Soirées musicales* (1936) and *Matinées musicales* (1941)

Although commentators have highlighted the clear texture and orchestral colour of Britten's *Rossini* orchestrations, these features have not been placed in the context of Britten's knowledge of, and admiration for, Tchaikovsky.¹¹⁷ All three works in fact contain passages of orchestration reminiscent of Tchaikovsky: the texture of the 'Canzonetta' (*Soirées musicales*, II), for example, recalls the 'Scene dansante' (Act I, no. 3) from *The Sleeping Beauty*, whilst the conspicuous refinement and variety of effects – ranging from mostly *pp(p)* use of castanets in the fourth movement of the *Rossini Suite* to *mf* clarinet and bassoon solos accompanied by *pp* tambourine, staccato brass triplets and *p* cello quavers in the 'Waltz' of *Matinées musicales* – suggest that the score of *The Nutcracker* was a model and that Britten sought to create a similarly Lilliputian atmosphere of enchanted childhood. The writing for celesta and woodwind in the 'Nocturne' of *Matinées musicales* thus recalls the 'Danse de la Fée-Dragée', whilst the second movement of the *Rossini Suite* employs a wordless boys' chorus with a not dissimilar melodic contour to that employed by Tchaikovsky in the 'Valse des flocons de neige' (Examples 7 to 9). The fact that Britten conceived the 1936 and 1941

¹¹⁷See, for example, P. Reed's note to the first concert performance of the *Rossini Suite*, AFMA 1987, pp. 39, 47.

Rossini orchestrations as ideally suited for ballet further suggests that he had the Tchaikovsky ballet scores in mind during their composition.¹¹⁸ Indeed, their idiom is also recalled in the Romantic 'big tune' of the 'End Music' of *Johnson over Jordan* (1939; R: PP to R: RR, especially R: QQ: bar 7), and Britten went on to complete an unidentified Tchaikovsky arrangement, probably from a ballet, prior completing *Matinées musicales* in June 1941.¹¹⁹ Tchaikovsky's ballets therefore seem to have constituted a significant source of influence on Britten between 1935 and 1941 in terms of generic and specific allusion, albeit one which operated in the relatively small-scale context of the works cited above.

¹¹⁸Letter from Britten to Erwin Stein, Grove Hospital, Tooting Grove, London, 8 March 1943 (BPL: BH).

¹¹⁹See letter from Britten to Enid Slater, 7 April 1940, and commentary in *Letters from a Life* vol. II, pp.799-802.

Example 7: *Matinées musicales*, No. 2 'Nocturne', bars 1-4

Andante tranquillo ♩=72

The score is for a symphony orchestra and includes parts for Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, Percussion, Celesta, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The music is in 3/8 time and features various triplets and dynamics such as *pp*, *p*, and *espress.*

Flutes I & II: *pp dolcis.* (triplets)

Oboes I & II: *pp* (triplets)

Clarinets in B \flat I & II: *pp* (triplets)

Bassoons I & II: *pp* (triplets)

Horns in F I & II: *pp sostenuto*

Trumpets in B \flat : *pp sostenuto*

Percussion: *pp* (triplets)

Celesta: *p* (triplets)

Violin I: *pp* (triplets)

Violin II: *pp* (triplets)

Viola: *pp espress.* (div.)

Violoncello: *pp espress.* (div.)

Contrabass: *pp legato* (triplets)

Example 8: *Rossini Suite, II, R2: bar 3 to R4*

Example 9: Tchaikovsky: *The Nutcracker, 'Valse des flocons de neige'*,

R:D: bars 10-18

1.8 String Quartet No. 2 in C (1945)

The expressive melodic contour of the cello part in the seventeenth variation of the 'Chacony' (at R17: bars 7 to 9) of the Second String quartet closely recalls Tchaikovsky's expressive writing for the instrument in the Letter Scene (Act I: no. 9) of *Eugene Onegin*. In a work written to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Purcell's death, the reasons for this reference to Tchaikovsky are unclear. Harewood recalled that Britten only first saw the Tchaikovsky opera in 1952, although the composer already knew the music from the score.¹²⁰ The elaborate

¹²⁰Harewood, p.135.

variation/cadenza structure of the movement nevertheless presented Britten with the opportunity to explore an interest in the expressive possibilities of the cello, and in composing a tenderly melodic variation he may unconsciously have drawn upon the inflection of a composer whose writing for the instrument he particularly admired. It is certainly revealing that in the composition score Britten has marked the cello variation 'cantabile' (as opposed to 'express.' in the printed score), one of Tchaikovsky's most characteristic markings.¹²¹

Example 10: Britten: String Quartet No. 2: 'Chacony', R17: bar 7 to R18



Example 11: Tchaikovsky: *Eugene Onegin*, No. 9: Letter Scene, bars 1-6



Britten's correspondence with Maurice Gendron, for whom he appears to have intended to write a cello suite in the same year, certainly suggests a longer-term interest in Tchaikovsky's cello works such as the *Pezzo Capriccioso*, *Andante Cantabile* and *Nocturne* which pre-dated his association with Rostropovich, as does his possession of two copies of the

¹²¹BPL: Tenbury MS 1514: microfilm of holograph score.

miniature score of the *Variations on a Rococo Theme*.¹²² The diaries also indicate that Britten would also have been aware of Tchaikovsky's warmly expressive writing for the instrument in, for example, the second movement of the Fifth Symphony. This circumstantial evidence suggests that this reference to *Eugene Onegin* primarily represents an unconscious assimilation of the composer's melodic inflection, a feature of the work which was not recognised either at the time of the first performance or subsequently.

1.9 *The Prince of the Pagodas* (1956)

Britten's wider interest in Tchaikovsky and in Russian music is apparent on a far larger scale in *The Prince of the Pagodas*. However, although this aspect of the work was recognised at the time of its première, it has subsequently been given significantly less attention than the Balinese elements of the score and a consideration of their place and development in Britten's later musical language.¹²³ Donald Mitchell, although

¹²²See, for example, letter from Maurice Gendron to Britten, Queens [sic] Hotel, Leeds, 1958 [n.d.], and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Gendron, 11 November 1958, which refer to a discussion of these works during the 1958 Aldeburgh Festival (BPL: Maurice Gendron correspondence). For the unrealised work for Gendron, see *Letters from a Life II*, letter 499, p. 1247.

¹²³*Letters of a Life IV*, pp.482-3, quotes Martin Cooper in *The Daily Telegraph* on 2 January 1957: '...the story follows, often in considerable detail, many of the incidents of the *Sleeping Beauty* ballet...[Britten] has made no attempt to disguise his own indebtedness to other writers of ballet music'. For the subsequent overlooking of this aspect, see M. Cooke in AFMA 1988, p. 57. On the other hand, Liudmila Kovnatskaia did highlight the work's eclecticism in 1974: 'During his work on the ballet Britten referred to

recognising Britten's allusions to the ballet scores of Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Stravinsky and viewing 'The very exclusivity of the genealogy, its Russian-ness' as indicative of the 'authenticity' of Britten's approach, did not develop this observation by means of detailed reference to the score and a consideration of one of the greatest compositional challenges Britten faced, namely how to avoid emulating Tchaikovsky's musical language superficially.¹²⁴ Subsequent musicologists have continued this trend: Lyn Henderson (2003), for example, does not draw specific comparisons with Prokofiev's ballet scores in order to assess Prokofiev's influence beyond citing three examples from *The Prince of the Pagodas* which reflect more general features of the composer's musical language.¹²⁵ Britten himself seems to have been particularly reluctant to discuss the ballet following the first production, not least as a result of the deterioration of his relationship with its choreographer John Cranko in the 1960s and the work's disappearance from the repertoire, which adds particular interest to his initial conception and sources of creative reference.¹²⁶

Tchaikovsky's ballet scores. The result drew from diverse styles and influences: Prokofiev's ballets and the opera *The Love for Three Oranges*, Shostakovich in the Dance of Fire and certain other episodes, Debussy and Stravinsky'; *Benjamin Britten*, p.202.

¹²⁴Mitchell, 'Catching on to the Technique in Pagoda-Land', pp. 18-19.

¹²⁵L. Henderson, 'His Influence on Britten: The Vital Prokofiev', *The Musical Times*, vol. 144, no. 1882, (spring, 2003), p.19.

¹²⁶Letter to the author from Colin Matthews, 29 October 2010.

The ballet's reference to Tchaikovsky and to Russian music in terms of structure and musical language can therefore be assessed in the light of three pieces of evidence which have hitherto not been used for this purpose and which are particularly revealing given the very small number of letters between Britten and Cranko compared to his collaborators in other stage works. Firstly, Britten's collection of miniature and full scores, which contain copies of Maurice Petipa's stage directions for *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker*. Secondly, Cranko's original scenarios for the ballet; and thirdly, the testimony of Oleg Vinogradov, who choreographed the work for the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad in 1973, a production in which Britten took a keen interest.

Britten's collection of Russian ballet scores enables one to identify the composer's creative reference during the work's composition with some certainty. In the case of Tchaikovsky – and in contrast to the testimony of Duncan, Harewood and Tooley - this evidence strongly suggests that Britten initially consulted all three ballet scores as well as other orchestral works with which he was unfamiliar.¹²⁷ He possessed two full scores of

¹²⁷Duncan, p.136, appendix V, and interview with Sir John Tooley, 26 January 2010. See also A. Wright, 'Britten and Home', *Music and Musicians*, August 1955, p.12, for Britten 'putting in "a lot of homework" [in the early stages of the still untitled ballet]. This includes a thorough study of Tchaikovsky's scores and he has subscribed to a complete Tchaikovsky edition, finding some wonderful things in the volumes'. The evidence of appendix XIV suggests that this is likely to have included the Second Suite for Orchestra and *Pique Dame*.

Swan Lake. The first contains a 'fairly full' synopsis in Russian and French to which Britten referred in a letter regarding stage directions in the printed score, and one can therefore assume that it was this copy which Britten consulted during the composition of the ballet, since the second was obtained by Britten later, at some point after its publication in 1958.¹²⁸ Staple marks and a pencil annotation in Britten's handwriting at page 128 of the first score ('see page') suggest that he paid particular attention to the Pas de Deux (no. 5, pp. 128-65) of Act I and to the Pas de Six of Act III (marked 'Cut'). It is therefore likely that given Britten's relative lack of experience in writing for dancers, he closely consulted these pages, not only when determining the structure of the five pas de deux and Act III Pas de Six, but more generally.¹²⁹ Indeed, the timpani and side drum pulse in the Fish creatures' variation in Act II (between R40 and R41) recalls no. 5 of Act I of *Swan Lake*. Further, the composition score indicates substantial crossings out in the Act III pas de deux and subsequent variation for Belle Rose, again suggesting that Britten consulted

¹²⁸*The Swan Lake Ballet* (New York: Broude Brothers, 1951; B.B.59), pp. II-V (BPL: 2-1000656), and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Anthony Gishford, 10 March 1957: '...in the published score of Swan Lake there is a fairly full synopsis at the beginning, and then only the briefest instructions over the music. This is what I think we should do in this case' (BPL: BH). Britten's second copy is Tchaikovsky PSS: vols. 11A & B (1958) (BPL).

¹²⁹See appendix IV, and Britten in 'The Composer Speaks': '...I've always been interested in ballet, although I have not known very much about it and had no direct contact with it before', Kildea, pp. 154.

Tchaikovsky in this specific context.¹³⁰ Moreover, whilst Britten uncharacteristically sanctioned a number of cuts for the initial performances at Covent Garden and, five months later, for La Scala, Milan, he seems to have been reluctant to cut the extended Pas de Deux in Act II, suggesting that he devoted particular attention to the structure and duration of this number.¹³¹

This copy of *Swan Lake* also contains a separate sixteen-page typewritten 'PROGRAMMES OF BALLETS BY MARIUS PETIPA/ "THE SLEEPING BEAUTY"', whose content is introduced thus: 'The programme is to be found in a hand-sewn book of MSS paper of 12 pages. It contains the final notes and ballet-master's summing up, which he sent to Tchaikovsky'. It is not possible to determine the provenance of this document, which is not mentioned in the Britten-Cranko correspondence and to which previous commentators on *The Prince of the Pagodas* have not referred, but it is likely to have been given to the composer by Cranko during the early stages of the work's inception at the beginning of 1955. Certainly, just as Britten initially envisaged the collaboration in the same light of Tchaikovsky and Petipa, Cranko also acknowledged that his own

¹³⁰Holograph score (BPL: 2-9300894), which indicates 29 bars of crossings out between pp. 45 and 47 and, in the subsequent variation, that p.49a was subsequently entirely discarded by the composer.

¹³¹BPL: *The Prince of the Pagodas* file: (i) 'Cuts for C.G.': 'No cut in Pas de Deux;' and (ii) 'Cuts for Milan: 'Possibly – cut bit in Pas de Deux'. For Britten's reluctance to sanction cuts of his completed works up to 1959, see Roth, p.229.

choreography 'was to take Petipa as a starting point' and went on to develop his choreography in the light of the impact of the Bolshoi Ballet during their Covent Garden season in October 1956.¹³² Moreover, Lord Harewood recalls that Britten told him that 'he referred constantly to Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty*, not only as the touchstone of balletic quality but also as a kind of ballet-music dictionary, and from it he got ideas for length, for the kind of variations dancers would respond to, for the variety and contrasts which, with all those short sections, would make up a satisfactory whole'.¹³³ It is therefore likely that this document formed an additional and hitherto unrecognised aspect of Britten's reference to the Tchaikovsky score.

Britten possessed Russian editions of the two other Tchaikovsky ballets. His copy of *The Sleeping Beauty* is not annotated, but in the light of Ronald Duncan's testimony, one can conclude that Britten obtained the score at some point after its publication in 1952 and that it was this copy which Britten consulted during the composition of the ballet.¹³⁴ Britten's familiarity with *The Nutcracker* was more long-standing: as has been

¹³²BPL: 2-1000656; J. Cranko, 'Making a Ballet – 2', *The Sunday Times*, 20 January 1957, in *Letters of a Life IV*, p.486; interview with Sir John Tooley, 26 January 2010; and J. Percival, *Theatre in My Blood: A Biography of John Cranko* (London: The Herbert Press, 1983), p.116.

¹³³Harewood, p. 140 and appendix V.

¹³⁴Tchaikovsky PSS: vols. 12A-D (1952) (BPL). Referring to the initial stages of the work's composition, Duncan recalled that Britten said: 'I have the score of *Sleeping Beauty* by my bed and I read a few pages every night before going to sleep...The more I look at *Sleeping Beauty*, the more I admire [Tchaikovsky], and who else can I take as a model?' Duncan, p.136. See also R. Duncan, 'The Prince', *Woman's Journal*, October 1956, p.78.

observed, he probably acquired a miniature score of the Suite in 1932. His later copy of the full orchestral score further indicates detailed familiarity: two bassoon quavers, for example, are altered in pencil from E flat to D in bars 38-39 of 'Le Café'.¹³⁵ Britten also possessed the composer's piano transcription of the ballet which contains a nine-page scenario in identical style to that of *The Sleeping Beauty* cited above and similarly illuminates how Britten and Cranko initially viewed the project.¹³⁶ Its content is introduced thus: 'The programme of the ballet...was written by M. Petipa...and is to be found in the Theatrical Museum, Leningrad...On the Left of the MSS are large margins, in which for the 1st Act are written the numbers of the mise-en-scene [sic] and other remarks, which are given here in brackets. In the margins of the pages of the 2nd Act, as well as the numbers, are partly written wishes for the musical illustrations...This MSS is better than the one kept in the Tchaikovsky Museum in Klin and the one published in M. Tchaikovsky's "Life of P.I. Tchaikovsky" ...At the head of the page of the present MSS, is written the inscription: - "This is the copy, of that which I sent to Tchaikovsky")'. Again, there is no indication of provenance, but it is likely that Cranko similarly gave the document to Britten to assist the composer in early 1955, since its text is conspicuous not only for its concern for scholarly authenticity but also for

¹³⁵Tchaikovsky PSS: vols. 13 A-B (1955) (BPL).

¹³⁶Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 54 (1956) (BPL). The scenario is currently uncatalogued.

the specific musical directions accorded to each number, including the number of bars required and, on occasion, the time signature. In this respect it differs from *The Sleeping Beauty* scenario and is more significant as evidence for Britten's creative reference during the work's conception, not least because, as shall be seen, Cranko's original scenarios arguably drew upon *The Nutcracker* to a greater degree than *The Sleeping Beauty* and it is with this Tchaikovsky score that Britten first seems to have become familiar.

The evidence of Britten's collection of Russian ballet scores suggests that Stravinsky remained an important, if qualified, source of creative reference during the composition of *The Prince of the Pagodas*. Britten had acquired miniature scores of at least four early Stravinsky ballets between 1925 and 1932 and Pears's copy of *Apollon Musagète* had also been incorporated into Britten's library by the time the composer began work on the ballet; he also possessed an illustrated symposium on Stravinsky's ballets published in 1947.¹³⁷ It is perhaps revealing that Britten did not

¹³⁷The Suites from *L'Oiseau de Feu* and *Pulcinella* (BPL: 2-1000542 ; 2-1000543) obtained in 1925 and 1930 respectively; *Le Sacre de Printemps* (BPL: 2-1000539), which Britten was awarded as the Sullivan Prize in 1932 and annotated with regard to rhythm, tempo and orchestration; and *Pétrouchka*, a Christmas present from his parents in 1931 (BPL: 2-1000538, and diary entry for 25 December 1931). Pears dated his copy of Stravinsky's piano reduction of *Apollon Musagète* 1930 (BPL: 2-9203161). See also Britten's copy of 'Stravinsky in the Theatre: a symposium prepared by Minna Ledermann', *Dance Index*, vol. VI nos 10-12 (1947), which suggests a continued interest in Stravinsky's ballets on Britten's part (BPL:1-9500477).

possess the complete score of what might appear to be the most obvious link between the two composers in terms of their shared admiration for Tchaikovsky, *Le Baiser de la fée* (1928), notwithstanding the fact that he probably heard the composer and Samuel Dushkin perform an arrangement of the ballet's Divertimento in 1933.¹³⁸ A plausible explanation is that Britten was unenthusiastic about Stravinsky's orchestrations and harmonisations of Tchaikovsky's ballet music and songs, regarding his own approach in *The Prince of the Pagodas* as a more authentic - as well as more original - act of creative homage to the composer's orchestration and melodic invention. This was a revealing judgement given not only Britten's admiration for Tchaikovsky's orchestrations of Mozart in his Fourth Suite but also Stravinsky's authentic re-orchestrations of two numbers from the piano score of *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1921, as well as the chronological coincidence of Britten's own unidentified Tchaikovsky arrangement (1940) with Stravinsky's chamber-orchestra arrangement of the Bluebird Pas-de-Deux

¹³⁸Britten's diary, 13 March 1933, in which he records that he heard Stravinsky and Dushkin perform 'some incredible arrangements from the Ballets', and BPL: 2-1000530 for a miniature score of the ballet's Divertimento which seems to have belonged to Britten. For Stravinsky's admiration for Tchaikovsky, couched in terms which Britten would surely have appreciated, see 'THE SLEEPING BEAUTY', open letter to Serge Diaghilev in *The Times*, 18 October 1921, transl. E. Evans, in E. Walter-White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966, 2nd ed. 1979), pp.573-4: 'The fact is that [Tchaikovsky] was a creator of *melody*, which is an extremely rare and precious gift...And that is something which is not German...Chaikovsky's music, which does not appear specifically Russian to everybody, is often more profoundly Russian than music which has long since been awarded the facile label of Muscovite picturequeness'.

(1941).¹³⁹ Indeed, it is significant that the sonority, texture and instrumentation Britten accords to his heroine Belle Rose is most akin to Tchaikovsky, as in her opening Variation and Pas de Deux (R44: bars 5 to 8), whereas the sonority of the early Stravinsky ballets whose scores Britten possessed and admired in the 1930s is recalled in more negative contexts: the spell which has been cast on the kingdom (Act I: R72 and R73), the insincerity of Princess Belle Epine in the neoclassical scoring of her Act I Variation (Example 12), and the humiliation of the Emperor, forced to dance as a puppet in the manner of Pétrouchka in Act III (R11 to R12).

¹³⁹In view of Pears's testimony in Blyth, p.21, that Britten 'felt that Paris had lent Stravinsky's work a chic air, which had been encouraged by Nadia Boulanger', the composer may have shared Constant Lambert's criticisms of 'the necessary element of chic' and 'the sour and deliberate harmonic distortions' in this Stravinsky score; *Music Ho!*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1934), p.102.

Example 12: *The Prince of the Pagodas*, Act I, R39: bars 2-12

Majestic (♩ = 76)

Violin I
mf very expressive and broad

Violin II
mf very expressive and broad

Viola
mf very expressive and broad

Violoncello
mf

Double Bass
mf

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

Britten's creative reference to Prokofiev during the ballet's composition is more elusive and has not hitherto been assessed in depth. Although some comparisons were made at the time of the first performances with *Cinderella*, *The Love for Three Oranges* and *Lieutenant Kijé*,¹⁴⁰ Harewood maintained that Britten did not share his enthusiasm for Prokofiev during

¹⁴⁰C. Barnes, D. Hunt, 'The Prince of the Pagodas': 'Choreography', 'Music'. *Dance and Dancers*, February 1957, pp.9-10.

the 1950s, nor does Sir John Tooley recall that Britten ever mentioned Prokofiev as a ballet composer.¹⁴¹ Certainly at no point did Britten ever cite Prokofiev as a creative influence, nor were the composers linked during Prokofiev's lifetime beyond their possession of a comparable technical faculty.¹⁴²

The evidence of Britten's diaries suggests that although Britten was familiar with Prokofiev's music from at least as early as 1931, by 1940 his knowledge encompassed a relatively narrow range of instrumental music and he did not possess any orchestral scores.¹⁴³ That Prokofiev's influence did nevertheless operate, particularly in the context of Britten's music for piano, is confirmed by the plausible allusions to the composer which Lyn Henderson has identified between 1934 and 1940 in, for example, *Holiday Diary*, *Diversions*, and *Introduction and rondo alla burlesca*, although one should add that Britten seems to have been indifferent to Ralph Hawkes's

¹⁴¹Appendix V, and interview with Sir John Tooley, 26 January 2010.

¹⁴²D.H. Ottoway, 'Serge Prokofiev and Benjamin Britten', *Musical Opinion*, July 1950, p.577. For Britten's tribute to Prokofiev in *Musik der Zeit* on the composer's death, see I. Nest'ev, *Prokofiev* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.439.

¹⁴³Britten only possessed a copy of *Preludes*, op. 12, no. 7, signed 'Benjamin Britten/Feb. 1931', in which he has annotated the fingering (BPL: 2-9204085). For references to Prokofiev's music, see his diary entries for 19 March 1931, 30 August 1934, 24 February and 29 June 1935 (Violin Concerto No. 1); 15 May 1933 (*Classical Symphony*); 11 October 1934, 19 September 1935, 31 January 1934 (Piano Concertos Nos. 3 and 5); 7 July 1932 (*Overture on Hebrew Themes*); and 4 December 1934 (String Quartet No. 1) (BPL).

suggestion in 1941 that he produce a work in the vein of *Peter and the Wolf*.¹⁴⁴

By 1955 Britten had also obtained a small number of Prokofiev's orchestral scores, but he only seems to have become familiar with Prokofiev's stage works from as late as 1963.¹⁴⁵ This was as a result both of attending live performances in Moscow and of obtaining a more representative variety of scores published in the Soviet Union between 1958 and 1967 as part of the rehabilitation of the composer's wider output.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, although Britten did not possess the scores of *Chout*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella*, this may also reflect the delayed reception of these works in the West, particularly in terms of publication and recordings, rather than a lack of interest on his part. Although Frederick

¹⁴⁴L. Henderson, 'His Influence on Britten: The Vital Prokofiev', pp.17-19, and letter from Ralph Hawkes to Britten, 7 Middagh St., Brooklyn, New York, 17 January 1941 (BPL: BH).

¹⁴⁵By 1955 Britten possessed miniature scores of the Classical Symphony (n.d.), *Lieutenant Kijé* (1947) and *Peter and the Wolf* (1942) (BPL: 2-1000292-4). Lyn Henderson, *op. cit.*, does not distinguish the original collection from acquisitions from other sources after Britten's death.

¹⁴⁶Pears's appointment diary cites *Romeo and Juliet* on 7 March 1963, and Britten heard Vishnevskaya in *War and Peace* at the Bolshoi Theatre on two occasions: 10 March 1964, and, under Rostropovich's baton, 23 April 1971 (BPL: programme for the 1964 performance inside Britten's uncatalogued copy of the vocal score, and 'PROGRAMME FOR THE VISIT TO MOSCOW & LENINGRAD of MR. BENJAMIN BRITTEN & MR. PETER PEARS, 16-25 April 1971' in DW). Britten's desk diary also records a 'Prokofiev opera' in Moscow on 9 March 1963, cited as *The Story of a Real Man* in *Letters from a Life V*, p. 468. Britten further obtained the vocal score of the oratorio version of *Ivan the Terrible* as a gift from A. Stasevich in October 1963 (BPL: 2-9900093), and 'lots of Prokofiev', probably including his full scores of 1967 Russian editions of *Betrothal in a Monastery* and *Semen Kotko*, during his final visit to the Soviet Union in April 1971; Pears, p.163.

Ashton's version of *Cinderella* had been in the repertory of Sadler's Wells Ballet since 1948, Britten does not appear to have attended a performance and Rozhdestvensky's complete recording of the work was only released in 1966.¹⁴⁷ This evidence suggests that Britten's allusions in *The Prince of the Pagodas* were drawn from the wider idiom of Prokofiev's musical language, such as his 'scintillating orchestral writing, memorable tunes, neat counterpoints, and deliciously perverse harmonic twists', rather than from stage works such as *The Love for Three Oranges*.¹⁴⁸

The most immediate parallels between Britten's and Prokofiev's musical language in *The Prince of the Pagodas* are in those numbers which contain an element of parody and the grotesque and seem drawn from *Lieutenant Kijé*: for example, the tuba, cello and double bass ostinato which characterises the entry of the court in Act I (R5: bars 1 to 4) and the expressive alto saxophone writing which accompanies the Emperor's dance in Act I (R10: bar 1 to bar 10, Example 13; cf. the sentimental tenor

¹⁴⁷ROHC online (www.rohcollections.org.uk, consulted 20.3.11) for performance dates of *Cinderella* between 1948 and 1956, Britten's pocket diaries 1948-56 (BPL), and Melodiya/HMV ASD 2429-30.

¹⁴⁸Britten's description of the Classical Symphony, which he conducted during the 1965 Aldeburgh Festival; AFMA 1965, p.9. Although Liudmila Kovnatskaia sees *The Love for Three Oranges* as an influence on *The Prince of the Pagodas*, and Britten's diary records that he heard a broadcast of 'sparkling but...rather weak' selections from the opera on 9 January 1936, this is their only reference to a Prokofiev stage work and he did not possess the score; *Benjamin Britten*, p.202.

saxophone theme which characterises Kijé at R10: bars 2 to 5, Example 14).

Example 13: *The Prince of the Pagodas*, Act I, R10: bars 1-10

The Emperor dances.

Alto Sax. *p* *espress. and sustained*

Example 14: *Lieutenant Kijé*, Symphonic Suite, I, R10: bars 2-5

Sax. Ten. *Andante* ♩ = 80
p *dolce*

In expressing his existing interest in fanfares in the context of a ballet, Britten may also have drawn from Prokofiev's theme for off-stage solo cornet (at the beginning and end of numbers 1 and 5) in his depiction of Belle Rose's vision of the Prince 'as if from a distance' in her Act I Pas de Deux (R46: bars 2 to 5; cf. *Lieutenant Kijé* bars 1 to 5). On the other hand, Britten had already employed this device in the opening and closing sections of *Canadian Carnival* and was to develop it further in his *Fanfare for St. Edmundsbury* (1959), which suggests that Britten's creative reference to Prokofiev in the ballet may not have been entirely conscious and instead drew upon features of his musical language which were fully assimilated by 1942.

Several significant comparisons may nevertheless be made between *The Prince of the Pagodas* and Prokofiev's ballets, not least because both composers drew, albeit in different ways, from the Russian ballet tradition. Although Britten's musical language on occasion recalls specific numbers of *Romeo and Juliet*, as in the *scherzando* rhythms and *marcato* tuba of the Coda of Variation III in the final act (R49: bars 1 to 7; cf. *Romeo and Juliet*, Act I, no. 10), more significant comparisons may be made with *Cinderella* and *The Tale of the Stone Flower* than the 'sober-minded stylisation' of the former.¹⁴⁹ The eclectic fairy-tale of the latter work possesses significant similarities with Cranko's scenario: in particular, both suggest *The Nutcracker* in their incorporation of magical elements, and in this sense the dramatic transitions from first to second and penultimate to final acts are pivotal. Katerina's dance with the fire spirit similarly attempts to depict the sonority of fire (Act IV, no.40; cf. the appearance of the Male and Female Flame in Act II scene 1), just as Belle Rose's arrival at Pagoda-Land may be compared dramatically to Danilo's fantasy encounter with the precious stones of the Copper Mountain. The score itself is also conspicuously melodic, and some of its orchestral textures and set-piece numbers suggest the influence of Tchaikovsky. As in *The Prince of the Pagodas*, Prokofiev assigned a particular sonority to individual characters – indeed, in common with *Swan Lake*, the heroine of

¹⁴⁹Morrison, p.107.

both the Britten and Prokofiev works is accorded the oboe – albeit this was a device Britten had already employed in his incidental music to *The Rescue* thirteen years earlier. Thus, whereas the string textures of Belle Epine’s ‘majestic’ variation in Act I resemble those of *Apollon Musagète*, Belle Rose is represented in her variation by a plaintive oboe solo clearly drawn from Tchaikovsky’s writing for the instrument. Britten’s use of an alto saxophone to depict the Emperor is also striking, expressing an existing predilection which may initially have been stimulated by the French tradition or by Berg as much as by Prokofiev’s *Lieutenant Kijé*.

On the other hand, Britten did not acquire the full score of *The Tale of the Stone Flower* until after 1962 and there is no evidence to suggest that he was familiar with the score seven years earlier.¹⁵⁰ The parallels with *Cinderella* are therefore more plausible. Cranko’s conception of Belle Rose was clearly drawn from *Cinderella*, and Britten’s aim for ‘the renewal and extension of [the] great tradition’ of Russian Classical Ballet may be compared to Prokofiev’s conception of ‘an updated classical ballet with its particular forms, like the *pas d’action* [and] *grand pas*’, in other words, faithful to the tradition and forms of the Tchaikovsky ballets but also

¹⁵⁰S. Prokofiev *Sobranie Sochinenii* vols. 12 A&B (Moscow: Muzyka, 1962) (BPL: uncatalogued).

wholly expressive of his own musical language.¹⁵¹ Whilst *Cinderella* has therefore been viewed 'in thick Soviet guise, the fourth Tchaikovsky ballet',¹⁵² it nevertheless remains highly characteristic in terms of rhythm, harmony and melodic invention. Moreover, in common with Britten's original integration at several points in the score of a 'gamelan' with a Western sonority - in Act II scene 2, for example, the former is superimposed over Belle Rose's 'Tchaikovskian' violin solo - Prokofiev was also able to bring several original elements to the work: the use of three full-scale waltzes (numbers 30, 37 and 49) which juxtapose a variety of moods and symbolically represent the romance itself; the creation of a distinctive 'dreamlike' sonority using extreme string registers; and, partly as a result of the later, the fairy-tale itself becomes ambiguous and, arguably, acquires a degree of 'adult' significance.

Although Robin Holloway has detected 'pretty explicit hommages' to Shostakovich in *The Prince of the Pagodas*, this is questionable.¹⁵³ The score's only apparent reference to Shostakovich is in the Male Flame's

¹⁵¹Mitchell, 'Catching on to the Technique in Pagoda-Land', p. 19, and S. Prokofiev on 24 December 1940, quoted in Morrison, pp. 260. Compare Britten's letter to Ernst Ansermet on 17 April 1956 stating that he was 'doing [his] best to follow the conventional classical ballet forms - quite a task these days!' in *Letters of a Life* IV, p.441, with Prokofiev's observation (1945): 'I wrote *Cinderella* in the traditions of the old classical ballet, it has pas de deux, adagios, gavottes, several waltzes, a pavane, passepied, bourré, mazurka and gallop'; S. Prokofiev, *Autobiography, Articles, Reminiscences*, p.132.

¹⁵²Morrison, p.259.

¹⁵³R. Holloway, review of the first complete recording, *Tempo*, New Series, 176 (March 1991), p.32.

Variation in Act II (between R53 and R54, and R55 and R66, Example 15), which appears to be drawn instead from the composer's scherzo writing in, for example, the second movement of the Eighth Symphony. Moreover, it is unlikely that Britten possessed a significant appreciation of Shostakovich's involvement in the short-lived genre of experimental Soviet ballet. He did not possess the scores of the suites extracted from the composer's three full-length ballet scores and, in any case, these works, their scenarios and choreography were intended to create a new tradition of Soviet art distinct from the Classical ballet tradition from which Britten primarily drew inspiration.¹⁵⁴

Moreover, with the exception of the 'Variation of the King of the West', the references Britten made to earlier ballet scores in *The Prince of the Pagodas* are not satirical. This is in contrast to the approach Shostakovich on occasion adopted towards the debased use of Tchaikovsky on the part of the Soviet regime from the 1930s onwards, when the composer and his music were reasserted as symbols of Russian nationalism and Soviet mass culture.¹⁵⁵ Thus, in Act II scene three of Shostakovich's *The Limpid*

¹⁵⁴See M. Ilichova, 'Shostakovich's ballets' in CCDS. Cf. Britten in 'The Composer Speaks': '...in this particular case, what attracted me was that it was going to be a classical...ballet...and that interests me far more than the psychological ballets'; Kildea, p.155.

¹⁵⁵See Frolova-Walker, p.341 for the Stalinist celebration of the Tchaikovsky centenary in 1940.

Stream (1935) the two Adagios (nos. 25 and 29) may allude to Tchaikovsky's ballet adagios: the first, whilst alluding to *Swan Lake*, also includes an incongruous passage for *ff* xylophone at R5: bars 1 to 3, and the final bars of the ballet's 'Final Dance' in Act III (from R71: bar 9) similarly juxtapose a reference to Tchaikovsky in the string writing with a Soviet-style trumpet fanfare (R72: bars 6 to 8). In the same ironic light Shostakovich observed that his quotation of *Pique Dame* in his *Five Romances on Texts from 'Krokodil'* (1965) had drawn upon 'the techniques of Socialist Realism'.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶Letter from Shostakovich to Glikman, Moscow, 4 September 1965, Glikman, p.124.

Example 15: *The Prince of the Pagodas*, Act I, R55: bars 1-11

Quick (♩. = 72)

Piccolo

Flute

Oboe *ff express.*

Cor Anglais *ff express.*

Clarinet in A *ff express.*

Clarinet in E flat

Alto Saxophone *ff*

Bassoon *ff express.*

Horn in F *ff express.* [Horn 2]

Trumpet in C

Cymbals

Piano

Violin I *ff*

Violin II *unis.*

Viola *ff*

Violoncello *unis.*

Double Bass *unis. ff*

5

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

C. A.

Cl.

Cl.

Alto Sax.

Bsn.

Bsn.

Hn. [Horn 4]

ff *express.*

C Tpt.

C Tpt.

Cym.

Pno.

15^{ma}

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

8

Picc.

Fl.

Ob.

C. A.

Cl.

Cl.

Alto Sax.

Bsn.

Bsn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

C Tpt.

Cym.

Pno.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

[Horn 4]

15^{me}

15^{me}

(tr)

1.10 Cranko's scenario

Cranko's handwritten draft scenario for *The Prince of the Pagodas*, entitled 'Rough Sketch The Green Serpent' can be analysed alongside a subsequent and more detailed typewritten scenario.¹⁵⁷ A number of Cranko's descriptions in these documents are explicitly drawn from the two Tchaikovsky/Petipa ballet scenarios and would have provided an additional stimulus for Britten to conceive the score in the light of the Tchaikovsky ballets, as would Cranko's casting of Svetlana Beriosova as Belle Rose given her close association with the roles of Aurora and Odette-Odile.¹⁵⁸ The scenario also contains further allusions to the ballets of Prokofiev and Stravinsky. The court settings of Acts I and III allude to *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, to which is added an element of parody drawn from Prokofiev – a 'Parody gavotte' – comparable to the Act I gavotte of *Romeo and Juliet* (no. 18) or the Gavotte (no. 10) and Dance of the Court (no. 20) from *Cinderella*; on the other hand, further elements of parody and the grotesque in the first scene of Act III seem more reminiscent of the third tableau of *Pétrouchka*. The 'Blowy, icy, mazurka' for the King of the North in Act I, described in the subsequent scenario as an 'Icy, windy Russian Trepak' and the 'Exotic, slow, refined, Oriental Dance' for the King of the East indicate a desire to create geographical

¹⁵⁷BPL: 2-9700608.

¹⁵⁸C. Swinson, *Svetlana Beriosova* (London: Adam and Charles Black, n.d. [1956]), p.5, and A.H. Franks, *Svetlana Beriosova: A Biography* (London: Burke, 1958), p.75.

colour akin to the Divertimento in Act II of *The Nutcracker*. On the other hand, Belle Epine's rejection of the four royal suitors parallels the Pas d'Action of Act I of *The Sleeping Beauty*, in which 'Aurora dances with her lovers and shows no preference for any of them', whilst her fantastic journey to Pagoda Land, a divertimento which includes a 'Waltz of the Clouds & Stars', coupled with the spectacular exoticism of the setting on arrival, allude to the second act of *The Nutcracker*, in which Clara and the Prince appear 'on a chariot of shells...accompanied by enormous golden dolphins with upraised heads' and the 'Very Fantastic Décor' of the Palace of the Sugar-Plum Kingdom includes 'a Pavilion of sugar-candy with transparent columns'. The 'Transformation & triumph' at the end of Act III scene 1 can be compared to the breaking of the spell at the end of Act II of *The Sleeping Beauty* or to the Nutcracker's 'transformation into a handsome Prince' (Act I, no. 27), whilst the Pas de Six and festive dances of Act III are comparable to the national and character dances of Act II of *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*.¹⁵⁹

However, Cranko's scenario is far shorter than Petipa's, containing decidedly fewer indications as to the music he envisaged beyond a small number of functional descriptions such as 'overture', 'court dance' and

¹⁵⁹This analysis compares Cranko's Rough Sketch and typewritten scenario with the two Petipa scenarios cited above.

'The Waltz of the Clouds & Stars'. Numbers are more commonly described in simple and non-musical terms such as 'very florid & cold' (Malina's Act I solo) and 'Roaring & burning' and 'Flickering & fluttering' for the Male and Female flame solos in Act II, whose coda Cranko merely described as 'Perpetuo moto'. Moreover, unlike Petipa he did not give the specific number of bars required, suggesting that this was a particular area for which Britten consulted his Tchaikovsky scores, particularly during the composition of Act II, during which he enjoyed very limited contact with the choreographer, and for the larger set-piece numbers.¹⁶⁰ Thus, although Oleg Vinogradov regards Britten as 'a first-class ballet composer' and the score as 'incredibly suitable for dance', he feels that, in contrast to the 'absolute harmony' of the Tchaikovsky-Petipa collaboration, 'the variations and corps de ballet parts are disadvantaged by not following the specific rules of choreography in terms of length, matters on which a choreographer could have advised him'.¹⁶¹ Moreover, the 'Dance of whirling Pagodas' and 'Dancing of growing & declining Pagodas' envisaged by Cranko in Act II do little to indicate the highly distinctive music Britten was to write for this section following his return from the Far East in the spring of 1956, suggesting that Britten's wider creative reference – both to Russian ballet and to Balinese music - was of

¹⁶⁰Sir John Tooley, for example, feels that Act II was composed 'in something of a vacuum'; interview with the author, 26 January 2010.

¹⁶¹Appendix XII.

particular importance in solving the not insignificant compositional problems raised by the work.¹⁶² Britten himself hinted at this aspect of his creative practice in a speech six years later: 'The whole business of giving a musical shape to one's ideas is so complicated, that when one is in difficulties the influences that can 'rescue' one...are so precious and important that they are inclined to obscure everything else'.¹⁶³ In a letter from Bali in January 1956 Pears thus noted that 'Ben is picking up some useful hints for his ballet which threatens to be entirely Balinese'.¹⁶⁴

Nevertheless, Cranko's directions seem to have influenced Britten's musical response in three specific respects. Firstly, his conception of a 'fanfare in the distance...Fanfare closer' in Act I, repeated later in the Act as 'A distant fanfare as before, but now more magical, unexpected and strange'. Cranko may have viewed this device in purely functional terms, in the manner, for example, of no. 3 of *The Sleeping Beauty*, but Britten was to extend what was already a characteristic element of his musical language as a symbolic means of dramatic punctuation throughout the score, and by Act III it is evident that the fanfare motif represents the Prince himself. Secondly, Cranko's typewritten scenario envisaged the

¹⁶²Rough Sketch, p.6.

¹⁶³Britten's speech on receiving an honorary degree at Hull University (1962), Kildea, p.214.

¹⁶⁴Letter from Pears to Peter Diamond, Bali, n.d. (stamped 24 January 1956) (Peter Diamond correspondence).

Clouds dance as a 'Waltz in sections', and Britten clearly intended to create as varied an effect as possible within the constraints of this form, along the lines of the large-scale waltzes from Act I of *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* or Act II of *The Nutcracker*. Finally, and in contrast to the Act III apotheosis of *The Sleeping Beauty*, Britten ultimately decided to retain Cranko's initial conception of a 'Tiny epilogue in which the jester clasps his hands & freezes everybody in a tableau', a ten-bar and musically understated conclusion (from R98) which Britten linked thematically with the ballet's opening scene and which he may have drawn from Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* as much as from the restrained apotheosis (K to D) of *The Nutcracker*.¹⁶⁵

Mitchell asserts that the relatively uncomplicated nature of Cranko's fairy-tale constituted for Britten a unique stimulus, 'a psychological liberation that meant that he was able to explore to its very limits, with maximum exuberance...the brilliant colours of the very large orchestra he had at his disposal'.¹⁶⁶ Although depth of characterisation is hardly a characteristic of nineteenth-century ballet, this is conspicuously the case with Cranko's scenario, and in contrast to the Tchaikovsky ballets and Prokofiev's *Cinderella*, it is difficult to suggest a plausible underlying

¹⁶⁵Britten's draft holograph, pp. 110-11, indicates that the ballet initially ended with an Apotheosis '*fff* All percussion'. Britten added the epilogue on p.112 (BPL).

¹⁶⁶D. Mitchell, 'Britten and the Ballet', in *Cradles of the New*, p.413.

'dark' or 'adult' interpretation, although Philip Brett to a degree attempted to do so.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the testimony of Beth Welford, Britten's sister, suggests that Britten was particularly attracted by the scenario's pronounced allusions to Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast, plays in which he had performed as a child.¹⁶⁸ Certainly, the music suggests that the composer accepted it entirely at face value as 'a nice story': the work's conclusion is unambiguously optimistic.¹⁶⁹ Elements of parody are also gently observed, certainly compared to Britten's 1936-40 works, and Britten consciously removed this element from the final scene: the Pas de Caractère between the Emperor and the Fool is conspicuously bland; and the Emperor's instrumentation changes to violins and flutes, signifying its emotional detachment from what has gone before: an additional parallel with the final act of *The Sleeping Beauty*.

1.11 Musical structure and treatment of ballet forms

In the original scenario Cranko added precise timings for the individual numbers, which Britten has annotated alongside most of the individual numbers of Act III in the typewritten scenario, as well as overall timings

¹⁶⁷P. Brett, *Benjamin Britten: 6: Transition and triumph, 1955-62*: '...sexuality, if suggested at all, is literally polymorphous. [The prince and the pagodas] are...surely connected through their music to a vision that is either utopian or regressive: innocence or nescience, pre-verbal, even pre-visual, depending only on touch', *Grove Music Online*, accessed 18 July 2010.

¹⁶⁸Interviewed by John Amis in *Evaluations and Comparisons*, recorded 20 November 1973 and broadcast on BBC Radio Three on 25 November 1973 (BBC Sound Archive, 35808/9).

¹⁶⁹'The Composer Speaks', Kildea, p.155.

for each act. Britten exceeded this original 'shooting script' in every act to produce 125 minutes of music, 'the biggest and longest purely orchestral score [he] was ever to write':¹⁷⁰ in Act I, 37 minutes for Cranko's 27½; in Act II scene 1, 23 minutes for 14; in Act II scene 2, 18 minutes for 14½; in Act III scene 1, 10 minutes for 8; and in Act III scene 2, 32 minutes for 25.¹⁷¹ Given Britten's considerable experience in writing documentary and film music to specific time requirements, the sections in which he has significantly exceeded Cranko's timings suggest a particular consciousness at these points of the Russian tradition within which he was composing; indeed, the choreographer observed that '...carefully as Britten had followed my script, his imagery was so strong that the entire choreography had to be revisualised':¹⁷² in Act I, the 'Entry of Suitors & 4 solos' (10 as opposed to 7 minutes) and the 'Entry & solo Gracieuse' (6 as opposed to 3 minutes); in the first scene of Act II, the divertissement music for the Sea Horses, Fish Creatures and Waves and Flames (9 as opposed to 4½ minutes); and in Act III the Pas de Six and variations (11 as opposed to 7 minutes) and the Finale (6 minutes, including the Apotheosis and Epilogue, as opposed to 3). On the other hand, although virtually identical in length to Prokofiev's *Cinderella* and approximately

¹⁷⁰ Mitchell, 'Britten and the Ballet', p.411.

¹⁷¹ Timings are taken from the first complete recording of the ballet (London Sinfonietta conducted by Oliver Knussen (Virgin Classics: VCD 7 91103-2/4; 1990).

¹⁷² 'Making a Ballet – 2', *Letters of a Life* IV, p.487.

twice the length of the two-act *The Nutcracker*, Britten's score is still significantly shorter than the three acts of *Swan Lake* (c. 150 minutes) and *The Sleeping Beauty* (c. 175 minutes). Moreover, with the exception of Act III, the score lacks the extended finales of the Prologue and Act I of the latter.

As in the case of *The Sleeping Beauty*, the Prelude introduces themes which recur later in the score: the alto saxophone and bassoon figure at A: bars 1 to 4 represents the spell which binds the Prince, and the triumphant theme of the Apotheosis is also cited in the first Act in Belle Rose's vision of the Prince at R46. Other motifs also have a recurring significance: for example, the *portamento* trombone figure employed twelve bars before R1 and at R43 represents the thwarting of the Fool's intentions by the Dwarf; and the theme representing the charm of the Kings between R50 and R51 is transformed into their rage at R64. In terms of thematic recurrence - if not thematic variation or transformation - *The Prince of the Pagodas* may therefore be compared to the recurrence of Aurora's theme or Carabosse's 'satirical, diabolical music' in *The Sleeping Beauty*.¹⁷³ On the other hand, compared to the Tchaikovsky ballets, more significant sections of Britten's score are 'knit together by recurrences, variations and developments of a restricted body of thematic material', a

¹⁷³Petipa's scenario, p.4 (BPL).

factor which, in contrast to the former, militated against the construction of a concert suite fully representative of the work during Britten's lifetime.¹⁷⁴ Donald Mitchell has also emphasised how effectively Britten managed transition in the score, an additional aspect of the score's seamlessness, particularly citing that between the first and second scenes of Act III.¹⁷⁵ However, although in this regard a comparison with Tchaikovsky is more evident, not least with the 'Panorama' (no. 17) and 'Entr'acte symphonique' (no. 19) of *The Sleeping Beauty*, in this context Britten may equally have drawn upon his considerable experience as a theatre and film composer.

Whereas both *The Sleeping Beauty* and *The Nutcracker* include a variety of set-piece waltz numbers with a *cantabile* melodic line, and Britten was certainly capable of employing a waltz in this way, as in the quick waltz he gave to the boy's variation in Act III, his use of waltz rhythms is a less marked feature of the score and is generally more unconventional: in this respect, there is a parallel with Prokofiev's use of waltz forms in *Cinderella*. Thus, whereas Belle Epine dances in 3/4 time with each of the Kings between R55 and R64, this is in the context of rejection rather than

¹⁷⁴Evans, p.224. Cf. Britten's letter to Paul Sacher, 11 March 1957 in which he refers to the difficulty of 'extract[ing] twenty minutes out of a work lasting nearly two hours!' (PS: Britten-Paul Sacher correspondence, 156.1-0183).

¹⁷⁵Mitchell, 'Britten and the Ballet,' p.416.

romantic union, and Britten added to the unusual effect by employing col legno or strings hit with the hair of the bow. Moreover, by forcing the earlier thematic material from the Kings' variations – all of which are in 2/4 or 4/4 – into 3/4 time, Britten made a significant dramatic point in highlighting the insincerity both of Belle Epine - unlike Aurora, not the heroine of the ballet – and her royal suitors. The 'Waltz of the Clouds' from R6 in Act II is a slow waltz – too slow for the ballroom (cf. 'The Great Waltz' in Act II of *Cinderella*) - whose melody, largely *ppp*, is carried on horns and trombones. Indeed, in a work which is conspicuous for its melodic invention, it is striking that the Britten seldom gave his melodic lines to upper strings and instead employed a wider and more unconventional range of sonorities. The most obvious reference to Tchaikovsky in respect to waltz form is in the Act III Finale, whose horn melody, harp arpeggios and overall structure recall the 'Valse des Fleurs'. However, this is not mere imitation as Britten ensured that the melodic line also draws upon the fanfares which are a consistent feature of the score as well as thematic material associated with the key protagonists.

The ballet includes five Pas de Deux, and with the exception of the First Variation of the Pas de Six in Act III, each similarly contains an unconventional element. In Act I Britten has incorporated into Belle

Rose's variation a cinematic vision of the Prince not envisaged in Cranko's original scenario; the Act II scene 1 Pas de Deux creates a sonority of fire, particularly by means of *sforzando*; and the Pas de Deux in scene 2 is highly understated, scored for solo cor anglais, *p(p)* until R83, with no brass until R84: bar 4 and finally disrupted at R85: bar 5 when Belle Rose tears off her bandage and the Prince flees from her.

Britten was surely aware that the Act III Pas de Deux posed a particular compositional challenge in creating 'majestic' music which was not derivative, not least given his admiration for the Act II Pas de Deux of *The Nutcracker* on the grounds of Tchaikovsky's ability to base the entire number - envisaged by Petipa as 'An Adagio with colossal effect' - on a relatively simple descending scale:¹⁷⁶ which perhaps explains Britten's substantial crossings out in the holograph score. Britten's solution was highly inventive if melodically less memorable: to introduce the number with three solemn *sforzando* chords and to base it on a relatively simple theme for unison strings which is repeated with increasing intensity three times over 192 bars punctuated by two contrasting 'energetic' sections of 23 bars. Dynamics, rhythm and percussion - gong, side drum and xylophone - create an effect entirely distinctive from its counterpart, but the impact is similarly majestic and *incalzando* and the interest also lies

¹⁷⁶Mitchell, 'Catching on to the Technique in Pagoda-Land', p.19.

primarily in the accompaniment rather than the melodic line. Moreover, although this number is significantly longer than the 48 bars demanded by Petipa, the subsequent two variations for its dancers are virtually identical in length: Britten's variation for the Prince is 49 bars long (for Petipa's 48 and Tchaikovsky's 51 bars) and Belle Rose's 26 bars (for Petipa's 32), suggesting that he specifically consulted the typewritten scenario cited above for the length and structure of these numbers. It is also significant that one of the very few alterations for the 1973 Kirov production which Britten was reluctant to accept was that the 'rather trivial' Coda (no.48) be inserted between the Pas-de-deux and the Prince's variation for the practical reason of giving the Prince a rest.¹⁷⁷

The structure of the final scene of the ballet seems to be particularly drawn from the Tchaikovsky scores, in particular the inclusion of a series of dances following the breaking of the spell, which recalls the final act of *The Sleeping Beauty*. Thus, the Pas de Six consists of six brief character dances comparable to the Pas de Quatre (no. 23) in Act III, and the short Pas de Caractère between the Emperor and the Fool can be compared to numbers 24 and 26, although, as Britten himself acknowledged, it is less

¹⁷⁷Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Dzhemal Dalgat, 18 August 1972 (BPL: DD)

memorable.¹⁷⁸ On the other hand, although Britten's exploration of sonority in these numbers is less distinctive than Tchaikovsky's, one should add that unlike Tchaikovsky – who tends to reserve thematic development to the finales of his ballets – Britten did employ a degree of thematic transformation in the Divertissement.

The resemblance of the structure of the Finale of that of *The Nutcracker* is striking. Petipa required 'A Grand General Coda for everyone on the stage, including those who have already appeared in their dances. 128 bars 3/4, very brilliant and ardent', followed by an Apotheosis and 'Grandioso Andante from 16 to 24 bars'.¹⁷⁹ The waltz-rondo of Britten's finale is similar in conception, and an annotation on the rear page of the composition score suggests that the composer was particularly conscious of the lengths of the component parts constituting this movement.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, although Britten considerably exceeded Petipa's suggested overall length, the duration of the waltz passage from R84 to R95: bar 21 closely corresponds to Tchaikovsky's score (230 as opposed to 239 bars).

¹⁷⁸'The little dance for the Emperor and the Fool is, to my mind, much too light and insignificant [to come after the Act III Pas-de-deux]. It is not one of my favourite dances anyhow!' letter from Britten to Dzhemal Dalgat, 7 January 1972 (BPL: DD).

¹⁷⁹Scenario, p.9 (BPL).

¹⁸⁰Holograph score: on the verso of the final page, Britten has added 31, 28, 17, 27, 24, 16, 19 (BPL).

1.12 Musical language and place in Britten's output

Several observations can be made with regard to the ballet's musical language and the place of the work in Britten's overall output. Although Donald Mitchell has described the score as 'rich in sonorous Tchaikovskian detail', in contrast to *Le Baiser de la fée*, there are in fact relatively few explicit allusions to Tchaikovsky's (as opposed to Prokofiev's) musical language and Britten seems to have avoided near-quotation.¹⁸¹ Britten's creative re-interpretation of Tchaikovsky's music should therefore be viewed as constituting assimilated musical influence as well as allusion, reflecting the composer's desire to avoid pastiche – in the manner, for example of Eric Coates's *The Jester at the Wedding* (1932) or Brian Easdale's score for *The Red Shoes* (1948) – and producing a distinctive work in its own right.¹⁸² This was an additionally important consideration if, as was originally envisaged, the ballet was to be

¹⁸¹Mitchell, 'Catching on to the Technique in Pagoda-Land', p. 18. Cf. C. Mason, 'Britten Can Make It', in 'The Prince of the Pagodas – Two Views', *The Spectator*, 11 January 1957, p.51: 'The results of [Britten's] studies [of Tchaikovsky] show most plainly in the orchestral writing, especially for the wind instruments, of which Britten uses an enormous number and keeps them all very busy with scales, trills and other rapid figurations...that unmistakably owe something to Tchaikovsky. He does not capture, and probably has not attempted, the fluttering, feathery quality, the speed, nor the effortless, smooth euphony of Tchaikovsky's woodwind writing. He adapts Tchaikovsky's methods, and secures with them different but no less ravishing sounds, of a deeper, richer and utterly personal sonority'.

¹⁸²Cf. D. Hunt, 'The Prince of the Pagodas': 'Music', p.10: '...the music is much more than the sum of its influences, which have been completely absorbed by Britten and then used as catalysts to spark off his creative imagination'.. On the other hand, as late as 1972, Alan Kendall concluded in his semi-official biography of the composer that the score 'came near to pastiche – but for a very special reason [its fairy-tale scenario]', *Benjamin Britten* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p.82.

performed in the Soviet Union alongside other works in the repertory of the Sadler's Wells Ballet, such as *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*.¹⁸³ It also does something to explain Britten's compositional difficulties in completing Act II prior to his visit to Bali in the spring of 1956, and his criticism of 'some moments of...not altogether absorbed classical idioms' in Cranko's choreography.¹⁸⁴

Oleg Vinogradov therefore feels that 'What Britten had in common with Tchaikovsky in the ballet was his rich melodic foundation [and that his] pioneering rhythmic elements and experimental colours did not obstruct the choreography, but, as with Tchaikovsky, assisted and greatly contributed to it'.¹⁸⁵ Moreover, whereas Lord Harewood believed that Britten 'was disconcerted by the need for a full or fullish orchestra so much of the time, unlike in opera',¹⁸⁶ he did not highlight a second assimilated feature the work shares with the Tchaikovsky ballets: its

¹⁸³The full text of Cranko, 'Making a Ballet – 2' refers to the ballet's scenery being in Moscow when the proposed Russian season was cancelled. See also *Royal Opera House Covent Garden Ballet Season 1957*, programme for the second night on 2 January 1957, for the five ballets in the company's repertory (ROHC).

¹⁸⁴Letter from Britten to Basil Coleman, 31 January 1957, reproduced as no. 1886 in *Letters from a Life V*, p.507.

¹⁸⁵Appendix XII. Cf. D. Hunt, 'The Prince of the Pagodas': 'Music', p.10: 'There is an overflowing abundance of *real* tunes – not the *ersatz*, fabricated variety that we have become conditioned to accept as melody'. See also C. Mason, 'Britten Can Make It', p.51, who highlighted 'something in the region of sixty different tunes [in the score], of which, after the third hearing, there are barely a dozen that do not come instantly to mind in an imagined run through the sequence of scenes', as well as 'the extreme richness of the rhythm, which is inexhaustible in variety and resource'.

¹⁸⁶Harewood, p.140.

highly selective use of tutti, used only at dramatically pivotal moments: for example, in Act II at R15: bar 3 for the appearance of the moon and staccato and *fff* between R65 and R66 with an almost immediate diminuendo to *ppp*, and at R18 in Act III when the Salamander sheds his skin and the spell is broken.

Britten's response to the revised scenario drawn up by Oleg Vinogradov in conjunction with Dzhemal Dalgat for the production of the ballet at the Kirov Theatre in Leningrad in 1973 also suggests that his creative reference to Tchaikovsky was not entirely conscious. Vinogradov explicitly highlighted parallels with the Russian Classical ballet tradition: Belle Rose's journey to Pagoda-Land was shortened and given a 'dynamic and dramatic aspect' and thus acquired a similar function to Clara's journey in *The Nutcracker*; the Act III finale was staged as a 'festive wedding procession preceded by a joyous waltz in which everyone takes part and which signifies the complete victory of Good over evil'; and Belle Rose's character was presented as a metamorphosis from a Cinderella-like figure to the majestic heroine of a Tchaikovsky ballet: it is her noble behaviour which ultimately has the magical effect which breaks the spell 'just as Prince Desire's kiss awakens La Belle Au Bois Dormant and the heroic struggle of Little Mary with the King of Mice returns his

beautiful outward appearance to the Nutcracker'. Britten expressed his 'entire agreement' to this revised scenario, and alongside the elaborated scenario for the Act II pas de deux between Belle Rose and the Prince wrote in pencil '? Tchaikovsky', which he amplified in a subsequent letter to its conductor: 'I see that the parallels between this moment and the great moments in Tchaikovsky's classics are very convincing'.¹⁸⁷ This is revealing given that Britten appears to have made no explicit reference elsewhere to the work's antecedents.

In his response to the creative challenge of avoiding pastiche, Britten's exploration of sonority and rhythm should primarily be seen as a significant development of his existing musical language. One contemporary reviewer thus highlighted that:

the most striking characteristic [of the score's sonority] seems to be [Britten's] doublings of instruments to give a rich and curiously deceptive blend of sound in which several constituent instrumental parts can be heard and yet often cannot be identified with certainty. This device has always been prominent in Britten's use of wind instruments, and here

¹⁸⁷Photocopy of letter from Dalgat to Britten, 15 December 1971, which outlines the revised scenario, p.9, and photocopy of letter from Britten to Dalgat, 7 January 1972 (BPL: DD).

it is carried further than ever before, to colour the whole score.¹⁸⁸

In so far as the work alludes to Russian ballet this should therefore be regarded as a reflection of a creative sensibility which had largely been formed twenty years earlier, hence the importance of his diaries and miniature scores as a source of evidence. It is clear from his *Matinées musicales* that Britten was already aware of the expressive potential of percussion in the context of a ballet, and even *Plymouth Town* makes effective use of suspended cymbal and timpani. Britten's use of percussion and rhythm are, of course, particularly striking in the gamelan-inspired music of Acts II and III – and Britten may in part have regarded this as equivalent to the national and character dances in *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty* – but they develop techniques which he had first employed in the mid-1930s. Britten's earlier works are in fact recalled throughout the score: in Act I the rocking harp and string crotchets between R34 and R35 recall the 'Requiem aeternam' of *Sinfonia da Requiem* (1940); and for Act II scene 1 Britten was able to draw upon his existing experience of depicting the elements in the *liquidamente* 'Water Theme' of the incidental music for *The Sword in The Stone* (1939). Similarly, the writing for brass and percussion between R1: bar 11 and

¹⁸⁸C. Mason, 'Britten Can Make It', p.51.

R3, and for flute, piccolo and clarinet at R18, recalls the 'sea' sonority of *Peter Grimes*.

It is therefore largely in the sense of sonority and rhythm, as opposed to the use of parody or subversion, that the work's references to Tchaikovsky and the Russian ballet tradition are transformed. In the second variation of Act I, for example, Britten's 'Eastern' sonority – created by means of solos for muted horn and oboe accompanied by *pp tremolando* strings and suspended cymbal – is distinctive from its equivalent in the Divertimento of *The Nutcracker* but equally effective. These aspects of the score seem particularly drawn from works written during Britten's sojourn in the United States (1939-42), when his interest in ballet had hitherto found its fullest expression in his orchestration of an unidentified Tchaikovsky arrangement probably for a ballet in 1940 and the staging of *Soirées musicales* and *Matinées musicales* a year later. This again suggests a longer-term genesis of the ballet, not least because this was also the period during which Britten had first been stimulated by Balinese music in the person of Colin McPhee.¹⁸⁹ Britten's vivid, even cinematic, depiction of the moon turning blue in the Prologue of *Paul Bunyan* (1941; R11 to R12), using a variety of woodwind and percussion effects but, strikingly, no strings, can be viewed as a precursor of the

¹⁸⁹See *Letters from a Life II*, letter 255 and pp. 646, 802.

appearance of the moon between R11 and R13 in Act II using woodwind, string harmonics, harp and percussion; and his use of trombones and tuba in the Act II Waltz of the Clouds (R7 to R8) recalls the same combination in *An American Overture* (1941: bars 76 to 81). Even within the one of the most 'Tchaikovskian' passages in the score, the Act I Variation of Belle Rose and subsequent Pas de Deux, Britten employed a series of *saltanto* rhythms for strings (R48: bars 1 to 15) which reflect the earlier influence of Copland's *An Outdoor Overture* and *Billy the Kid* (1938) on works such as *Canadian Carnival* (1939). Other aspects of Britten's musical language in the score – most obviously, the use of Balinese heterophony, but also, for example, the cello harmonics and pizzicato in Act II – can be viewed as transitional, to be developed by Britten in subsequent works such as the Cello Symphony, rather than in any way a response to Russian music.

Finally, Britten's score is eclectic in a far wider sense than drawing upon Russian music and Balinese material, although commentators have not fully assessed this aspect of the score. For example, in one of Britten's very few comments on the music, he revealed that on Belle Rose's arrival in Pagoda-land 'there is an important reference to the Frogs in the music between 67 and 68 – in the bassoons', suggesting a parallel with Janáček's

instrumental stylisation of animal and insect noises in *Přihody Lišky Bystroušky* [*The Cunning Little Vixen*], a work which, significantly, contains a prominent balletic element, though it is unclear whether Britten was acquainted with the score at a time the opera was relatively unfamiliar in the United Kingdom.¹⁹⁰ In Act I, on the other hand, the bright woodwind sonority between R6 and R7 and the refined flute and string writing which accompanies the Entry of the Pages and the Entry of the Four Kings (R15 to R17) recall *Ma Mère l'Oye*, whose exoticism and use of pentatonic scales may have stimulated Britten prior to his first-hand exposure to Balinese music in the spring of 1956. In contrast, the sonority of the ballet's apotheosis, with its *ff* sustained strings in their upper register, seems drawn from Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé*, and the use of castanets in Act III between R89 and R90 may have been stimulated by Falla's *El amor brujo*: Britten had greatly admired both works since the early 1930s.¹⁹¹ Finally, the depiction of the elements in the first scene of Act II may be a reverential allusion to the 'Dances of Spirits of Earth, Water and Fire', the ballet music from *The Perfect Fool* (1918) by Gustav Holst, whose daughter Imogen assisted Britten in preparing the full score of the ballet and to whom the work is co-dedicated.

¹⁹⁰Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Dalgat, 7 January 1972 (BPL: DD). See AFMA 1954 pp. 36-7 for the Janaček Centenary Concert during the 1952 Aldeburgh Festival, in which Britten played the piano.

¹⁹¹Britten's diary entries for 1 August 1934 and 22 February 1933 (BPL).

The ballet's composition and reception have generally been viewed as unsatisfactory experiences for Britten, prejudicing him against the work and the genre more widely.¹⁹² However, the evidence suggests that this was not entirely the case. In 1971 and 1972 the composer showed considerable interest in the production of the work by the Kirov Ballet, in spite of his preoccupation with *Death in Venice*, and was 'very eager indeed' to see it in person.¹⁹³ He also attended at least four ballet performances between 1971 and 1972, including *Swan Lake* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, and seems to have envisaged conducting a recording of Tchaikovsky ballet music in November 1972.¹⁹⁴ Indeed, given the pronounced balletic element in *Death in Venice*, and the fact that Britten's casting of Dianne Bergsma as the Polish Mother was partly inspired by admiration for her performances in *Swan Lake*, it is plausible that Britten would have continued to explore the possibilities of the genre, with Tchaikovsky as a continued reference point, had not permanent ill health intervened in mid-1973.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹²Letter from Colin Matthews, 29 October 2010: 'It was a work he didn't like talking about, and he never got round to approving a published score while he was alive'. Tooley also recalls a 'quite catastrophic' meeting with Britten and Kenneth Macmillan in July 1972 which failed to resolve the issue of the cuts necessary for greater theatrical effectiveness; interview with the author, 26 January 2010.

¹⁹³Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Dalgat, 18 August 1972 (BPL: DD).

¹⁹⁴Appointment diary entries for 9, 11, 17 February 1971 and 29 July 1972. At the rear of the 1971 diary, Britten has written: 'Recordings Nov. 1972. BB. F. Bridge. Tschaikovsky Ballets. F da R' (BPL)

¹⁹⁵Appendix IV, and letter from Dianne Bergsma to the author, 26 January 2011.

1.13 Third Suite for Cello (1971)

Britten's thematic use of three Tchaikovsky folk song arrangements as the basis of the Third Suite for Cello is exceptionally revealing. Firstly, the allusion to Tchaikovsky in this work was entirely conscious, representing quotation coupled with transformation by means of variation form. Britten's copy of the arrangements indicates that he initially considered at least twenty tunes drawn across Tchaikovsky's four collections, and primarily on the basis of rhythmic fertility, before making a final choice drawn from the least elaborate arrangements for voice and single piano, which Britten may have felt most successfully preserved the character of the original songs and possessed a protoshape susceptible to variation form. He thus discounted the piano accompaniment, and wrote the three tunes in their simplest form at the rear of the composition sketch in February 1971.¹⁹⁶ Indeed, all three songs possess similar intervallic contours – 'Under the Apple Tree' and 'The Grey Eagle' particularly so – and are written in closely related keys, which suggests that Britten was primarily interested in their more general intonations and rhythmic characteristics.

¹⁹⁶BPL: Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 61 (1949): Britten has inserted paper markers on which he has written 'Rhythm(ic)' alongside nos. 10-11, 28-9 (1868-9); 11 ('a'), 31 ('c'), 46-7, 61-2 (1872-3); 4a ('b'), and 14-15 (1872). In addition, nos. 9, 17, 34, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44, 47, 48, 49 (1868-9) are marked ('x') in pencil; and paper markers are inserted alongside 12-13, 20-1, 22-3, 28-9, 42-3, 51-2, and 61-2 (1872-3); and 9 (1878). Britten has written the three tunes and the Kontakion on page 12a of the composition sketch (BPL: microfilm, 209). See Brown vol. IV pp. 423 for a discussion of Russian folksong as 'a series of reflections upon a protoshape'.

To an extent, therefore, Britten's selection should be placed in the context of his broader interest in folksong settings over the previous thirty years. Four years earlier Britten had praised the 'originality, simplicity [and] yet richness' of the folk song arrangements of Kodály and Bartók for children's voices, and two years later - the point at which he first informed Rostropovich that he was 'beginning to think of Suite no. 3' - he had also been stimulated by the 'exciting and revealing experience' of producing a record of Percy Grainger's arrangements, which he had admired since the early 1930s.¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the inflections of two of the Tchaikovsky arrangements Britten employed in the Suite bear a resemblance to those of Grainger's two-piano arrangement of 'Let's Dance Gay in Green Meadow,' which Britten performed on this recording:

¹⁹⁷Autograph draft of radio script of Britten's tribute to Zoltán Kodály, broadcast 7 March 1967, reproduced in Kildea, p.302; prefatory note by Britten and Pears to John Bird, *Percy Grainger* (Elek Books, 1976), in Kildea, p.350; *Salute to Percy Grainger* (Decca SXL 6410, recorded December 1968 and issued in 1969); and handwritten draft of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 1 January 1969 (BPL: MR).

Example 16: Percy Grainger: 'Let's Dance Gay in Green Meadow' [right-side pianist], bars 15-44

Example 17: Tchaikovsky: *Protiazhnaia*: no. 11 in Tchaikovsky PSS vol. 61

Allegro ma non troppo

Example 18: Tchaikovsky: *Ulichnaia* (*ibid.*, no. 31)

Allegro

Poco più mosso

Moreover, Britten's final use of folksong in a non-vocal context, the *Suite on English Folk Tunes 'A Time there was...'* (1974) was 'lovingly and reverently' dedicated to the memory of Grainger and concludes with a

quotation of his complete arrangement of 'Lord Melbourne' set to a melancholy cor anglais solo. In the case of Tchaikovsky and Grainger, and in the context of the last five years of Britten's life, the quotation of folksong arrangements therefore represented an expression of affection for a cherished composer and a particularly personal gesture. Indeed, Mitchell views Britten's enthusiasm for Tchaikovsky as 'a passion that lived with him till his dying days'.¹⁹⁸

Britten's choice of Tchaikovsky folksong arrangements was in fact a personal gesture on several levels, not least as a symbolic means of representing his friendships with Rostropovich and Shostakovich at a time when the cultural détente which had made these relationships possible had begun to break down and Rostropovich's position had significantly deteriorated as a result of his defence of Solzhenitsyn and open letter to *Pravda* in October 1970, developments of which Britten was acutely aware through his friendship with Sir Duncan Wilson, Ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1968 to 1971.¹⁹⁹ Thus, following his return from the Soviet Union in April 1971, Britten wrote to Paul Sacher that 'I was able to take with me a little consolation present for

¹⁹⁸AFMA 1974, p.26, and appendix I.

¹⁹⁹For Britten's awareness of the 'new, uncomfortable conditions' inside Russia following the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, see his letter to Sir Duncan Wilson on 13 August 1970 (BPL: DW). The Red House visitors' book indicates that Wilson stayed with Britten from 10-11 January 1971, during the gestation of the Third Cello Suite (BPL).

[Rostropovich] – a new Cello Suite built on Russian themes. I played this through to him and Shostakovich and I think the point was made'.²⁰⁰ Indeed, Britten's programme note for the cancelled Aldeburgh Festival première in 1972 described Rostropovich as 'a great Russian musician and patriot', a turn of phrase which pointedly reflects a profound admiration for Rostropovich's musicianship and for the Russian cultural tradition Britten viewed him as representing. The choice of Tchaikovsky was also apposite given that, as has been observed, Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya had enhanced Britten's appreciation of the composer's vocal and cello music: indeed, their first recital at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1961 had opened with three Tchaikovsky songs.²⁰¹ It may therefore constitute a nostalgic reference to the music making of the previous decade, as well as for the exceptionally happy private visits Britten had made to the Soviet Union between 1965 and 1967 in their company: as late as May 1972 Rostropovich would poignantly express the hope to Britten that they would return together.²⁰² Thus, even in what can be viewed as Britten's most explicit allusion to Tchaikovsky's music, a

²⁰⁰Letter from Britten to Paul Sacher, 27 April 1971 (PS: Britten-Sacher correspondence, microfilm 156.1-0363).

²⁰¹AFMA 1972, p.54; and 6 July 1961. The latter programme, which is not outlined in AFMA 1961, included Tchaikovsky's op. 47 no. 7; op. 16 no. 1, and op. 6, no 5 (BPL: PG/AF/1961/10).

²⁰²Letter from Rostropovich to Britten, 22 May 1972 (BPL: MR).

variety of musical and extra-musical preoccupations also seem to have operated.

1.14 Conclusion

Several concluding observations can be made about Britten's creative relationship with Tchaikovsky. Firstly, the evidence, albeit incomplete, suggests that the impact of Tchaikovsky's music should be viewed as a significant aspect of a musical sensibility formed over the decade prior to Britten's political engagement with the Soviet Union in 1935. It was also symptomatic of a selective, romanticised and non-political interest in the wider Russian cultural tradition, hence the references to Stravinsky and Prokofiev as well as Tchaikovsky in *The Prince of the Pagodas*. On the other hand, the explicit influence of Tchaikovsky's music seems to have operated in a relatively limited range of contexts and more commonly by means of allusion and assimilation rather than near-quotation.

Secondly, whilst Britten's admiration can be viewed as a relatively uncomplicated and continuous aspect of his creative outlook, this aspect of his creative personality was further stimulated in the 1960s as a result of his creative relationship with Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya and,

arguably, as a result of an increasing degree of self-identification with Tchaikovsky's personal and creative outlook.

Finally, Britten's reference to Tchaikovsky in the form of a private musical tribute to Rostropovich and Shostakovich in the Third Cello Suite suggests that by the end of his creative life, in contrast to the mid-1930s and in the light of his own failing health and increasingly pessimistic outlook, Britten's admiration for both Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich and the cultural tradition he viewed them as representing should be regarded as complementary. In October 1970, for example, Britten suggested to Mark Lubotsky that he play Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir d'un Lieu Cher* alongside the Shostakovich Violin Sonata; and at the final Aldeburgh Festival concert Britten attended in 1976 Rostropovich conducted the Serenade for Strings alongside Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony.²⁰³ In this sense by the end of Britten's creative life, his pre-1935 interest in Tchaikovsky and Russia had come full circle.

²⁰³Letter from Britten to Mark Lubotsky, 30 October 1970 (Mark Lubotsky's private archive); AFMA 1976, pp.53-4; and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten and Pears to Irina Shostakovich inviting her as honoured guest to the 1976 Aldeburgh Festival (BPL: DDS). Following this performance on 20 June, Britten inscribed Rostropovich's copy of the Shostakovich score: '...by your wonderful performance...you have made "our" (Dmitry's & mine!) "yours"!' (Rostropovich Archive, St. Petersburg, visited by the author 16 February 2009).

Chapter 2: Britten and Shostakovich, 1934 to 1976

2.1 Introduction

Although Britten did not mention Shostakovich as a favourite composer when interviewed by Murray Schafer in 1961, it was not uncommon for both composers to be linked during their lifetimes, even prior to their first meeting in September 1960. In 1946, for example, the Press Attaché of the British Embassy in Moscow reported that Grigory Shneerson, the Head of VOKS Music Section from 1942 to 1948, said that 'he had studied the piano score of *Peter Grimes* and was impressed: he thought that Britten had something in common with Shostakovich, especially in his writing for the piano'.²⁰⁴ Elsewhere Virgil Thomson highlighted that both composers were 'Very similar in their approach and the nature of their success', going so far as to describe Britten as 'a local Shostakovich', though this was not intended as a compliment.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴Extract from Notes of a meeting of Mr. Dumbar, the Press Attaché, and Mr. White, with Mr. Karaganov, acting head of VOKS, and Mr. Shneerson, head of VOKS Music Section, at VOKS, on January 16th 1946' (NA: BW 64/13).

²⁰⁵Dickinson, p.114, and V. Thomson, *A Virgil Thomson Reader* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), p.33. Cf. Virgil Thomson's *New York Herald Tribune* review of *Paul Bunyan* on 5 May 1941, highlighting the music's 'particular blend of melodic "appeal" with irresistible counterpoint and semi-acidulous instrumentation...Its real model is, I think, the music of Shostakovich, also eclectic, but higher in physical energy content than Mr. Britten', quoted in D. Mitchell, 'The Origins, Evolution and Metamorphoses of *Paul Bunyan*, Auden's and Britten's "American" opera', in W.H. Auden, *Paul Bunyan: The libretto of the operetta by Benjamin Britten* (London, Faber and Faber, 1988), p.134. For a contrasting view that Britten represented 'le Chostakovich anglais, l'échantillon d'exportation internationale', see A. Honegger, 'Musiques nouvelles', *XXème Siècle*, 13

However, the first symposium on Britten's music in 1952 did not make any reference to Shostakovich as an influence on the composer, and it was not until after Britten's death that aspects of the creative relationship were highlighted in the reassessments of Mitchell (1984), Roseberry (1995) and Kovnatskaia (2000), made in the light of the publication of a variety of Britten's pre-1942 scores and, in 1991, of the first two volumes of Britten's selected diaries and correspondence up to 1945, as well as the knowledge of the two composers' association as it developed from 1960 onwards.²⁰⁶ All three writers, whilst considering somewhat different aspects of creative affinity, fundamentally agreed on the following areas of interpretation: that Shostakovich's appeal to Britten in the 1930s was significant, and both musical and extra-musical, encompassing a political attraction to the Soviet Union as well as a pronounced admiration for Shostakovich's musical idiom; that aspects of Shostakovich's aesthetic as a composer – his social engagement and involvement in film and theatre – were admired by Britten; that both composers shared a similar creative ancestry; and that Shostakovich's musical influence on Britten in the 1930s continued after 1960, when, to a degree, Britten may also have influenced Shostakovich, particularly in stimulating the latter's return to

December 1945, in H. Calmel, comp. and annotated, *Arthur Honegger, Ecrits* (Paris: Libraire Honoré Champion, 1992), p.191.

²⁰⁶DMHK; D. Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?'; E. Roseberry, 'A debt repaid?', and L. Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels'.

vocal composition. The relationship is thus considered from the perspective of the 1930s in the first instance, and is regarded as a continuous aspect of Britten's creative life in which the pre-war period is directly linked with the last fifteen years of the composer's life. However, the subject awaits a full-length study in depth and is scarcely considered by Evans (1979) and Rupprecht (2001), and Brett similarly did not discuss the relationship in biographical or musical terms.²⁰⁷

A variety of evidence will be employed to consider the Britten-Shostakovich relationship in this chapter: the full text of Britten's diaries between 1928 and 1938; the Britten-Shostakovich correspondence from 1960 to 1975; each composer's collection of the other's scores; a representative range of articles published about Britten in the Soviet Union the 1960s and 1970s; and a series of interviews. In particular, the assumption that the creative relationship in the 1960s should be seen as a direct continuation of Britten's admiration for Shostakovich in the 1930s will be scrutinised; and it will also be assessed in the light of Britten and Shostakovich's use of percussion and celesta, and the political and cultural contexts of the 1930s and 1960s.

²⁰⁷P. Brett, 'Benjamin Britten', *Grove Music Online*.

2.2 Britten's political attitude towards Soviet Russia

Liudmila Kovnatskaia emphasises that 'from the very beginning Shostakovich's name...resonated beyond the bounds of the world of music, and was...above all, the name of a Soviet composer...[Britten] was intensely interested in politics and was alarmed by what he saw'.²⁰⁸ The relatively few diary entries regarding Shostakovich between 1934 and 1938 support this interpretation that from 1935 onwards he embodied an extra-musical appeal in that Britten saw him as the most gifted composer of the Communist régime. On the other hand, the diaries also indicate that Britten's conception of Russia only became a political one in the context of the disintegration of international peace from 1935-6 and what he viewed as the political and moral decadence of Europe. Indeed, Britten first referred to a Shostakovich work, and in less than positive musical terms, on 26 January 1934.²⁰⁹ Moreover, prior to 1935, Britten's diary entries strongly suggest that his notion of Russia was non-political and focused on Tchaikovsky and Stravinsky rather than Shostakovich; and even thereafter Britten's diaries and correspondence indicate a political

²⁰⁸Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p.184.

²⁰⁹'Listen to a bit of a Contemporary concert from the B.B.C. Suite 'The Nose' by Shostakovich [sic]. Very amusing & exhilarating [sic] – but I shouldn't be surprised if it were found to be uneventful & even conventional with all the glitter taken off – this, especially the Entre Acts' (BPL).

perspective which remained decidedly less doctrinaire - and less intellectually sophisticated – than that of Alan Bush.²¹⁰

Indeed, viewed from the perspective of Britten's entire creative life, the composer's political attitude towards Soviet Russia seems less straightforward. Harewood feels that 'Ben's feeling over Russia in the mid-1930s was instinctive, because he was instinctively a rebel, and we were not on good terms with Russia'.²¹¹ This is supported by Britten's autograph draft of his 1966 sixtieth-birthday tribute to Shostakovich. In a passage Pears was to excise, perhaps as a reflection of the relationship Britten had come to enjoy with the establishment by the 1960s as Britain's most celebrated composer and the recipient of the Order of Merit a year earlier, he originally wrote: 'Also of course there was the political disapproval – this music was as ~~revolutionary~~ disturbing as the ~~dangerous~~ new Regime now firmly in control at the Kremlin'.²¹² Britten's initial choice of language implies that by the 1960s and the time of his creative relationship with Shostakovich he had retained, as Graham Johnson suggests, a residual sympathy common in the artistic circles of

²¹⁰Compare, for example, Britten's letter to Alan Bush, Quarryfield, Crantock, on 2 August 1936 with Bush's 'socio-political' aesthetic in his response of 11 August (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence).

²¹¹Appendix V.

²¹²Britten's autograph first draft of sixtieth-birthday birthday tribute to Shostakovich, n.d., but published in the Soviet Union in 1967 (BPL: 1-9501439, in DDS); the second draft is reproduced in Kildea, pp. 300-1.

his generation with the ideals and aspirations of the Russian Revolution; and Donald Mitchell similarly feels that in the 1960s Britten remained conscious of a common political outlook between himself and Shostakovich. However, although Johnson feels that Britten's visits to the Soviet Union between 1963 and 1971 and his creative contacts with Russian musicians in a sense rejuvenated the composer by reconnecting him to the left-wing artistic tradition he had inhabited between 1935 and 1939, the evidence strongly suggests that at this stage he was primarily inspired by the opportunity to associate with musicians of exceptional calibre, and to visit a country whose culture had interested him in a non-political way for over thirty years.²¹³ Thus, by 1970 Edward Heath viewed Britten's interest in Russia as 'primarily – I would think purely – musical: as a function of his friendships with Rostropovich and his wife, with Richter, and with Shostakovich [and] of Britten's intense pleasure in making music with them'.²¹⁴ Victor Hochhauser also feels that by the 1960s Britten's response was entirely determined by musical and human considerations.²¹⁵ Further, in spite of being contacted by the Russian Embassy in London with regard to the possibility of a visit to the Soviet Union as early as 1959, certainly after 1963 Britten was wary about being

²¹³Interview with Graham Johnson, 20 May 2010; appendix I; and cf. Britten in Schafer, p.117: '...when one travels to Iron Curtain countries as I have had occasion to do, one is simply conscious of human beings'.

²¹⁴Appendix I.

²¹⁵Appendix VII.

misrepresented in the Soviet Press and always chose not to attend official Soviet Embassy functions in London.²¹⁶ By the 1960s it was more characteristic for him to express admiration in general cultural terms which reflected the language of implicit admiration for the artistic achievements of the Soviet Union he had used in his diaries between 1935 and 1937 but eschewed political engagement.²¹⁷

The evidence also suggests that Britten's understanding of Shostakovich's relationship with the Soviet regime in the 1930s and thirty years later was not identical. His initial appreciation of the realities of creative life under the Soviet system as it developed in the 1930s was naïve and idealistic. In 1936 Britten described Shostakovich as 'a member of the Soviet regime, living and apparently revelling in the present conditions', just as the programme note for a performance of the Seventh Symphony Britten attended in 1943 stated that in 1936 Shostakovich 'was asked to cultivate

²¹⁶Letter from G. Ioanisyanyan [sic] to Britten, Soviet Embassy, London, 4 August 1959 (BPL: USSR Moscow); and letter from Sir Humphrey Trevelyan to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 18 April 1963: 'I certainly should not worry about the Pravda interview. Even if it did distort what you said, I thought it fairly mild. In order to show you what can happen, I enclose a copy of an article allegedly describing an interview given by Igor Markevich here' (BPL: British Embassy Moscow). The latter file also contains several invitations from the Russian Embassy in London between 1969 and 1970 which Britten has declined. For a discussion of the *Pravda* episode, see *Letters from a Life V*, pp. 470-1 and Kildea, pp. 233-40.

²¹⁷See, for example, 'Britten rasskazyvaet', p.100: '[The English people] greatly respects Soviet art', and Britten's handwritten draft comments on the English Opera Group visit to the Soviet Union in 1964 [n.d.], p.4: 'Other rewards for our labours were the presence of great Soviet musicians at many of our performances' (BPL: English Opera Group, 1964).

a new outlook more in keeping with a national policy which...did at least try to make culture accessible to all...In Shostakovich's case...it may eventually turn out that the discipline imposed on him was on the whole salutary'.²¹⁸ Britten's perspective thus reflected a common view of music under the Soviet régime, which balanced its post-1936 ideological restrictions against what was viewed as its promotion of culture, tending to highlight 'the golden age of Soviet music' in the 1920s and underestimating the régime's sheer brutality under Stalin.²¹⁹ Indeed, he may have continued to underestimate the extent to which Shostakovich was obliged to reinvent his musical language following the *Pravda* attacks of January and February 1936, which largely terminated the composer's operatic career. In his 1966 tribute to Shostakovich, Britten was 'amazed that the same man could write them both [the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies] – the 4th so prolific with ideas, with a tumultuous exuberance amounting to at times to wildness...The Fifth, so controlled, so classical, neat even in spite [sic] of its energy', although, again, he seems to have been reflecting a widely held contemporary perception of Shostakovich's work. In the same year, for example, Tim Souster observed that 'only since the recent re-emergence of the Fourth

²¹⁸Britten's autograph draft of his article for *World Film News* 1/1 (April 1936), Kildea, p.18, and unattributed programme note for 'Russian Concert' at the Royal Albert Hall, London, 19 July 1943 (BPL: PG/1943/0719A).

²¹⁹Abraham, *Eight Soviet Composers*, pp.7-9.

Symphony has it been possible to discover to what extent this work represents “the path not taken”.²²⁰ Similarly, although Britten attended *Katerina Izmailova* with Shostakovich in March 1963, he may have accepted at face value the composer’s endorsement of this bowdlerised version, and the preface of the Soviet edition which he subsequently acquired, which saw it as ‘discarding certain eccentricities...which were at variance with the work’s general style’.²²¹

On the other hand, Britten did possess a copy of Alexander Werth’s highly critical account of the 1948 assaults on Russian composers such as Shostakovich as well as Western exponents of ‘formalism’ such as himself.²²² His correspondence with Gerald Abraham also suggests that he appreciated the degree of ideological pressure on Shostakovich at that point.²²³ Marion Thorpe certainly feels that by the time of his friendship

²²⁰Autograph draft of birthday tribute (BPL: DDS), and T. Souster, ‘Shostakovich at the Crossroads’, *Tempo* 78 (1966), p.1.

²²¹Britten’s appointment diary, 20 March 1963 (BPL); Glikman, p. 260; and L. Lebedinsky, preface to vocal score of *Katerina Izmailova* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1965), p.5 (BPL: 2-1000836). The score of *Lady Macbeth* was not published during Britten’s lifetime.

²²²A. Werth, *Musical Uproar in Moscow* (London: Turnstile Press, 1949) (BPL: 1-9501233).

²²³Letter from Gerald Abraham to Britten, 24 December 1948, in which he reported a meeting with Shaporin, Khrennikov and Yarustovsky in Prague in April 1948, during which he noted that in spite of their public attacks on Britten, in private they showed considerable interest in his music: ‘When I came back, I told the British Council to send [them] a bunch of your scores...Whether the Russians will ever receive them is doubtful... I am not at all doubtful that in public they will continue to call you a decadent bourgeois – and for heaven’s sake don’t make this story public or they may all be sent to Siberia’ (BPL: Gerald Abraham correspondence). Britten himself noted with wry amusement that he had been ‘singled out as the “bad” composer!’ in a letter to the Revd. Wilfred Derry, 1 January 1949 (Lancing College Archives: Britten-Pears papers).

with Shostakovich Britten was acutely aware of the personal torment which lay behind the composer's apparent compliance, and although Mitchell adds that Britten never alluded to this in conversation, it is further suggested by Britten's statement to Shostakovich in 1963 that 'For years now your work & life have been an example to me – of courage, integrity, & human sympathy'.²²⁴ To an extent, this was because from 1960 Britten was far better informed about the realities of the Soviet régime, not least through the two Ambassadors to the Soviet Union with whom he enjoyed cordial relations, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan (1962-5) and Sir Duncan Wilson (1968-71). Thus, following the composer's first visit to the Soviet Union in 1963, Trevelyan wrote to him that: 'The Ideological battle is going very far and there will be a plenum of the Central Committee on it at the end of May. It looks as if they may well abolish the individual unions and substitute one union for all the arts, in order to give tighter control...They have not touched Shostakovich, but this is, I fear, the sort of atmosphere in which the second-rate flourishes, even if it does knock out the lunatic fringe. I do not approve of it, I need hardly say!'²²⁵ On the other hand, at this stage Britten seems to have placed such pressure in the context of perennially difficult relations between creative

²²⁴Interview with the author, 5 September 2008, and letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 26 December 1963, photocopy of handwritten original (BPL:DDS).

²²⁵Letter from Humphrey Trevelyan to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 18 April 1963 (BPL: British Embassy Moscow).

artists and their patrons, which suggests a residual tendency to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt as well as a degree of political naïvety.²²⁶

Britten's political perspective on the Soviet Union would become decidedly more cautious as a result of the refusal of the Soviet authorities to allow Vishnevskaya to perform in the première of *War Requiem* in 1962 and the insistence of Goskoncert that the subsequent English Opera Group tour encompass Riga, where its members would have no diplomatic protection.²²⁷ By 1965 he thus acknowledged that 'As I am only too well aware, negotiations with [the Russians] are always long and difficult', even on ostensibly non-political matters such as copyright.²²⁸ On the other hand, he enthusiastically took advantage of the short-lived political 'thaw' by undertaking five visits to the Soviet Union between 1963 and 1967, and from 1963 onwards placed particular store on what he seems to have regarded as a personal relationship with Ekaterina

²²⁶See also Britten's speech given on being made Honorary Freeman of the Borough of Lowestoft on 28 July 1951: '...I can never manage to throw up my hands in horror quite as high as other people, when I hear stories of Soviet composers, ordered about by their government – in principle, it's just the same as Palestrina, ordered about all his life by the Church, Handel ordered about by kings and princes, Wagner ordered about by eccentric, if well-meaning patrons. The rub comes when it is impossible to please these patrons when the artist sees beyond them, which often happened then, and often happens now', *Tempo* 21 (autumn 1951), pp.3-5, in Kildea, pp. 109-10.

²²⁷See photocopy of letter from Britten to V. Stepanov, Ministry of Culture, Moscow, 14 December 1961, making a personal request for the decision not to allow Vishnevskaya to perform to be reconsidered, to which he did not receive a reply (BPL: USSR Moscow), and appendices D and L.

²²⁸Typewritten carbon copy of from Britten to David Adams, 25 April 1965 (BPL: BH).

Furtseva, the Soviet Minister of Culture: he would subsequently appeal to her to allow Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya to record *The Poet's Echo* for Decca and to reconsider the cancellation of Rostropovich's visit to the Aldeburgh Festival five years later.²²⁹ In this respect Britten was ultimately bound to be disappointed: the British Cultural Attaché in Moscow in 1976, reflecting on the 'very low ebb' which Anglo-Soviet cultural relations would reach in 1972-3, observed that 'Cultural relations with the Soviet Union are totally at the mercy of political decisions: they can be switched on and off at a few days [sic] notice'; and in 1974 Furtseva's career was to end in suicide.²³⁰ Moreover, although Pears's travel diaries suggest that Britten regarded his two visits to the Soviet Union between 1965 and 1967 as essentially private, both British cultural attachés at the time of Britten's 1963-67 visits emphasise that they were in fact strongly supported by Furtseva, who 'primarily viewed Britten as a trophy; a sort of expression of her policy' and treated Britten as an honoured guest.²³¹ Edward Mirzoian also notes that Britten's visit to

²²⁹Typewritten carbon copies of telegrams from Britten to Furtseva, n.d. [1967], and marked 'Personal' and addressed to his 'dear Friend' on 25 May 1972 (BPL: Russian Embassy, London/MR). See also typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Furtseva, 3 April 1963: '...it was a great pleasure to be able to meet you so often personally, and to have such pleasant talks' (BPL: Russian Ministry of Culture).

²³⁰Annual report from the Cultural Attaché in Moscow (W. Mardsen) to the British Council 1975/76', marked 'Restricted', p.1 (NA: BW 64/57).

²³¹Appendix II, and interview with Sir John Morgan, British Cultural Attaché in Moscow from 1965 to 1967, 20 March 2010. By 1970, Sir Duncan Wilson would describe Britten as 'the main drawcard' for Furtseva'; letter marked 'Confidential' from Duncan Wilson, British Embassy, Moscow, to R. Brash, 24 March 1970 (NA: BW 64/47).

Armenia in August 1965 took place with the connivance of Khrennikov at the financial methods he and other composers employed to ensure that Britten's cottage at Dilizhan was supplied with alcoholic drinks in spite of an official prohibition law, and Vishnevskaya similarly emphasises the considerable collective effort made 'to create an illusion of the beautiful life we enjoyed in the Soviet Union'.²³²

Britten's attitude is particularly difficult to assess after 1968. Johnson's assessment (2003) largely relies on Pears's travel diaries between 1965 and 1967 and thus highlights a largely positive attitude towards Soviet conditions.²³³ However, Pears's diary for the 1971 visit is truncated, and an assessment of Britten's attitude from 1968 onwards requires a survey of a wider range of correspondence and official documentation initially marked confidential under the Thirty-Year Rule. This evidence strongly suggests that following the high-water mark of Rostropovich's and Vishnevskaya's six-day visit to the 1968 Aldeburgh Festival,²³⁴ Britten's attitude became more critical as a result of the intensification of the reactionary pressure inside the Soviet Union following the invasion of

²³²E. Mirzoian, *Fragmenty* (Yerevan: Amrots Grup, 2005), p.242, and appendix XIII.

²³³See, for example, Pears pp.108 and 121 for a positive assessment, influenced by Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya, of Soviet musical and social conditions; Britten largely reproduced the former two months later in 'A Composer in Russia'.

²³⁴The Red House Visitors' Book indicates that Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya stayed from 15 to 21 June 1968 (BPL).

Czechoslovakia in 1968, particularly as it related to the subsequent deterioration of Rostropovich's position and Britten's first-hand experience of the Soviet Union in April 1971. Indeed, the overwhelming pessimism of the majority of Britten's compositions between January 1969 and March 1971 may to a degree reflect Britten's changed attitude.²³⁵

Thus, although Britten initially equated the Soviet invasion with the American 'occupation' of Bentwaters Air Base in Suffolk, a month later he privately wrote to Furtseva that 'I feel I must tell you that many true and good friends of the Soviet Union are deeply shocked by the invasion of Czechoslovakia. May I ask you to use every effort to speed the return of cultural liberties there?'²³⁶ Vishnevskaya further recalls that whereas during his previous visits to the Soviet Union she and Rostropovich had not discussed political matters with Britten, in April 1971 they were entirely candid about their position, which is supported by Lord Armstrong's minute of Britten's subsequent meeting with Edward

²³⁵For Britten's more pessimistic attitude, see, for example, typewritten carbon copy of telegram sent by Britten to Furtseva on 25 May 1972: 'It is tragic that our great musical association together which has meant many concerts in our two countries and has produced five new cello compositions should be thus sadly interrupted. Dear Ekaterina Alexeevna because of your and my happy friendship over so many years I plead with you to let these concerts take place.' The context was a letter of 22 May 1972 in which Rostropovich informed Britten that all of his foreign trips had been cancelled without explanation until 1973; Furtseva herself did not reply to Britten (BPL: MR).

²³⁶K. Mitchell, 'Edinburgh Diary', in Reed, p.199, and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Furtseva, 28 September 1968. Cf. letter from Britten to Duncan Wilson, 22 September 1968: 'I do so want to do our bit in keeping the cultural door open, but I feel I must make my position clear in a private letter to Madame Furseva [sic]' (BPL: Ministry of Culture /DW).

Heath.²³⁷ Indeed, following this visit Sir Duncan Wilson wrote confidentially to the Foreign Secretary that 'Britten...looks back on this visit to Moscow with very mixed feelings. Perhaps there is some advantage in him having seen with his own eyes the sort of petty persecution to which his great friends, Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya, are subject; but the sight has caused him acute pain'.²³⁸ Indeed, whereas six years earlier Britten had written that '...the inspiration of the Revolution is, genuinely, still with [Soviet composers]: so it is completely natural for them, not least for Shostakovich, to celebrate events that have affected all their lives', both the Foreign Office and British press interpreted his appearance on the same platform as Rostropovich and Richter on 18 and 20 April 1971 as a political statement as opposed to 'a unique gesture of Anglo-Russian friendship', as Britten claimed.²³⁹ Britten's response to Khrennikov's invitation to attend a reception at the Composers' House in Moscow on 21 April 1971 also indicates a far more uncompromising attitude than on his previous encounter in January

²³⁷Appendix XIII, and typewritten carbon copy of memorandum from R.T. Armstrong, Prime Minister's Office, to N.J. Barrington, 6 May 1971 (NA: PREM 15/2220): 'Mr. Britten said that Rostropovich was still harbouring Solzhenitsyn in his dacha. But he seemed to be in reasonably good spirits; and, although he was still not allowed out of Russia, he seemed to expect that he would come to the Aldeburgh Festival next year'.

²³⁸D. Wilson, 'CONFIDENTIAL FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE DIPLOMATIC REPORT No. 287/71 "DAYS OF BRITISH MUSIC" IN THE SOVIET UNION', 7 May 1971, p.5 (NA: FCO 34/110).

²³⁹'A Composer in Russia', p.284; memorandum marked 'Restricted' from E.J. Field, British Embassy, Moscow, to I.H. Williams, 30 April 1971 (NA: FCO 34/109); G. Widdicombe, 'Moscow Concerts,' *Financial Times*, 29 April 1971; and AFMA 1976, p.50.

1967: 'Khrennikov has in his time been particularly beastly to Shostakovich, and this is a fact that Britten will neither forget nor forgive. He absolutely refused to attend'.²⁴⁰ Similarly, whereas in December 1966 Britten and Pears seemed to have embraced their 'friendly helper and interpreter' Toya Sokolova – whose job was also to report to Fursteva on musicians such as Rostropovich and Richter – in April 1971 Britten took a strong dislike towards her.²⁴¹ Indeed, following this visit, Britten wrote to Wilson: 'Our experiences have rather taken their toll...You have seen so much at first hand, but we hadn't really, & we were rather shocked'.²⁴²

Britten nevertheless continued to resist calls to voice his concerns in a letter to the press, expressing the desire 'to prolong these connections [with Shostakovich, Rostropovich, Richter, and Fursteva] as long as possible',²⁴³ which also suggests that by this stage, and in contrast to the pre-war period, he was more pragmatic and that personal considerations were his primary concern. By 1971 he was also well enough placed to employ official channels rather than protesting publicly: he was, for

²⁴⁰Letter from Sir Duncan Wilson, British Embassy, Moscow, marked 'Confidential', to J.L. Bullard, 20 May 1971 (NA: FCO: 34/10); cf. Pears, p.151.

²⁴¹Pears, p.136, and *ibid.*: '[Britten, Pears and Rostropovich] had hardly settled in [at Shostakovich's flat, on 22 April] when Miss Sokolova appeared – Pears' account was that Britten turned white and Rostropovich green with rage at this (she could only have learned of the occasion by microphone techniques)'.
²⁴²Letter from Britten to Sir Duncan and Lady Wilson, Kelso, 3 May 1971 (BPL: DW).

²⁴³Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Michael Scammell, Director, Writers and Scholars International, 10 July 1972 (BPL: USSR Moscow).

example, in close contact with Sir Duncan Wilson as Rostropovich's position deteriorated in 1970 and 1971. Five days after meeting the Prime Minister to discuss this issue in May 1971, Britten would therefore write to Alan Bush:

I am afraid that I no longer agree to sign 'round robin' to the press, just as I refused to ~~sign~~ join in with those letters to the Times about the Soviet invasion of Czecho Slovakia, or the Soviet treatment of Slava Rostropovich. I have my own ~~way~~ methods of protesting (including writing my own individual letters for publication). Besides I pay frequent visits to Russia & realise that the situation is not quite so simple as your draft letter implies.²⁴⁴

Although Britten continued to express the hope that 'There are some small straws in the wind which could show a new direction of thought on the Soviet side',²⁴⁵ by the time of renewed détente in 1973-5, Britten's health rendered a future visit to the Soviet Union out of the question, notwithstanding a British-Council sponsored exhibition and two performances of *War Requiem* in the Moscow Conservatory to mark his

²⁴⁴Draft letter from Britten to Alan Bush, 10 May 1971 (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence).

²⁴⁵Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Michael Scammell, 10 July 1972 (BPL: USSR Moscow).

sixtieth birthday, Furtseva's invitation for him to be guest of honour at the Tchaikovsky Competition in 1974, and the production of *The Prince of the Pagodas* by the Kirov Ballet in early 1973.²⁴⁶ Britten's response to the latter is indicative of a pessimism which contrasts to the idealism with which he had viewed the Soviet Union in the mid-1930s: 'We hear so much these days of discord between our two nations that it might be useful to tell people about this, alas rather rare, instance of friendship'.²⁴⁷

2.3 Britten's attitude towards Soviet music

The complete text of Britten's pre-1938 diaries is also revealing in suggesting an ambivalent attitude on Britten's part towards the musical achievements of the Soviet Union and supporting the interpretation that although in the mid-1930s Britten possessed high musical expectations of the Soviet régime, these were relatively short-lived and in the event only to be fulfilled in Shostakovich. He thus dismissed Shaporin's Symphony (1932) in January 1935 with the words 'I hope USSR can produce better stuff than this', whereas eight months later he described Shostakovich's

²⁴⁶Interview with Sir Michael Llewelyn Smith, who orchestrated the exhibition as Cultural Attaché and liaised closely with the Ministry of Culture and Rostropovich between July and November 1973, 13 May 2010, and NA: FCO 34/222 for details of how Britten's sixtieth birthday was celebrated in Moscow. For Furtseva's invitation, see letter from Furtseva to Britten, n.d. [February 1974] (BPL: Russian Embassy London).

²⁴⁷Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to David Adams, 15 February 1973 (BPL: BH). See also Britten's letter to Sir Duncan and Lady Wilson on 18 July 1971: '...we will go on trying to keep the doors open as long as we can, but it can never be the same' (BPL: DW).

First Symphony as 'obviously the work of a very young man – of whom very great things are expected'.²⁴⁸ Britten also seems to have been critical of the majority of Soviet scores he received from Ralph Hawkes in 1935-6.²⁴⁹ In this respect, then, Britten did in fact discriminate between the quality of contemporary Soviet music to a greater extent than Donald Mitchell suggests and his judgements remained primarily musical.²⁵⁰ He did not show any significant interest in the work of any other Soviet composer either in the 1930s or as a result of his first-hand encounters in the 1960s with Khachaturian and Kabalevsky, notwithstanding the fact that both composers also composed works for Rostropovich and the latter's considerable output for children. Indeed, Pears's travel diaries suggest that from 1965 onwards Rostropovich consciously restricted access to Britten on the part of other musicians.²⁵¹ Further, Britten does not appear to have shown any interest in the work of younger Russian composers. His reaction to a recording of Schnittke's First String Quartet which he received in November 1967 is not recorded, nor did the two composers meet in Moscow in April 1971, although the quasi-improvisatory first movement of the Schnittke work, with a polyphony

²⁴⁸Diary, 23 January and 19 September 1935 (BPL).

²⁴⁹Diary, 13 December 1935 and 20 March 1936 (BPL).

²⁵⁰Cf. D. Mitchell, *Britten and Auden in the Thirties*, p.72: 'I have no doubt that for Britten [the intellectual/political] appeal of Soviet Russia meant that contemporary Russian music had a significance, or at least an interest, over and above its quality as music'.

²⁵¹Pears, p.146. The only score Britten possessed by Khachaturian or Kabalevsky was a piano-duet arrangement of *Spartacus* (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1961) (BPL: 2-1000908).

tending towards heterophony, is to a degree akin to the first movement of Britten's Third String Quartet.²⁵²

The diaries further suggest that beyond Shostakovich Britten possessed little awareness of the first generation of composers educated entirely under the Soviet regime such as Shebalin and Popov, and that his interest in contemporary Russian music focused instead upon older composers who had left Russia, such as Stravinsky and, prior to 1936, Prokofiev. In the 1930s Shostakovich was therefore exceptional in combining what Britten saw as considerable musical potential with attractive political credentials and a degree of exposure in the West. By the 1960s Britten's ambivalent attitude towards the development of Stravinsky's compositional technique, together with the death of Prokofiev, would have accorded Shostakovich an additional stature in Britten's eyes as the greatest contemporary Russian composer. In the draft of his 1966 tribute Britten thus wrote: 'What a pleasure therefore when, many years later I

²⁵²Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Lilian Hochhauser, 21 November 1967, thanking her for sending 'the tape of the Schnittke Quartet, which I look forward to playing. As soon as I have done so we must discuss a possible programme for the Borodin Quartet' (BPL: VH). However, none of the composer's works were programmed at AFMA during Britten's lifetime, and Mark Lubotsky confirms that Schnittke was not present when Britten visited his home in April 1971; interview with the author, 30 October 2010.

met Dimitri.....to find the man as lovable, as characteristic, as great & contemporary, as ~~the composer~~ his music'.²⁵³

However, even in the 1930s Britten's attitude towards Shostakovich is more complex than has been acknowledged. Although Eric Roseberry has highlighted – not entirely accurately - the importance of the *Lady Macbeth* performance as Britten's first encounter with the composer's music, his attitude towards the First Symphony in 1935-7 is more revealing, Britten describing it as important 'more perhaps in what it stands for than what it is', and, in spite of his admiration for the first movement, viewing the work as a whole as 'very uneven, but with some splendid imagination'.²⁵⁴ Indeed, the evidence of the diaries suggests a by no means uncritical attitude towards Shostakovich's music on Britten's part. It is significant, for example, that he regarded some of the vocal writing in *Lady Macbeth* as 'extravagant', and even thirty years later he humorously warned Galina Vishnevskaya not to allow the part to damage her voice.²⁵⁵

Moreover, Britten also seems to have viewed Shostakovich and his music as a polemical counter to what he regarded as the derivative English

²⁵³Autograph draft of birthday tribute (BPL:DDS).

²⁵⁴E. Roseberry, CD note to *Britten Music for Oboe, Music for Piano*, Hyperion CDA66776 (1995) p.5, and Britten's diary, 4 June 1937, 19 September and 31 March 1935 (BPL).

²⁵⁵Diary, 18 March 1936 (BPL), and appendix XIII.

symphonic tradition of the 1930s: the music of *Lady Macbeth* was 'new & personal' and the First Symphony as 'charming-vital-enterprising & deliriously free - makes all our Sibelius's & the saletites [sic] look like the old Tories they are'.²⁵⁶ Certainly, when Sir Charles Mackerras worked at Aldeburgh between 1956 and 1959, Britten 'made no secret of the fact that he considered [Shostakovich] an extremely dramatic composer and that he admired *Lady Macbeth* more than the local composers like Vaughan Williams'.²⁵⁷ One should also acknowledge that Britten did not refer to the work in any of his comments on his own operas, such as the preface to the first edition of *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), in which he discussed with a variety of examples the interaction of librettist and composer, suggesting that it did not directly influence his own approach to operatic composition.²⁵⁸ Although Britten was clearly impressed by the 'remarkable entr'actes' of *Lady Macbeth* in March 1936, and these may have influenced him eight years later in the construction of *Peter Grimes* – particularly the use of a passacaglia to depict the inner torment of the main protagonist – this source of influence was scarcely highlighted in the critical response to the work 1945, nor by Britten in a candid

²⁵⁶Autograph draft of Britten's 1966 birthday tribute, and diary, 4 June 1937 (BPL).

²⁵⁷Appendix VIII.

²⁵⁸Britten's 'Preface' to R. Duncan's Libretto of *The Rape of Lucretia* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1946), pp. 5-6. On the other hand, the influence of *Lady Macbeth* might have resurfaced in the context of incidental music: the *pp marc.* bass drum pulse of the first thirteen bars of the 'End Music' of *Johnson over Jordan* (1939) may be drawn from Shostakovich's depiction of the return of the ghost and husband in Act II (R316 to R318: bar 1 and R330 to R333).

discussion of the stylistic genesis of the opera in 1966.²⁵⁹ Indeed, the diaries – coupled with the greater integration of Britten’s interludes into the musical and dramatic flow of *Peter Grimes* - suggest that Britten was more broadly eclectic, showing a greater admiration for *Wozzeck* from 1933 onwards - if not earlier, under Bridge’s influence - which significantly pre-dated his knowledge of Shostakovich’s music.²⁶⁰ Moreover, in contrast to Shostakovich, whose operatic career largely terminated in 1936, Britten went on to develop his use of interludes independently, in response to the varied compositional challenges of the chamber operas and *Owen Wingrave*.

By the 1960s it is clear that Britten’s musical interest in the Soviet Union focused not only on Shostakovich, but also encompassed an admiration for its system of musical education and the ‘basic acceptance of culture as part of national life, requiring proper conditions so that it can produce

²⁵⁹Britten’s autograph draft of article for *World Film News*, Kildea, p.18; P. Brett, comp., *Benjamin Britten: Peter Grimes*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.94; and ‘Benjamin Britten Talks to Edmund Tracey’ (1966) in Kildea, pp. 292-3.

²⁶⁰For Britten’s admiration for *Wozzeck*, see Mark, p.34, and ‘Benjamin Britten Talks to Edmund Tracey’, Kildea, pp. 292-3: ‘*Wozzeck* had, for about ten years, played a great part in my life, not only, I may say musically, but also psychologically and emotionally...in many ways I am aware now that I was strongly influenced by *Wozzeck* when I wrote *Grimes*’. See also Britten’s diary entries for 8 March 1933 and 14 March 1934, and his letter to Alan Bush, 2 August 1936, in which he cites this work rather than *Lady Macbeth* – which he had heard five months earlier - as one of ‘the three greatest works of this era’ (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence). Shostakovich was not suggested as a source of influence on *Peter Grimes* in, for example, Crozier, or A. Gishford, ed., *Covent Garden Operas: Peter Grimes* (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1947).

the greatest possible benefits'.²⁶¹ Harewood thus believed that 'Ben felt that the Russians treated musicians, particularly composers, rather better than we treated them over here, and I think that impressed him', although one should add that Britten only articulated this viewpoint publicly between 1963 and 1965 and Harewood's comments refer to the pre-1964 period when he enjoyed a close friendship with the composer.²⁶² This is confirmed by a comparison of Britten's statement of what he believed a creative artist was entitled to demand of society in his Aspen Award acceptance speech in 1964 with his entirely positive description of the position of Soviet composers a year later, in which he expressed the wish that 'something similar [to the Composers' Colony at Dilizhan in Armenia] could happen in England, but I fear that composers are still not taken as seriously here as over there'.²⁶³ Britten's warm admiration for the Soviet Union's system of musical education also reflected how by the 1960s he chose, somewhat tendentiously, to recall his own pre-1934 experience: 'I am sincerely happy that your children have excellent opportunities to develop their musical talents. What is particularly helpful is the combination of general schooling and specific musical education available to gifted students. We are very much behind in this

²⁶¹Annotated draft of 'A Composer in Russia' for *The Sunday Telegraph*, n.d. [October 1965], p.4 (BPL: 1-02053820).

²⁶²Interview with the author, 13 March 2009.

²⁶³Aspen, p.16, and 'A Composer in Russia,' p.282.

respect. If you take me, for example, I started learning music seriously only at the age of seventeen; before, at my secondary school, we simply did not have the time for it'.²⁶⁴

2.4 The social duty of the national composer

Donald Mitchell (1984) contends that the 'example of Shostakovich's working life', particularly the composer's active involvement in film and theatre work in the late 1920s and 1930s, represented an important element of his appeal to Britten in view of the development of Britten's own career from 1935 onwards.²⁶⁵ However, in spite of Britten's considerable documentary and film work between 1935 and 1946 and his contacts with left-wing film makers such as John Grierson who were strongly influenced by Soviet cinema, there is no evidence that he was directly stimulated by this aspect of Shostakovich's creative activity, notwithstanding the release of *The Girlfriends* (1935) in the West and Britten's enthusiastic cinema-going during the 1930s, although he may have admired the somewhat 'cinematic' construction of *Lady Macbeth*.

Moreover, Britten's approach towards social engagement between 1935 and 1946 was not identical to that of Shostakovich. As a younger

²⁶⁴'Britten rasskazyvaet', p. 102. See also 'Britten Looking Back' (1963) in Kildea, p.251.

²⁶⁵Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?', p.37.

composer determined to earn his living primarily from composition, he seems to have been more willing than his Russian counterpart from 1931 onwards to accept the conventions of theatre work²⁶⁶. Moreover, from 1937 to 1947 Britten, in contrast to Shostakovich, was also significantly involved in radio work, whilst after *Love from a Stranger* (1936) he did not return to commercial cinema. Indeed, Britten never referred to Shostakovich's film work in his diaries, and in a revealing comment on 26 November 1936 wrote: 'I feel very dissatisfied with [the music for *Love from a Stranger*] – as I feel it is just ordinary film stuff, but apparently Max Schach (head producer and manager of Capitol) is not of that opinion & thinks they've discovered a new Stravinsky!!', which suggest that this aspect of Britten's creative identity was of secondary importance, and that one could equally draw a comparison with a range of other composers who wrote for film in the 1930s, such as Honegger and Milhaud. Moreover, whereas for Shostakovich writing for film remained an important preoccupation throughout his creative life, and he seems to have been interested in the possibilities of film opera as early as 1935,²⁶⁷ in the case of Britten it lapsed between the composition of the score for

²⁶⁶See Shostakovich's 'Declaration of the Composer's Duties', *Rabochi i Teatr*, No. 31, 1931, p.6, quoted in the 'Editor's Note' of *Dmitrii Shostakovich: sobranie sochinenii* vol. 28 (Moscow: Muzyka, 1986): 'Music should not be made to cater to the tastes and methods...peculiar to a certain theatre...which levels down the composers' styles. The 'ease' with which they write such predetermined music leads...to mere hack work'.

²⁶⁷M. Iakubov, commentary to *D. Shostakovich: NSS* vol. 126 (Moscow: DSCH, 2005), p.380.

Instruments of the Orchestra in 1945 and his interest in the operatic possibilities of television in the second half of the 1960s. By this time Britten clearly did appreciate the importance of the medium for Shostakovich, since Vishnevskaya rehearsed for the film of *Katerina Izmailova* during their holiday in Armenia in August 1965, and its first showing in the United Kingdom took place at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1967, just as Kozintsev's *Hamlet* had been screened at Aldeburgh the previous year.²⁶⁸ However, there is no evidence to suggest that Shostakovich influenced Britten in this regard. Philip Reed believes that it was only the success of Basil Coleman's 1966 BBC Television production of *Billy Budd* that led to the composer's 'thinking more seriously about television and what sort of contribution he might make to the medium'.²⁶⁹ Moreover, in the event Britten does not seem have been wholly convinced by the results of *Owen Wingrave* and, in contrast to Shostakovich, did not compose any film scores after 1945.

²⁶⁸G. Vishnevskaya, commentary to *Dedicated to Galina Vishnevskaya*, transl. N. Winter, (St. Petersburg: Compozitor, 2000), p.7; and AFMA 1967 and 1966, pp.28, 39.

²⁶⁹P. Reed, "Fiery Visions": *Peter Grimes* on Television', DVD note to BBC 074 3261 DH, p.8, and letter from Britten to Sir Duncan Wilson, 26 November 1970: 'We are deep in the very fraught recordings (for Television) of [*Owen Wingrave*]- it is an impossibly complicated medium, & I am not convinced at the moment that the result will be worth all the bother!' (BPL: DW). On the other hand, Benjamin Luxon feels that Britten would have found *Owen Wingrave* less frustrating had he collaborated with an experienced film maker in the project; interview with the author, 11 February 2011.

It is therefore more appropriate to suggest that both Britten and Shostakovich possessed and retained a significant interest in the creative possibilities in film, but one which was arrived at and pursued independently, both in the 1930s and the 1960s, and Britten did not refer to his earlier film work in his interviews with Soviet musicologists during the latter period. What is unclear is how far in the 1930s Britten fully appreciated Shostakovich's film and theatre work as an element of a wider sense of the composer's involvement in society which reflected his own, articulated as early as 1936: 'I feel that the scope of music has suddenly become too narrow - well, in the last 50 years. Too introspective – too self consciously original...it is the reason why modern music has become the meat only for the cultured few...It is partly for this reason that I spend so much time writing for films and theatres'.²⁷⁰ The evidence certainly indicates that by the 1960s this represented a significant aspect of Britten's admiration for Shostakovich. Donald Mitchell had highlighted Britten's own 'sociological importance' as 'an artist with a social conscience and a sense of public responsibility' as early as 1950, and by 1970 this was clearly admired by the British establishment.²⁷¹ In 1971, for example, Britten wrote to the Prime Minister that he viewed the

²⁷⁰Letter from Britten to Alan Bush, Quarryfield, Crantock, 2 August 1936 (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence).

²⁷¹Mitchell, 'A Note on *St. Nicolas*', p.226, and appendix IX.

Aldeburgh Festival from its inception as 'bringing culture to this starved part of East Anglia'.²⁷²

The fact that Britten publicly expounded his conviction on the theme of the composer's duty to engage with society on at least five occasions between 1962 and 1964 further suggests that it was a formative element in his creative relationship with Shostakovich in the early 1960s.²⁷³ Britten was at his most candid in an interview during his first visit to the Soviet Union:

Music is a means of communication, and I firmly believe that the composer ought to convey something to people through his work. And as a member of society, the composer must try to create works which would be useful and relevant to his people. A true artist cannot remain indifferent to the reception of the audience. It can happen sometimes that a composer creates music that is ahead of its time, but this does not mean that the artist can work for the chosen few, as is the case with some young composers in the West. This is detrimental for the

²⁷²Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Edward Heath, 30 July 1971 (BPL: Edward Heath correspondence).

²⁷³'Speech on Receiving Honorary Degree at Hull University' (1962); 'Freedom of Borough of Aldeburgh' (1962), in Kildea pp.214-18; 'Britten rasskazyvaet'; Aspen; and 'British Music in the World Today', Kildea, pp.272-3.

composer in the first place, as he becomes detached from the true source of artistic inspiration.²⁷⁴

Mitchell therefore believes that Britten's and Shostakovich's 'shared philosophies of being a composer in the twentieth century mattered a great deal to Ben. He always had a very strong feeling that music should have a major role to play in the cultural life of a nation, which also meant in the politics of a nation; [and] this was certainly something that brought them very close together'.²⁷⁵ To an extent, this reflected Britten's consciousness of his equivalent status to Shostakovich by 1960, with the death of Vaughan Williams and of Prokofiev, as each country's greatest living composer. Although the first post-war official visit of British musicians to the Soviet Union in 1956 had taken place under the patronage of Sir Arthur Bliss, Master of the Queen's Music, the reception of *War Requiem* cemented Britten's greater status. Royal patronage of the Aldeburgh Festival became more explicit with Prince Philip's visit in June 1962,²⁷⁶ by 1971 the Prime Minister was consulting Britten on 'musical

²⁷⁴'Britten rasskazyvaet', pp.101-2.

²⁷⁵Appendix IX.

²⁷⁶Red House Visitors' Book, 13-14 June 1962 (BPL).

honours' and visited the festival a year later, and in 1976 the composer received the unprecedented award of a life peerage.²⁷⁷

Britten's initial relationship with Shostakovich was in fact given significant encouragement by the Foreign Office and the British Council. Thus, prior to the composer's first visit to the Soviet Union in March 1963, the British Ambassador wrote to him: 'We hope very soon to have copies of the new recording of your Requiem so that we can present them to the Minister of Culture and Soviet musicians. I have already told the Vice Minister and Shostakovich that we would be getting copies for them'.²⁷⁸ It was by this means that Shostakovich first encountered a work which greatly enhanced his musical admiration for Britten by the end of the year; and Britten was later able to use the diplomatic bag for his correspondence with the composer.²⁷⁹ Indeed, in July 1961, as part of the preliminary discussions regarding Britten's first visit to the Soviet Union, the British Cultural Attaché informed the Soviet Minister of Culture that

²⁷⁷Letter from Sir Arthur Bliss to Britten, Marlborough Place, London, 3 March 1955; and letters from Edward Heath to Britten, 30 July 1971 and 8 June 1972 (BPL: Arthur Bliss/Edward Heath correspondence).

²⁷⁸Letter from Sir Humphrey Trevelyan to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 15 February 1963 (BPL: British Embassy Moscow).

²⁷⁹For Shostakovich's admiration for *War Requiem*, see letters from Shostakovich to Isaak Glikman, Zhukovka, 1 August 1963 in Glikman, p.114, and from the Waldorf Hotel, London, to Britten, 5 December 1963, transl. Marion Thorpe, in which he has 'already listened to your Requiem many, many times. It is a great work' (BPL: DDS). Sir Duncan Wilson offered Britten the use of the diplomatic bag in a letter on 23 December 1968 (BPL: DW).

'We consider our living composers as good as any that the Soviet Union could produce', an implicit statement of the equivalent status of Britten and Shostakovich.²⁸⁰ In late 1967 Trevelyan also prevailed upon Britten to join a high-profile Anglo-Soviet Consultative Committee set up to promote co-operation between the British and Soviet governments in non-political areas such as music, although in the event Britten rapidly seems to have become wary of the commitment and cited ill health as his reason for withdrawing in April 1968.²⁸¹

At a practical level social engagement was matter of adopting an appropriate means of musical communication. Alan Brooke Turner thus recalls that when interpreting between Britten and Shostakovich in March 1964 both composers agreed that wherever possible an opera should be performed in the language of the audience on the grounds of communication: to insist otherwise, Britten stated, was 'pure snobbism'.²⁸² It also reflected the works the composer chose to undertake.

In his speech on receiving the first Aspen Award in July 1964, Britten

²⁸⁰'Mr. Speight's Visit to the Soviet Ministry of Culture on July 20, 1961' (NA: BW 64/43).

²⁸¹Letter from George Brown to Britten, Foreign Office, London, 13 November 1967, and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Lord Trevelyan, 30 April 1968 (BPL: Anglo-Soviet).

²⁸²Appendix II. Cf. Glikman's testimony that Shostakovich preferred *Katerina Izmailova* to be performed in the language of the audience, Glikman, p. 300, and Norman Kay's review of the first London performance of the Second Violin Concerto (1967): 'The last movement is...one of the routine disappointments that continue to pour from a composer whose obsession about communication demands a whipped-up finale'; *Tempo*, New Series, 83 (winter 1967-8), p. 23.

specifically applauded Shostakovich's aim in the Seventh Symphony 'to present a monument to his fellow citizens, an explicit expression for them of their own endurance and heroism', and five months later he also defended Shostakovich as 'the most wonderful *useful* composer to have around...I don't think he'd pretend for a moment that every work he wrote was a masterpiece or even that it will continue to be used – but if you have a demand from the public or orchestras or society to produce music, it's marvellous to be able to do it as well as that, even if you're not perhaps always frightfully interested'. Britten similarly acknowledged that his own 'occasional' works might be musically routine: '...so many of one's pieces that were written...for special occasions, and one's not desperately proud of them but they were quite useful at the time, but now they're sort of turned out and...naturally they don't stand up to a great deal of wear'.²⁸³ He thus remained highly reluctant to sanction the circulation of, for example, the majority of his pre-1945 radio and documentary scores, which he felt had served their purpose.²⁸⁴

However, Britten's stance on this issue is more complex than has hitherto been acknowledged and sheds particular light on his relationship with Shostakovich as it developed in the 1960s. In 1969, Ernst Roth, Britten's

²⁸³ Aspen, p.12, and 'British Music in the World Today, Kildea, pp.272-3.

²⁸⁴ Letter from Britten to David Adams, 1 May 1968: 'Many of these pieces are quite old...and my feelings for them are rather coloured!' (BPL: BH).

publisher up to 1965, noted that whereas 'as pianist and conductor...Britten seeks and needs live contact with his public...There is nothing theoretical or secluded in his art or in his approach to it, in his private life Britten is happy only in the small circle of his chosen friends'.²⁸⁵ This is amplified by Lord Harewood's observation that 'Ben despised the ivory tower for the artist, and yet he was shy in the face of the world; he could not bear its censure and longed for its praise'. Indeed, by the 1960s Harewood feels that Britten 'increasingly...came to resent the intrusion of others' and 'felt more and more threatened by anything and anyone outside his own world', although his views may be coloured by Britten's termination of their friendship in 1964.²⁸⁶ Moreover, in contrast to Shostakovich, who continued to compose 'civic' works in a striking variety of genres and on both large and small scales from 1960 onwards, Britten was in fact increasingly selective in his acceptance of 'civic' commissions. This is illustrated by his relatively small-scale output in this regard after *War Requiem*, in the form, for example, of arrangements of the *National Anthem* and *God Save the Queen* (1961, 1967, 1971) and short works such as *The Building of the House* (1967), which he considered 'a true example of Occasional Music'.²⁸⁷ In fact, although Britten remained conscious of the importance of the composer's

²⁸⁵Roth, pp.230-1.

²⁸⁶Harewood, pp.147, 149.

²⁸⁷AFMA 1967, p.13.

responsibilities to society, particularly during his final illness, and his final *Welcome Ode* and *Praise We Great Men* (1976) can be viewed in this light, over the previous decade he had largely composed on his own terms: for favoured causes such as his former prep school (*Psalm 150*, 1962), the Red Cross (*Cantata misericordium*, 1963), United Nations (*Voices for Today*, 1965) and The Save The Children Fund (*Children's Crusade*, 1969); for a relatively narrow circle of musicians such as Bream, Ellis, Pears, Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya; and for more restricted contexts such as the Aldeburgh Festival – or, as in the case of the Cello Symphony and *The Poet's Echo*, the Soviet Union - as opposed to London.²⁸⁸

Britten's sensitivities on this issue by the time of his friendship with Shostakovich appear to derive from a variety of causes. As early as 1950, Hans Keller noted that Britten's music encountered 'far more understanding and far less resistances abroad than in his own country', which suggests that the resentment towards the composer's success and prodigious technical faculty – coupled with a residual prejudice towards

²⁸⁸See Britten in 'Interview with Charles Osborne' (October 1963): 'As I get older I find writing to a commission more and more irksome, and now usually, I only accept one when it coincides with some already existing plan of my own', Kildea, p.246, and his final letter to Bishop Pimen of Saratov and Volgograd, 24 January 1975: 'I am able to work which gives me great pleasure and at least a feeling that I am not a totally useless member of Society'. In his final letter to Shostakovich on 2 December 1974, Britten wrote: 'I am happy to say that I have started to write a little music and I cannot say what pleasure it gives me to be of some little use again' (BPL: Bishop Pimen correspondence/DDS).

his homosexuality and pacifism had not evaporated. This would partly account for the appeal to Britten of the enthusiastic reception accorded to his music in the Soviet Union, where Rozhdestvensky, Dalgat and Kondrashin - in addition to Rostropovich – were all instrumental in promoting Britten’s music during the 1960s.²⁸⁹ Indeed, Soviet musicologists consistently presented Britten’s pacifism in positive terms, as symptomatic of the humanity of his music and the composer’s ‘preference for democratic living emotion as opposed to...naked preconceived theory...his stance for music in contrast to anti-music’.²⁹⁰ One should add that both Irina Shostakovich and Edward Mirzoian are categorical that Britten’s homosexuality was never discussed nor a consideration at any private or official level in the Soviet Union.²⁹¹

The initial public and critical failure of *Gloriana* in 1953 seems to have been particularly important prejudicing Britten’s attitude towards

²⁸⁹See Britten in 1964: ‘...one has been immensely encouraged...by the reaction of countries as widely apart as Russia and America to one’s tunes’, ‘British Music in the World Today’, Kildea, p.270; and Britten’s comments in interviews with *Sovetskaia muzyka* in 1963 and 1964: ‘My strongest impressions...are those of the Soviet audience and the reception we were given here; and ‘[That the first performance of the Cello Symphony will take place in Moscow]...makes me really happy...one could not wish for a more enthusiastic audience than the Muscovites’, Britten rasskazyvaet’, p.101, and ‘U nas v gostiakh – Benjamin Britten’, p.130. One should also highlight Mark Lubotsky’s seven performances of Britten’s Violin Concerto in the Soviet Union between 1967 and 1971, including a recording under Kondrashin in October 1967, as evidence of the popularity of Britten’s music in this context; interview with Mark Lubotsky, October 30 2010.

²⁹⁰‘Dni Brittena v Armenii’, pp. 109-10.

²⁹¹Appendix X, and interview with the author, 8 April 2010.

composing high-profile works in a metropolitan context, particularly in the subsequent light of what Britten viewed as the inordinate success of *War Requiem*, in a sense, the most 'public' statement he made of one of his most cherished 'private' concerns. Harewood, for example, feels that:

[The failure of *Gloriana*] shut [Britten] in on himself and he became even more private. He had made a great public gesture and the public had, so to speak, rejected him...Every creative artist who goes before the public takes something private with him...only with Ben it turned out sometimes to have been too private to risk...[With *War Requiem*] he was making what he felt was a private statement in a bigger but still serious context...and he got the response proper only for an 'easy' piece...[which he considered] an outrage and an invasion of privacy.²⁹²

It is therefore revealing that in 1965 Britten made a somewhat superficial distinction between what he regarded as Shostakovich's 'public' works – *Katerina Izmailova*, the symphonies and concertos – which 'make easy contact with audiences, simple or sophisticated' - and the 'private' string

²⁹²Harewood, p.148. Cf. Brett in *Grove Music Online*, accessed 26.5.10, that as a result of *War Requiem* Britten 'became a victim of his own success, drowning his authentic "private voice" as a result of insinuating himself into the English oratorio tradition'.

quartets, suggesting that he admired not only the composer's continued ability to write music which could communicate directly to society, but also Shostakovich's versatility: his ability to compose works for either context.²⁹³ Donald Mitchell's programme note for the first performance of the Fourteenth Symphony outside the Soviet Union, which Britten endorsed, also highlighted that 'Shostakovich always seems to have exploited two veins in his symphonic art, the explicitly public and the explicitly private, and has at his disposal a powerful, versatile style which accommodates both worlds'.²⁹⁴

Whereas prior to *War Requiem*, Britten seems to have been able to balance the public/private dichotomy in a series of relatively large-scale works such as *Our Hunting Fathers* and *Sinfonia da Requiem*, by the 1960s he appears to have found this aspect of his music more problematic, clearly regarding the Cello Sonata and subsequent Cello Suites as 'private' works, and arguably adopting the stylised form of the Church Parables between 1964 and 1968 as a means of addressing private concerns in the yet more restricted context of Orford church.²⁹⁵ Following his return from

²⁹³AFMA 1965, p.32.

²⁹⁴D. Mitchell, 'Shostakovich and his symphonies', AFMA 1970, pp. 9-10, and 'Private Pieces', CD note to *Britten the Performer*, vol. 13 (BBCB 8013-2).

²⁹⁵In 'Britten rasskazyvaet', p. 103, Britten amplified the appeal of the form of the Church Parables: 'I am fascinated by the rigid form of [Japanese Noh theatre], reminiscent of ancient Greek tragedy...I am not against contemporary plots for opera or other music works. However, I sometimes find it easier to express myself with the help of a legend

the Soviet Union in 1963 Britten himself acknowledged that 'There are moments when I want to say something subtle & intimate, which will possibly be only understood by people who feel about things the way I do...There is no doubt that finally one treasures the private rather than the public work of art. But both are necessary, both for the public & the composer, and the greatest figures have ~~always~~ produced both, and the public work of these great figures can be good & of more than just temporary use, because of their 'gift'.²⁹⁶ In the context of Shostakovich's post-1960 music, particularly the late vocal settings and Thirteenth and Fourteenth Symphonies, and as the short-lived Khrushchev 'thaw' began to appear more uncertain from the end of 1964, Britten may also have come to admire the composer's courage in expressing 'private' concerns in the context of a 'public' work and the sense of 'civic morality' which dictated this aspect of his creativity. In this sense, Britten may have recognised that the accommodation that both he and Shostakovich enjoyed with the establishment in the 1960s was less than straightforward. On the other hand, this should not be overstated, since Donald Mitchell feels that Britten's post-1960 admiration for

or parable'. Cf. A. Whittall, 'A New Starting-Point?' *Opera*, April 1967, p.288: 'Britten's two recent attempts to move music drama from the theatre to the church are unlikely to result in a "universalization" of the form. Britten's stylized de-theatricalization is the direct opposite of John Cage's anti-art view that life is theatre, but its potentialities seem equally limited'.

²⁹⁶Britten's autograph draft of article for *The Observer*, n.d. [1963], pp. 5-6, reproduced in Kildea as 'On *Pravda*, Art & Criticism' (BPL: 1-02053807).

Shostakovich largely focused on his chamber music, an essentially 'private' form of expression.²⁹⁷ Moreover, Britten's apparent shift from public to private post-*War Requiem* can, in a sense, be viewed as parallel to Shostakovich's own shift from symphony to string quartet as an intensified form of autobiographical expression from the 1950s.

2.5 The murderous protagonist as victim

Britten's rehabilitation of Peter Grimes as a victim of society as opposed to the villain of Crabbe's poetry suggests a further area of extra-musical affinity given Shostakovich's similar treatment of Leskov's short story in *Lady Macbeth*, although this is difficult to assess fully given that Shostakovich's operatic career largely terminated in 1936. Soviet musicologists certainly emphasised this point of similarity between the two works in the 1960s and 1970s, and it is perhaps significant, as Irina Shostakovich suggests, that Shostakovich first saw *Peter Grimes* a month after he attended rehearsals for *Katerina Izmailova* in London, not least because he was informed that Britten had taken a constructive interest in the work's staging.²⁹⁸ It is certainly likely that knowledge of Britten's

²⁹⁷Appendix IX.

²⁹⁸Appendix X.

long-term admiration for a work of such importance to him contributed to a deepening of their relationship from 1963 onwards.²⁹⁹

On the other hand, Britten himself said very little indeed about the scenario of the Shostakovich opera, either in 1936 or thirty years later, beyond describing it as 'a love story which is treated very naturalistically', which suggests that he did not view the characters as fundamentally similar and may primarily have been influenced, as Western musicologists tended to argue, by *Wozzeck*.³⁰⁰ Moreover, notwithstanding Shostakovich's strong identification with the victims of persecution in, for example, the first movement of the Thirteenth Symphony and parallels between the hunting of the Nose and the two man hunts in *Peter Grimes*, Britten's rehabilitation of his main protagonist is significantly greater compared to that of Shostakovich or Berg. This suggests that he felt the position of individual against the crowd more

²⁹⁹See Britten's letter to Shostakovich, 26 December 1963: 'You know how much I love this opera myself, & rejoice that it has made so many friends here' (BPL:DDS). For a characteristic Soviet interpretation, see 'Gordost' Angliiskoi Muzyki', pp.15-16: 'Both characters possess emotional generosity and strong will, but they only fight for personal happiness and die as victims of the social order'. Kovnatskaia is exceptional in highlighting the difference between the two characters: 'Shostakovich's Katerina is a passionate, integral, determined person, who is undeterred on her way to final revelation and tragic end; Peter Grimes is more a product of his society – doubtful, full of uncertainties and contradictions. His reflective idealism leads him to madness and ultimate death'; *Benjamin Britten*, p.71.

³⁰⁰World Film News 1/1 (April 1936), Kildea, p.17, and H.F. Redlich 'The Significance of Britten's Operatic Style', in *Music Survey*, vol. II, no. 4 (spring 1950), p.240, which views *Wozzeck* as 'socially ostracised and disenfranchised, fighting against a community of sadistic philistines (a preconception of the dramatic situation in *Peter Grimes*)'.

acutely as a result of his pacifism and homosexuality and that it was primarily the autobiographical context of 1939 to 1944 as opposed to the influence of Shostakovich which asserted itself in the conception of the opera.³⁰¹ Russian commentators on Britten have scarcely referred to his homosexuality as an aspect of his creative personality, but Irina Shostakovich's testimony, and her striking use of the word 'persecuted' (травил) with regard to Stravinsky's treatment of Britten, suggests that by 1965 Britten and Shostakovich were intuitively aware of the other's sensitivities and that this in fact constituted a fundamental area of mutual empathy: 'Dmitrii Dmitrievich was not interested in [Britten's homosexuality]. It was something obviously we did know but when people like each other and have a good attitude to each other they understand each other more easily'.³⁰²

2.6 Britten's knowledge of Shostakovich's music prior to 1960

In the light of the Britten-Shostakovich relationship from 1960 onwards, it has been assumed that Britten was acquainted with and admired a wide variety of Shostakovich's music by the time of their first meeting.

³⁰¹A central feeling for us was that of the individual against the crowd, with ironic overtones for our own situation...I think it was partly this feeling which led us to make Grimes a character of vision and conflict...rather than the villain he was in Crabbe', Schafer, pp. 116-7. On the other hand, see Harewood, pp.148-9: '[Britten] had too strong and too English a sense of humour to allow himself to feel positively persecuted'.

³⁰²Appendix X.

However, the full text of Britten's diaries only refers to the Suite from *The Nose*, *Lady Macbeth*, the First Symphony and Piano Concerto. Although one can accept that Britten appreciated the defining features of Shostakovich's musical language by 1938 one must also scrutinise Roseberry's assertion that Britten's pre-1960 knowledge of the composer's music was 'not unextensive'.³⁰³ Indeed, as has been observed, of contemporary Russian composers it is Stravinsky who receives a far greater number of diary entries.

Britten himself later observed that by 1936 'not many of [Shostakovich's] works had reached England and even at the height of the Anglo-Soviet alliance in 1943 Gerald Abraham highlighted 'our British ignorance of [Soviet] music'.³⁰⁴ Although Britten chose to date the beginning of his 'deep attachment' to Shostakovich's music in his 1966 tribute to Shostakovich to the performance of *Lady Macbeth* he attended in London in March 1936, by the time of his first meeting with the composer in 1960 of the first eight string quartets he seems only to have possessed the score of the first.³⁰⁵ One should therefore qualify Kovnatskaia's interpretation of Britten's 'long interaction with Shostakovich's music, especially his chamber works', given that the evidence strongly suggests that Britten

³⁰³E. Roseberry, 'A debt repaid?' p.235.

³⁰⁴Britten's autograph draft of birthday tribute (BPL: DDS), and Abraham, p.7.

³⁰⁵BPL: 2-9104190, in a [n.d., 1942] New York: International Music Company edition.

only showed a significant interest in the latter after 1960.³⁰⁶ One can also question how far Britten was aware of the full range of Shostakovich's works, such as his wartime arrangements of British and American folk songs or his apparent adoption of the 'Russian' style in *Song of the Forests*. Indeed, it may be that at this stage Pears showed an equal interest in the composer's music and between 1960 and 1965 was more of a catalyst to the creative relationship than has hitherto been recognised.³⁰⁷

Prior to 1960, with the notable exception of *Lady Macbeth*, the evidence suggests that Britten primarily viewed Shostakovich as a composer of large-scale symphonies in the nineteenth-century tradition, a musical form towards which, with the notable exception of Mahler, he remained ambivalent. The enthusiastic reception in the West of the Fifth and Seventh Symphonies, particularly during the Second World War, suggests that Britten would have continued to regard Shostakovich in this light. It was accordingly the Seventh Symphony which Britten cited

³⁰⁶Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p.185. All subsequent Shostakovich scores in Britten's collection have publication dates from 1960 onwards (BPL).

³⁰⁷For Pears's interest in Shostakovich, see his copy of D. Rabinovich, *Dmitry Shostakovich: composer* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), in which he has listed the composer's opus titles to op. 39, and a 1935 Russian edition of *Three Fantastic Dances*, signed 'Benjamin Britten / from P.P. / New York' (BPL: 1-9500433 and 2-9202765).

when accepting the first Aspen Award in 1964.³⁰⁸ However, although Britten possessed a wartime edition of this work, his negative reaction to the 'monumental symphonies' he encountered in Armenia in August 1965 suggests that the Soviet 'epic' symphony held little appeal for him.³⁰⁹ This may partly explain an unelaborated reference in the handwritten first draft of Britten's sixtieth birthday tribute to Shostakovich in 1966 intended for publication in the Soviet Union: 'Like all ~~affairs~~ attachments of course there are moments of misunderstanding, & coolness even', a comment which Pears excised and does not appear in the typewritten second draft. Moreover, in this tribute Britten seemed to express polite admiration for the symphonies as opposed to the chamber music, in which he initially wrote 'Shostakovich is most personal & unique'.³¹⁰

It is striking that the three occasions on which Britten appears to make specific allusions to Shostakovich's music are drawn from the composer's symphonies and made across Britten's creative life, suggesting that he may have retained this perception of the centrality of Shostakovich's

³⁰⁸Aspen, p.12. See also Pears's copy of D. Rabinovich, *Dmitry Shostakovich: composer*, published a year before Britten and Shostakovich first met, which views the Eleventh Symphony as a 'summing up' of Shostakovich's work (BPL: 1-900433).

³⁰⁹BPL: 1000472, and annotated typewritten version of 'A Composer in Russia' for *The Sunday Telegraph*, n.d. [October 1965], p.6 (BPL: 1-02053820).

³¹⁰Autograph draft of birthday tribute to Shostakovich (BPL). See appendix IX for Mitchell's amplification of this comment. By 1960 Britten possessed the scores of the Third, Fifth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth and Eleventh Symphonies in Western editions published between 1942 and 1958 (BPL: 2-1000469; 2-1000473; 2-1000472; 2-1000475; 2-1000474; 2-9204043).

symphonic output: the satirical *Lullaby for a Retired Colonel* (1936; bars 10 to 11), cf. the first-subject march of the First Symphony; the first three bars of the Second Suite for Cello (1967), cf. the opening of the Fifth Symphony; and the Strawberry Seller's song in *Death in Venice* (1973), whose melodic contour recalls that of 'The Suicide' in the Fourteenth Symphony (Examples 19 to 24).³¹¹

Example 19: Britten: *Lullaby for a Retired Colonel* (bars 10-11; first piano)



Example 20: Shostakovich: First Symphony, R8: bars 1-2 (clarinet solo)



Example 21: Britten: Second Suite for Cello, I: *Declamato*, bars 1-3



³¹¹These potential allusions to the Fifth and Fourteenth Symphonies have been widely recognised, but not that of the *Lullaby for a Retired Colonel* to the First Symphony. See, for example, P. Reed's note to the first concert performance in AFMA 1998, p.90.

Example 22: Shostakovich: Fifth Symphony, I: bars 1 – 3 (strings)

Moderato ♩ = 76

Violin I
Violin II
Violoncello
Contrabass

Example 23: Britten: *Death in Venice*, Act II, R305, bars 1-7

STRAWBERRY SELLER

Le be - le fra - go - le... La be - la, be - la

5
u - a, Fine straw - ber - ries, fine straw - ber - ries...

Example 24: Shostakovich: Fourteenth Symphony, IV: 'The Suicide'

Adagio ♩ = 160

Soprano

Три ли - ли - ли, три ли - ли - и...

On the other hand, all three allusions may be unconscious and represent assimilated influence. The piano accompaniment of 'A Poison Tree' (1935), for example, is dominated by a figure which suggests an existing predilection for the melodic contour of Example 20, which could equally be drawn from the Adagio appassionato of Berg's *Lyric Suite*, which

Britten first encountered prior to his earliest acquaintance with Shostakovich's music.³¹²

2.7 'Children of similar fathers'?

In the autograph draft of his 1966 tribute to Shostakovich Britten described his own works as 'so very different from his own perhaps, but stemming conceived in at the same time period, children of the same similar fathers, & with many of the same aims'.³¹³ Although Britten did not elaborate further, it was exceptional for him to define his music so openly, particularly with regard to the music of another living composer. His words are certainly revealing as an attempt to articulate the creative relationship between the two composers as it developed from 1960. However, from the pre-war perspective Britten's comments should be treated with some caution, given that they were intended for publication in the Soviet Union and made in the light of Britten's admiration for the significant amount of chamber music Shostakovich composed from 1938 onwards. Britten was also aware that Shostakovich – in contrast to Stravinsky - especially admired his *War Requiem*, describing Britten's

³¹²Diary, 13 February 1933 (BPL).

³¹³BPL: DDS.

music in 1963 as 'the most outstanding phenomenon of the twentieth century'.³¹⁴

The identification of the 'similar fathers' is less straightforward than it might appear. On the one hand, given Britten's strong predilection for composing for individual musicians, he may partly have been referring to the instrumental and vocal works inspired by Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya over the previous seven years, viewing the Cello Symphony and *The Poet's Echo* (1964-5) as complementary to the First and Second Cello Concertos and *Satires* (1959-66). Britten also seems to be alluding more widely to the Western musical tradition, of which both composers considered themselves, and each other, to be heirs. In a letter to Britten in the same year Shostakovich praised Britten's 'muzykal'naia kul'tura', suggesting that he regarded Britten not only as an exceptionally gifted and broad practical musician but also as a continuation of a line of great composers.³¹⁵ In this light it is striking that Britten's list of favourite composers in 1961 was conspicuously more of a lineage than those chosen by the other British composers interviewed by Schafer in 1961:

³¹⁴Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Waldorf Hotel, Aldwych, London, 5 December 1963, transl. Marion Thorpe (BPL: DDS).

³¹⁵Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 15 October 1966, transl. Keith Grant (BPL: DDS).

Mozart, Purcell, Schubert, Bach, Verdi, Tchaikovsky, Mahler, Berg.³¹⁶

Nine years earlier Pears had similarly highlighted that 'In endeavouring [to build his own musical tradition], Britten has gone to the purest stream of modern music: Monteverdi, Purcell, Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Verdi...Mahler, Berg and Strawinsky'.³¹⁷

Britten may therefore partly be alluding to both composers' shared recognition of the expressive potential of Baroque forms in a twentieth-century context, which was a significant feature of their creative output by 1966. He would, for example, have been conscious not only of the parallel use of a passacaglia in *Lady Macbeth* and *Peter Grimes* and the striking similarity in this respect between his and Shostakovich's Violin Concertos (1940/1948), but also by their continued use of the form, most recently in the Cello Symphony and Tenth String Quartet. Soviet musicologists certainly tended to draw attention to this aspect of Britten's music in the 1960s and 1970s, although emphasising his 'intimate link' with Purcell rather than comparing him to Shostakovich. However, in contrast to the sentiments Britten expressed in the pre-1938 diaries, by 1966 there was a striking difference in what both composers considered to be their creative ancestry, in that whereas Beethoven's music and

³¹⁶Schafer, p.23.

³¹⁷Pears, 'The Vocal Music', in DMHK, p.73.

aesthetic remained important to Shostakovich at every stage of his creative life, Britten largely abandoned his earlier enthusiasm, partly on the grounds of what he viewed as the 'crudity of sound', turning in preference to Mozart, Haydn, Schubert and Tchaikovsky.³¹⁸

Britten may also have had in mind two specific nineteenth-century composers: Mahler and Tchaikovsky.³¹⁹ For example, Britten's initial sketch page of *Russian Funeral* suggests that he fundamentally envisaged the work as based upon the formulaic rhythm of a funeral march.³²⁰ In this respect it is likely that both Britten and Shostakovich were independently influenced by the funeral marches of Mahler. Britten's brass writing thus bears a degree of similarity to 'Lucia's Funeral March' from Shostakovich's *Salute to Spain*, also inspired by the Republican cause and composed under Mahler's influence in 1936. One can also draw a parallel between the funeral marches which end the second and final acts of *Lady Macbeth* (at R359 and R548) and Britten's 'Funeral March for a Boy' in *The Company of Heaven* (1937). However, the most striking features of *Russian Funeral* – its clear texture and sophisticated use of percussion and dynamic contrast – can equally be viewed as a development of

³¹⁸'Gordost' Angliiskoi Muzyki', p.16, and Schafer, p.119.

³¹⁹Cf. Sviatoslav Richter: '...when all's said and done, Shostakovich is descended from Beethoven, via Mahler and Tchaikovsky', Richter, p.126.

³²⁰Microfilm of composition sketch (incomplete) with discarded pages (BPL: MF A28 188-206).

Britten's existing musical language, and the work can also be regarded as first of three Spanish-inspired funeral marches which make characteristic use of percussion to amplify rhythm: the 'Lament (Barcelona, July 1936)' from *Mont Juic* (1937), which has a similar ABA structure and 'continuous, heavy, plodding rhythm', and the 'Funeral March' of *Ballad of Heroes* (1939).³²¹ Moreover, the work's 'incredible premonitions of Shostakovich and Mahler' should not be overstated, given that at the height of his creative relationship with Shostakovich Britten requested that *Russian Funeral* be withdrawn from circulation and the manuscript returned to him, choosing instead to emphasise the importance of *Lady Macbeth* as the initial link between the two composers: it should not therefore necessarily be seen as the 'source of Britten's new style of works for the 30s'.³²² Indeed, as the composer may have sensed by 1968, the work's musical atmosphere is more akin to mature Shostakovich than to his own mature style, resurfacing in the quotation of the same revolutionary song in the Eleventh Symphony (1957) and in some of the brass writing of the Twelfth Symphony (R73 to R75).

³²¹Britten's description of the 'Lament' in his letter to Ralph Hawkes, The Old Mill, Snape, sent on 29 September 1938 (BPL: BH).

³²²L. Kovnatskaia, *Russko-britanskie muzykal'nye sviazi* (St. Petersburg: Gosudarstvennaia konservatoriia, 2009), p.298; typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to David Adams, Boosey and Hawkes, London, 1 May 1968 (BPL: BH); and L. Kovnatskaia, 'Russian Funeral through Russian ears: aural impressions and some questions', *International Journal of Musicology* 2, 1993, p.329.

Despite the Mahlerian musical atmosphere of sections of *Lady Macbeth*, it is unclear how far Britten appreciated the degree of this aspect of creative affinity during the 1930s, and he did not link the two composers in his diaries or correspondence. Moreover, he did not obtain the score of Shostakovich's Fourth Symphony until the composer presented him with a copy of the 1962 first edition in 1964, illness having prevented him from attending the first performance of the work in the West two years earlier, and the text of his 1966 birthday tribute suggests that he only studied the score in detail at that point.³²³ Britten and Shostakovich do not appear to have discussed Mahler during any of their meetings,³²⁴ and may well have admired different aspects of music: certainly, his influence on both composers had hitherto largely taken different forms.³²⁵ Nevertheless, Mitchell emphasises 'the very strong links between them [by the 1960s] because of their own individual passions for Mahler'.³²⁶ Given Britten's reference to the composer in his first interview with *Sovetskaia muzyka* in

³²³Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962, inscribed in Russian 'To dear Benjamin Britten/from a very affectionate D. Shostakovich/13.IV 1964./Moscow' (BPL: 2-1000471); and Britten's autograph draft of his birthday tribute: 'I have in the last few days been reading the scores of two of his finest symphonies, the 4th & the 5th' (BPL).

³²⁴Appendix X. Cf. Victor Hochhauser's testimony that practical, and relatively short, musical discussions were the norm between the two composers; appendix VII. Colin Graham recalled a conversation on the subject of Puccini's operas in Blyth, p.121. Sir John Morgan adds that when Britten and Shostakovich met, 'they spoke, in a very real sense, the same language'; interview with the author, 20 March 2010.

³²⁵Britten particularly admired Mahler as 'a composer with the finest ear for orchestral sound', AFMA 1960, p.81, whereas the example of Shostakovich's own music suggests that Mahler's juxtaposition of idiom, particularly the tragic and grotesque, were particularly important. See also Roseberry, 'A debt repaid?', p.237.

³²⁶Appendices J and I.

March 1963, he is therefore likely to have identified this area of creative affinity by the time he attended a Moscow performance of *Katerina Izmailova* with Shostakovich in the same month.³²⁷ How far Britten's statement in his 1966 birthday tribute was intended to encompass the additional influence of Berg on both composers during their formative years is unclear. In contrast to Mahler, Britten did not refer to Berg in his four interviews with the Soviet press between 1963 and 1965, perhaps in recognition of a continued degree of official hostility in the Soviet Union towards the Second Viennese School.

Whereas Tchaikovsky can also be viewed as one of a number of 'stylistic forebears' of Britten and Shostakovich, it is also the case, as Liudmila Kovnatskaia observes, that both composers were 'interested in different aspects of [Tchaikovsky's] work, or rather, they generally reacted differently to the same impulse'.³²⁸ As with Mahler, Irina Shostakovich does not recall that Britten and Shostakovich ever discussed Tchaikovsky's music, and by the time the two composers met in person Shostakovich's admiration for Tchaikovsky had to a significant degree

³²⁷'Britten rasskazyvaet', p. 102, and entry in Britten's desk diary for 20 March 1963 (BPL).

³²⁸Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p.186.

been eclipsed by Musorgsky as a source of creative inspiration.³²⁹ Nevertheless, a shared respect for Tchaikovsky remains a valid point of contact: Shostakovich admired Tchaikovsky's 'definite and profound purpose in everything he wrote', his 'vivid sense of tragedy', his 'wealth of composition technique...and magnificent orchestration', as well as the cosmopolitanism of his creative outlook which in no way detracted from his national character'.³³⁰ These are viewpoints with which, as has been observed, Britten would have concurred.

On the other hand, in contrast to Britten, Shostakovich also regarded Tchaikovsky as 'a creative and technical encyclopaedia to which every Russian composer has reference in the course of his own work'.³³¹ One can cite the musical as well as dramatic parallels between Act I scene four of *Nos* with Act III scene 1 of *Pique Dame*, as well as the coda of the Fourth Symphony, which appears to make a symbolic allusion to the double bass figure from R12 to the end of the final movement of Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony. Indeed, Shostakovich also emulated to a degree the form of

³²⁹Appendix X; and *D. Shostakovich: O vremeni i o sebe*, p.85: 'In my years after the Conservatory...Tchaikovsky's art seemed unattainable. My love for it was crazy and self-abandoning. The love is still there, but I no longer accept everything as unconditionally as before. My other passion is Musorgsky, whom I admire and revere' (author's translation). The source for this reference is cited as *Teatralnaia nedelia*, 24 February 1941. For Rostropovich's recollection that by the time of his acquaintance with Shostakovich, the composer held Tchaikovsky in relatively low regard, see Glasow, p.90.

³³⁰D. Shostakovich, *Russian Symphony: Thoughts about Tchaikovsky* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), pp. 2, 4-5.

³³¹*Ibid.*

Tchaikovsky's symphonies, which, again in contrast to Britten, he largely admired, in starting the climax at the beginning of the recapitulation.³³² Similarly, Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto was part of Shostakovich's performing repertoire until 1930 and – as in the case of Britten in 1938 – the composer would have been highly aware of its model when he came to compose his own concerto in 1933, although it is unclear whether Tchaikovsky is among one of the large number of musical citations in the score.³³³

However, in the light of the blatant allusions to Tchaikovsky in Soviet 'light' Classical music, such as the Introduction of Khachaturian's *Lermontov Suite* (1940/44), Shostakovich's 'encyclopaedia' comment was less than entirely positive. Although Shostakovich's own 'Folk Feast' (no. 3) and the Scene (no. 11, from R120 to R122) of the Suite from *The Gadfly* (1955) straightforwardly allude to the national dances and Act III finale of *Swan Lake*, partly in order to create a nineteenth-century idiom in line with the scenario of the film, it is unclear how far Shostakovich rated this

³³²Shostakovich did express limited criticism of some of Tchaikovsky's finales; *Iunost* 1968, no. 5, quoted in *D. Shostakovich: O vremeni i o sebe*, p. 307.

³³³S. Khentova, *Shostakovich: Pianist* (Leningrad: Muzyka, 1964), pp. 66 and 85 cites a performance by Shostakovich in 1927. Sofia Moshevich adds a further example in 1930 in S. Moshevich, *Dmitrii Shostakovich: Pianist* (Montréal; London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), p.65. A possible allusion to Tchaikovsky in the Shostakovich Piano Concerto is in the finale at R76: bar 9 to R77.

music above hack work.³³⁴ Moreover, although Shostakovich's scoring of the waltz in 'Dance Music' from the incidental music to *Hamlet* (1932) clearly drew upon Tchaikovsky's unparalleled mastery of this genre in Russian music, he was also not adverse to referring to 'popular' Tchaikovsky in a satirical context. This impulse, if not examined by Esti Sheinberg in the most significant study of the satirical aspect of Shostakovich's music, remained with the composer throughout his creative life, culminating in the explicit reference to *Pique Dame* in the first setting of *Four Verses of Captain Lebiadkin* (1974).³³⁵

Although Musorgsky has also been highlighted as part of the shared 'stylistic genesis' of Britten and Shostakovich, the evidence suggests that Britten did not regard the importance of Musorgsky as 'Shostakovich's life companion' as an area of creative affinity, notwithstanding the reassertion of this aspect of Shostakovich's musical personality at the time of their creative relationship, not least in the conception of the Fourteenth Symphony.³³⁶ Galina Vishnevskaya believes that her performance of *Songs and Dances of Death* at the Aldeburgh Festival on 6

³³⁴Glikman, p.275.

³³⁵Sheinberg, E., *Irony, Satire, Parody and the Grotesque in the Music of Shostakovich: A Theory of Incongruities* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).

³³⁶Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p. 186, and C. Emerson, 'Shostakovich, Tsvetaeva, Pushkin, Musorgsky: Songs and Dances of Death and Survival', in Bartlett, p. 191.

July 1961 influenced Britten in the declamatory soprano part of *War Requiem*, but it is more likely that the composer was inspired instead by the particular characteristics of her ‘voice,...musicianship and...temperament’, and by his existing admiration for Verdi.³³⁷ Whilst Britten possessed a complete edition of Musorgsky’s songs, it is revealing that he did not possess Shostakovich’s orchestration of *Songs and Dances of Death* (1962) and that his score of *Khovanshchina* is in Rimsky-Korsakov’s rather than Shostakovich’s orchestration (1959), since both Shostakovich orchestrations were published in Moscow in 1966 and 1963 respectively and would have been readily obtainable through Rostropovich.³³⁸ Moreover, although Shostakovich presented Britten with a copy of the orchestral score of *The Execution of Stepan Razin* (1964) on New Year’s Day 1967, Britten does not appear to have shown anything other than polite interest in the work, nor does he seem to have appreciated the extent to which Shostakovich conceived it in the light of Musorgsky’s music and empathised with the subject matter of the poem.³³⁹ One can make the same observation regarding Britten’s attitude

³³⁷Appendix XIII; photocopy of letter from Britten to V. Stepanov, 14 December 1961 (BPL: USSR Moscow); and for the programme of this recital, vid. BPL: PG/AF/1961/10. Britten’s earlier letters to Vishnevskaya, such as on 1 April 1961, indicate that he was already a ‘great admirer’ of her voice (BPL:MR).

³³⁸*Musorgski: Romansy i pesni* (Leningrad: GMI, 1960) (BPL: 2-01050972). Britten’s copy of *Khovanshchina* is a 1970 Muzyka edition of the vocal score (BPL: 2-1000776).

³³⁹Pears, pp.148-9. The copy is the first edition of the score (Moscow: Muzyka, 1966), and is inscribed by Shostakovich in Russian: ‘To Benjamin Britten with a feeling of great respect, 1 January 1967’ (BPL: 2-9401243). See Sollertinsky, p.170: ‘This episode [of

towards similar passages in the Thirteenth Symphony, notwithstanding his own recent setting of Yevtushenko's declamatory verse, albeit on a far smaller scale, in *Voices for Today* (1965).³⁴⁰

2.8 Parody and satire

The musical influence of Shostakovich on Britten is therefore less than straightforward to assess. Whereas by 1995 Donald Mitchell regarded Shostakovich as 'a direct influence' on Britten, he had made no mention of Shostakovich in his analyses of Britten's 'musical atmosphere' forty years earlier, suggesting that his interpretation of Britten in the 1930s may have been influenced by his intimacy with the composer during the period of his association with Shostakovich, as well as by a desire to consolidate Britten's critical reputation and to establish an official creative lineage in the decade after his death.³⁴¹ Moreover, in the case of Britten, notwithstanding the evidence of the diaries and miniature scores, there is a additional problem of chronology in that the composer's documented familiarity with *Lady Macbeth* between November 1935 and March 1936

Stepan Razin]...fascinated Shostakovich, who followed the example of his favourite composer Musorgsky...in turning to one of the most crucial moments in Russian history'.

³⁴⁰See 'British Music in the World Today' for Britten not feeling 'an awful lot of sympathy' for Shostakovich's 'last two or three symphonies [nos. 11-13]' in December 1964, Kildea p.272.

³⁴¹Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?', p.32. Neither the 'The Musical Atmosphere' in DMHK, pp.9-58, nor Mitchell's articles on Britten in *Music Survey*, New Series, 1949-52, make any reference to Shostakovich.

coincided not only with his film and documentary work but also with his equal if not greater enthusiasm for Mahler and Berg, suggesting a variety of influences whose relative importance is difficult to assess.³⁴² Britten's predilection for the passacaglia, for example, could equally have been stimulated by Berg's *Wozzeck*, in which case it would be more appropriate to suggest that Britten and Shostakovich were independently influenced by the general revival of the form in the second quarter of the twentieth century and appreciated its expressive possibilities: hence Britten's use of the form in the piano part of *Reveille* a year later, and amplifying Britten's 'children of similar fathers' comment.

One may similarly question the assertion that '...the direct influence of [Shostakovich's] music is especially noticeable in Britten's compositions of the 1930s and 1940s...Shostakovich exerted his influence on Britten precisely at the time when the English composer's identity was being shaped and consolidated'.³⁴³ Although Britten regarded *Our Hunting Fathers* (1936) as his 'real opus one', and a variety of commentators have emphasised the influence of Shostakovich on the score, one could equally argue that many of the defining features of Britten's style – such as an interest in percussion and a preference for clarity of texture – are evident

³⁴²For the chronology of Britten's admiration for both composers, see *Letters from a Life I*, pp.425-6 and 493-4.

³⁴³Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p.185.

in earlier compositions and certainly before his first documented acquaintance with Shostakovich's music in 1934. Indeed, in the unpublished draft of Britten's 1936 article on *Lady Macbeth*, he described Shostakovich as 'yet more of an intellectual cult than a composer of importance to the general public',³⁴⁴ and in an unpublished letter to Alan Bush four months after this performance, in which he expounds his musical and aesthetic ideals in some detail, Britten did not mention Shostakovich as a musical influence, notwithstanding Bush's active espousal of Communism. Indeed, of contemporary Russian composers, it is Stravinsky who is instead cited by Britten.³⁴⁵

The influence of a work such as *Symphonie des Psaulms* on *Sinfonia da Requiem* four years later, which, as has been observed, remained less than entirely assimilated as late as 1959-63, also suggests that Britten's post-1960 association with Shostakovich may to a degree have served as a form of psychological liberation.³⁴⁶ In December 1966 Pears recorded that

³⁴⁴Britten's autograph draft of article for *World Film News* 1/1 (April 1936), Kildea, p.17.

³⁴⁵Letter from Britten to Alan Bush, 2 August 1936, Quarryfield, Crantock, 2 August 1936: 'My greatest influences are: Beethoven (from the beginning), Mahler, Stravinsky & Berg (increasing rapidly). The three greatest works of this era I feel are: Das Lied von der Erde, Psalm Symphony, & Wozzeck...' (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence).

³⁴⁶Donald Mitchell, for example, believes that Britten 'constantly learned from Stravinsky throughout his creative life', appendix IX. On the other hand, Jane Brandon's view that the *Death in Venice* Overture 'resonates with Stravinsky's re-invention of Venetian church-music' in *Canticum Sacrum* (1956) is unconvincing, since Britten did not possess the score and is more likely to have drawn upon Monteverdi independently; Brandon, pp.313-4. It is more revealing that in 1970 Bayan Northcott had highlighted

'Ben tells [Shostakovich] his recent dream of Stravinsky as a monumental hunchback pointing with a quivering finger at a passage in the Cello Symphony "How dare you write that bar?"³⁴⁷ It is also striking that Irina Shostakovich feels that Stravinsky 'persecuted' (травил) Britten.³⁴⁸ Stravinsky certainly seems to have been sceptical of the value of both works which initially cemented the Britten-Shostakovich relationship, *Lady Macbeth* and *War Requiem*, and Britten would have been particularly sensitive to his disparaging comments about the 'Kleenex at the ready' reception accorded the latter were he aware of them.³⁴⁹ Robert Craft's description of the dynamic between Shostakovich and Stravinsky when they met in Moscow in 1962 also suggests an ambivalent attitude towards the composer on Shostakovich's part coupled, as in Britten's case, with a residual admiration for *Symphonie des Psaumes*.³⁵⁰

One can also question Mitchell's view that the common use of parody and satire represents 'the really significant relationship' between Britten

Britten's 'general progress towards utter attenuation' as 'parallel in some ways to the impasse reached by Stravinsky after *The Rake's Progress*', and asked whether 'a return to more complex instrumental, even orchestral interests, might not now offer a breakthrough comparable to Stravinsky's adoption of serialism'; 'Composers of the Sixties', *Music and Musicians*, January 1970, p.33.

³⁴⁷Pears, p.139. Cf. Bayan Northcott's view that from the 1950s 'far from getting shot of Stravinsky, Britten felt more and more bothered by him'; 'The Fine Art of Borrowing: Britten and Stravinsky', *AFMA* 1994, p.17.

³⁴⁸Appendix X.

³⁴⁹Walsh, p.8, and I. Stravinsky and R. Craft, *Themes and Conclusions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp.26-7.

³⁵⁰R. Craft, *Stravinsky: Chronicle of a Friendship (1948-1971)* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1972), p.206.

and Shostakovich.³⁵¹ One can, of course, highlight examples of this trait in Britten's music between 1936 and 1942 which suggest Shostakovich as a model, such as ironic use of march forms in the *Pacifist March* (1936-7) and the final movement of the Piano Concerto, although one should add Britten showed an equal tendency to employ the waltz in this context, as in the latter's second movement, in which the piano soloist is accompanied by solo tambourine, and the parody of *Der Rosenkavalier* in 'Channel Crossing' from *Love from a Stranger*. However, it is more revealing that from a similar age both composers explicitly alluded to the topic of the dance of death in its nineteenth-century resurgence as a manifestation of a satirical creative disposition: Shostakovich, for example, in the 'Dance of Death' in his *Aphorisms* (1927) and 'Procession of Ghouls' (R3 to R4) in *The Tale of Priest and his Servant, Balda* (1934), and Britten, as Mitchell has demonstrated, in a series of works from 1936 to 1962.³⁵²

On the other hand, whereas Britten's allusion to the topic of the dance of death ultimately proved transitory, Shostakovich's continued reference to it in a variety of contexts from 1960 onwards suggests a closer degree of identification. Whereas he may initially have drawn upon its debased use

³⁵¹Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?', p.35.

³⁵²Mitchell, 'Violent Climates', in CCBB.

in the Saint-Saëns *Danse Macabre* and was prepared to employ it in less serious contexts than Britten, by the latter stage Musorgsky's grotesque treatment of the motif in *Songs and Dances of Death* constituted a prime source of reference, contributing directly to the genesis of the Fourteenth Symphony between 1962 and 1969. Indeed, Britten's own initial sources of reference were not necessarily identical and may have included Schubert's Quartet in D minor, whose final movement Britten described as 'A tremendous, breathless dance of death', as well as Auden's literary fixation with death in the context of the decadence of bourgeois civilisation, in addition to the likely impact of Mahler's representation of the motif.³⁵³ Moreover, it is the central section of the third movement of Stravinsky's *Symphonie de Psaumes* whose rhythms are recalled in the dance of death of Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem*, and in contrast to Shostakovich, Britten always employed a variety of percussion to depict the topic.

Mitchell's thesis can be qualified in several further respects. In terms of parody and satire, Britten's musical language in the mid-1930s can

³⁵³AFMA 1954, p.28. Cf. Britten's 'Analysis by the Composer' of his own dance of death in the first edition of the full score of *Sinfonia da Requiem* (H.L.21; New York: 1942), and 'The Good Companions', interview by Gillian Widdicombe with Peter Pears, *The Observer, Review*, 30 March 1980, p.33, which highlights the involvement of Britten's family in the occult and the impact of the deaths of Britten's parents in 1934 and 1937 as possible factors influencing Britten's creative fascination with death. See also Britten's diary, 5 October 1935, for the impact of Auden's *The Dance of Death*.

equally be viewed in terms of a wider musical reference, particularly to the music of Prokofiev. As has been observed, Britten's diaries indicate an early familiarity with the salient characteristics of the composer's musical language, and his 'grotesque' marking of a reference to 'A bearded ancient with a scythe' in the first choral dance in Act II of *Gloriana* is more likely to have been drawn from Prokofiev than Shostakovich. Indeed, whereas Mitchell views Prokofiev's influence on Britten as significant but indirect, occurring through the music of Shostakovich, Britten appears instead to have drawn upon Prokofiev directly and independently, as in the bassoon solo accompanied by trombone and *marcato* bass drum rhythms in 'Merlyn's Tune and Tree Music' from *The Sword in the Stone* (1939) (bars 44 to 49, Example 25), the 3/8 rhythms and instrumentation of Britten's dance of death in the scherzo of the Violin Concerto (R12: bars 1 to 9), and in the final movement of the Piano Concerto, in which Britten adds to what appears a hybrid of Prokofiev and Shostakovich's satirical musical language what were to become characteristics of his own mature style: the use of timpani glissandi and varied use of suspended cymbal.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁴Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?', p.35.

Example 25: *The Sword in the Stone*, 2: 'Merlyn's Tune and Tree Music',

bars 44-9

Andante maestoso (very deliberate and quite pompous)

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Flute:** Starts with a rest, then plays a melodic line starting in bar 48 with dynamics *pp* and *f*.
- Clarinet in B \flat :** Plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting in bar 48 with dynamic *p*.
- Bassoon:** Labeled 'Solo', it plays a melodic line starting in bar 48 with dynamics *pp* and *ff*.
- Trumpet in C:** Plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting in bar 48 with dynamic *pp* and instruction 'senza sord.'
- Tenor Trombone:** Plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting in bar 48 with dynamic *pp* and instruction 'senza sord.'
- Percussion:** Features 'Susp. Cym.' and 'B.D.' (Bass Drum) playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, starting in bar 48 with dynamic *pp marcato* and instruction 'Ped.'
- Harp:** Plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting in bar 48 with dynamic *p*.

Further, although Britten and Shostakovich both employed parody and satire in the 1930s and early 1940s, they drew upon separate literary and cultural traditions which, to an extent, reflected the entirely different social and political and contexts in which they worked. The gentle social satire of *Moskva, Cheryomushki* (1958) thus has little in common with the searching final 'Litany' of *Paul Bunyan* and Auden's topical variety of satire. Shostakovich's sarcasm and penchant for black humour and the grotesque were particularly stimulated by Gogol and Dostoevskii, but by the 1960s, in so far as Russian literature acted as a creative stimulus to Britten, it reflected a more romanticised and less cynical attitude: he was

more interested in the possibilities of Pushkin, Chekov and – to judge from his interest in an operatic version of *Anna Karenina* in the mid-1960s – Tolstoi, and he does not seem to have shown any significant interest in the twentieth-century scenarios he received from Soviet admirers.³⁵⁵ Indeed, whereas Britten's Christian upbringing seems to have been powerful enough to resist outright cynicism, Levon Hakobian emphasises that Shostakovich, as a Soviet intellectual, was a cynic by definition.³⁵⁶ Thus, whilst Britten satirised clerical hypocrisy in *Peter Grimes* and *War Requiem*, and also parodied plainsong in the vocal line of *Our Hunting Fathers*, there is nothing in his music akin to the crude anticlericalism of Shostakovich's *The Tale of a Priest and his Servant, Balda* or *Lady Macbeth*.

With the exception of *Our Hunting Fathers*, as Mitchell acknowledges, Britten's use of satire and parody was conspicuously less belligerent, although 'the evolution of the twenties into the thirties' does not entirely account for this area of creative difference.³⁵⁷ Britten's early predilection for the waltz from 1923-5 onwards, and the movement titles of the *Simple Symphony*, indicate that for him parody should be viewed as a

³⁵⁵For a translated scenario received by Britten in 1964 based upon Alexander Grin's *Purple [sic] Sails* (1923), see letter from Dzhemal Dalgat to Britten, Leningrad, 25 March 1964 (BPL: DD) and for a possible projected scenario based upon Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* (1943), see L. Kovernatskaia, 'Nadezhda Golubovskaia i Benjamin Britten: eskiz siuzheta' in *Prinoshenie Nadezhde Golubovskoi* (St. Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2007).

³⁵⁶Letter to the author, 10 September 2010.

³⁵⁷Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?' p. 38.

development of an existing creative trait which pre-dated his acquaintance with Shostakovich's music. Indeed, in August 1936 Britten would ask: 'Why should serious composers only use the dance form for satire?'³⁵⁸ which suggests that his affinity for this aspect of Shostakovich's music was by no means inevitable, as is indicated by his striking use of waltz time in his setting of Manley Hopkins's 'Rosa Mystica' in *A.M.D.G.* three years later. It was also unusual for Britten to make a satirical allusion to another composer and when he did so, as in his parodies of Italian verismo opera in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and of Wagner in *The Sword in The Stone* and *Albert Herring*, the effect is affectionate, just as his parody of European musical styles and forms in *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* (1937) or of contemporary dance music in the 'quasi blues' 'The Spider and the Fly' in *Johnson over Jordan* (1939) are in entirely serious contexts.

Perhaps most importantly, the satirical impulse in Britten was ultimately transient. Whereas in the 1960s it reasserted itself vigorously in Shostakovich's music in works such as the *Satires* and *Five Romances on Texts from 'Krokodil'*, the latter with a satirical reference to the 'Dies irae' chant in the third setting, in Britten's case it largely did not survive the

³⁵⁸Letter from Britten to Alan Bush, Quarryfield, Crantock, 2 August 1936 (BPL: Alan Bush correspondence).

Second World War and his association with Auden, as is suggested by the composer's replacement of the original third movement of the Piano Concerto in 1945. Indeed, by the 1960s – unless one considers the stylised form of the Church Parables, each with a life-affirming ending, as a form of parody – Britten's sense of parody seems to have been subsumed by increasing pessimism, which also suggests that the initial impulse for the two composers may not have been identical. It is striking that after his return to the United Kingdom in 1942 Britten rarely followed Shostakovich in juxtaposing the tragic and satirical. His decision to engrave Wilfred Owen's 'My subject is War, and the pity of War' on the front page of *War Requiem* in 1962 is therefore revealing, since this was the final work in which he depicted the dance of death, and its pessimism characterises a variety of subsequent works.³⁵⁹

It was only at the end of Britten's creative life, between 1971 and 1975, that this aspect of Britten's creative personality arguably reasserted itself: in the 'marcia' and 'barcarola' of the Third Suite for Cello, the 'Carol' of *Sacred and Profane*, marked 'Flowing – with parody!' and the 'Burlesque' of the Third String Quartet. Whereas the vocal setting may represent an

³⁵⁹On the other hand, one could consider the macabre use of *f* xylophone to depict Sir Philip Wingrave and his ancestors in *Owen Wingrave*, as between RM 181 and RM 183, as a further manifestation of the dance of death in Britten's output, or, in a distorted sense, the imagery of T.S. Eliot's *The Death of Saint Narcissus* set as *Canticle V* in 1974.

affectionate parody of Britten's own contributions to the genre, the outer sections of the string quartet's 'Burlesque' – marked 'Fast - con fuoco,' 'roughly' and "'Maggiore'" – demonstrate a dynamic and rhythmic crudity uncharacteristic of post-war Britten, and may reflect the influence of Shostakovich's Tenth String Quartet (cf. R22 to R28 and R71 to R74), which Britten had particularly admired since October 1964.³⁶⁰ Similarly, the 'Quasi "Trio"' employs a variety of string effects which accentuate the atmosphere of parody and, in the case of the instruction for the viola to be played on the wrong side of the bridge may allude to Shostakovich's instruction to play on the body with the stick of the bow in the Thirteenth String Quartet.

However, notwithstanding Britten's reticence on the subject to Colin Matthews, such devices may primarily constitute a form of musical tribute to Shostakovich, who died two months prior to Britten beginning work on the score, as opposed to expressions of parody.³⁶¹ Given that Britten's tribute to Shostakovich on his death described him as 'the greatest composer that I shall ever have the honour to know,' and is also exceptional in being handwritten at a time when writing was particularly

³⁶⁰'Musician of the Year', Kildea, p.267.

³⁶¹Letter from Colin Matthews to the author, 29 October 2010: 'Commenting about his own music [in 1975-6] in other than rather throwaway terms simply didn't happen, and it was very difficult to draw him out'.

difficult for him, it is not unlikely that he would have wished to make some form of musical reference at this stage, hence the placing of the 'Burlesque' between the autobiographical and deeply serious 'Solo' and final 'Recitative and Passacaglia'.³⁶² On the other hand, in a work whose uncharacteristic use of self-quotation strongly suggests an autobiographical significance, Britten may also be alluding to his pre-war sense of parody evident as early as 1933 in the 'Burlesque' of the *Three Divertimenti*. The movement's title may also refer to the 'Rondo-Burleske' of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, a work which he had admired since 1935 and with whose overall valedictory nature the Third String Quartet may also to a degree be compared.³⁶³ Thus, as with Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony, the work as a whole represents a rather wider, but, as shall be seen, more stoical form of reflection on his creative life in the context of failing health.

2.9 Use of percussion and celesta

In 1968 Marion Thorpe highlighted both composers' 'unfailing sense of using instruments in an interesting, new and inevitable way,' but this

³⁶²Britten's pencil draft for 'Message broadcast during the BBC TV tribute to the memory of Dmitri Shostakovich, 10 August 1975, sent to BBC Russian service for translation and subsequent transmission to Russia' (BPL: DDS); cf. Britten's final letter to Shostakovich, 2 December 1974: 'Please forgive me that this letter is typed, but writing by hand is practically impossible for me now' (BPL: DDS).

³⁶³See Britten's draft of 'On Behalf of Gustav Mahler', Kildea, p.39, for his admiration for this 'outstanding' movement.

point of comparison has not been analysed in detail in respect to their use of percussion.³⁶⁴ It therefore sheds further light on the relationship between Britten and Shostakovich to examine the interpretation that Britten's sophisticated understanding of the possibilities of percussion was stimulated by Shostakovich in the mid-1930s, and to consider how both composers continued to use percussion across their creative lives, particularly in the light of the testimony of David Corkhill, who played percussion under Britten's direction from 1969 onwards and succeeded James Blades as timpanist of the English Chamber Orchestra in January 1973, as well as the evidence of the Britten Thematic Catalogue, which enables a provisional consideration of Britten's pre-1928 unpublished juvenilia.³⁶⁵

It is therefore revealing that although Britten's first sophisticated use of an extended percussion section was in the *Rossini Suite* and *Night Mail* (July 1935 to January 1936), in as early a score as *Plymouth Town* he was clearly aware of the potential of percussion in a dramatic context, employing a variety of effects, such as *ppp* (*non marcato*) timpani with

³⁶⁴AFMA 1968, p.68.

³⁶⁵Interview with the author, 19 May 2010. The Britten Thematic Catalogue is in the process of being compiled by the BPL but was consulted by the author for Britten's pre-1928 works in a preliminary online version on 18 September 2009; catalogue numbers are likely to change and are therefore not given. Britten's appointment diary indicates that he met Corkhill to discuss percussion in *Death in Venice* 2 January 1973 (BPL).

sponge sticks (at R:G1) and what was to become a hallmark of his style, the suspended cymbal (R:U: bar 16); indeed, amongst his published works, he had already employed the latter in *Quatre chansons françaises* (1928). The Britten Thematic Catalogue in fact indicates that Britten first used percussion in his *Symphony in C* (1922) and was further to explore its possibilities in the significant volume of orchestral scores composed between 1926 and 1927: the *Symphony in D minor* (1927), for example, employs timpani, triangle, castanets, cymbal and bass drum, and *Chaos and Cosmos* (1927) timpani, cymbal, bass drum and gong. Whereas in some of these works, Britten may primarily have been following the printed instrumentation on the full score, which generally included timpani and several blank lines for percussion, the choice of instrumentation suggests that Britten's interest in percussion significantly pre-dated his knowledge of Shostakovich's music.³⁶⁶

The use of the xylophone presents a particularly illuminating contrast between the two composers, not least because a variety of commentators have detected the influence of Shostakovich in the use of xylophone solo in the 'Epilogue and Funeral March' of *Our Hunting Fathers* (Example

³⁶⁶For references to Britten's use of percussion in the *Suite fantastique* (1926) and *Symphony in D minor* (1927), see C. Mark, 'Juvenilia (1922-1932)', CCBB, pp.18-19, 20.

26).³⁶⁷ Although Britten did not elaborate which were his 'favourite sounds' in his 1961 interview with Schafer, Mitchell believes that the sonority of the xylophone was a major source of inspiration to him.³⁶⁸ However, Britten's use of the xylophone can be distinguished in three ways from that of Shostakovich. Firstly, he employed the instrument in a wider variety of contexts, ranging from the 'Love Music' of *Love from a Stranger* to the characterisation of the Powder Monkeys in *Billy Budd*, yet selectively in each individual work: in the *Welcome Ode*, for example, for only two bars. Secondly, he generally used it in conjunction with a range of percussion instruments – whip and suspended cymbal in the 'Dies Irae' of *Sinfonia da Requiem* - or as part of an integrated orchestral texture. Even in short scores such as the fifth orchestral interlude from *Peter Grimes* or *The Building of the House* the instrument is employed throughout its dynamic range, and in the 'Epilogue and Funeral March' of *Our Hunting Fathers* it is employed no more than *p*, an uncharacteristic use for Shostakovich. Finally, from *The Prince of the Pagodas* onwards, as Cooke has demonstrated, Britten employed the xylophone as one of a variety of percussion instruments to create an oriental sonority with a

³⁶⁷Michael Kennedy in A. Blyth, ed., *Song on Record: 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.202; M. Cooke, CD note to EMI 7243 5 56534 20 (1998), p.4; and Mitchell, 'What do we know about Britten now?' p.35.

³⁶⁸Schafer, p.119, and appendix IX.

multilayered symbolic importance.³⁶⁹ Shostakovich's use of the xylophone, on the other hand, was more usually *ff(ff)* and suggestive of a machine or hammer effect, as in the *marcatissimo* opening of the Fourth Symphony or in the Largo of the Fifth Symphony (R89 to R90). Indeed, in the Second Cello Concerto, David Corkhill feels that its use is uncharacteristic of conventional xylophone writing, suggesting instead the cimbalom (R100 to R101, Example 27).³⁷⁰ Deliberate vulgarity combined with an extra-musical connotation such as death thus frequently seems to be the intended effect. In *Lady Macbeth* the instrument may also have a sexual connotation, for example, between R183 and R190 or R500 to R501, given that Shostakovich removed the elaborate xylophone part from the interlude between scenes 2 and 3 when he revised the second of the *Five Interludes* for the rehabilitated *Katerina Izmailova* in 1963.³⁷¹

Example 26: Britten: *Our Hunting Fathers*, 'Epilogue and Funeral March', bars 1-2



³⁶⁹M. Cooke, *Britten and the Far East*, *passim*.

³⁷⁰Interview with the author, 19 May 2010.

³⁷¹See M. Iakubov's commentary to *D. Shostakovich: NSS* vol. 69 (Moscow: DSCH: 2002), p.187.

Example 27: Shostakovich: Cello Concerto No. 2, R100: bars 6-7



A comparison of both composers' use of vibraphone is similarly illuminating, since it is possible that Britten's elaborate use of the instrument in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *War Requiem* and the Cello Symphony – at a time when it remained a rarity in the conventional orchestra - influenced Shostakovich in its unprecedented use in his final two symphonies.³⁷² In the Fourteenth Symphony, the vibraphone primarily illustrates the imagery of the poetry: in 'Lorelei' for seven bars, *p* and in conjunction with celesta and *divisi* strings in their upper register, and for nine bars *p* and *mf* in 'The Death of the Poet'. In the Fifteenth Symphony, on the other hand, a twenty-two bar and mostly *p* solo in the second movement (R76: bar 4 to R78: bar 3) succeeds a solo celesta passage and suggests a more symbolic use, as in the final six bars of 'Immortality' which conclude the *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* (1974).

³⁷²See, for example, letter from Britten to James Blades, 19 April 1960: 'The percussion parts for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" are, as you might imagine, elaborate. I could not resist it since I knew for whom I was writing!...Apart from the usual other instruments, I have got big parts for vibraphone, glockenspiel and xylophone, demanding a certain amount of virtuosity' (BPL: James Blades correspondence).

However, in contrast to Shostakovich, Britten employed the vibraphone over a longer period, from *Paul Bunyan* onwards, and from the 1960s it assumed an increasing importance in his music, possibly representing a reassertion of the pre-war impact of Berg's use of the instrument as sustaining percussion as a means of dramatic punctuation. Whereas in the Cello Symphony he seems to have employed the vibraphone for its colour, as a transparent middle-register instrument which would not impede the projection of the solo cello, after 1955 onwards he more characteristically employed it symbolically, to represent unattainable allure, whether of peace and 'the horrible power that makes men fight' in *Owen Wingrave* or of sexual desire in the person of Tadzio in *Death in Venice*. Britten also employed the instrument in a more sophisticated way than Shostakovich: David Corkhill thus recalls that by 1971 Britten showed a particular interest in whether the resonators should be switched off and fans closed, which is not stipulated in Shostakovich's scores.³⁷³ Moreover, in contrast to Shostakovich, Britten's use of percussion developed radically in the post-war period, in response to the stimulus of writing for James Blades and a new generation of virtuoso percussion players such as Corkhill and culminating in the 'very elaborate instrumentation' in *Death in Venice*, in which percussion

³⁷³Interview with the author, 19 May 2005.

effectively constitutes the main orchestra as opposed to the highly significant component of the Fourteenth Symphony.³⁷⁴

Corkhill also feels that, in contrast to Shostakovich, Britten's general preference was for soft-edged percussion, a reflection both of his pacifism as well as a predilection for a melodic sound such as bells and a more French conception of orchestral colour.³⁷⁵ In this sense, Britten's use of percussion is more akin to that of Stravinsky in *Le Chant du Rossignol*. Indeed, when Britten prepared a performance of Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto in 1972 at two points in the score he seems to have envisaged employing timpani rather than bass drum, again suggesting a

³⁷⁴See, for example, Britten's letter to Blades on 8 February 1966, in which he asked a variety of questions regarding sophisticated percussion effects in *The Burning Fiery Furnace*, including 'a suggestion of four or five different pitches' for whip and 'a long round drum, which could be played in procession and beaten with one stick only [with a pitch] somewhere around the bottom cello D'. By 1968 Britten was consulting Blades on the use of more exotic percussion instruments such as dulcimers in *The Prodigal Son* (undated postcard from Britten to Blades in response to Blades's letter of 17 May 1968), and on 26 January 1973, during the composition of *Death in Venice*, Britten wrote to Blades: 'I...am sure you will have some fun with the very elaborate instrumentation I am indulging myself in' (BPL: James Blades correspondence).

³⁷⁵Interview with the author, 19 May 2010. Cf. Denisov, p.146: 'Shostakovich was never fond of orchestral exuberance; any form of narrative decoration was alien to him. But he greatly appreciated and had an excellent feeling for the expressive possibilities of timbres. This factor to a large extent predetermined his attitude to percussion. Shostakovich mostly used the percussion not like 'noise' instruments (apart, perhaps, from certain places in *The Nose*), but as a precisely heard colour endowed *with a concrete meaning*. Such is the role...of the long 'farewell' coda of the Fifteenth Symphony. He did not seek to extract from percussion instruments all the possibilities of their variety and richness; on the contrary, he would choose only what was for him the most important timbre and use it with great precision and justification' (author's translation).

preference for a more refined orchestral sound.³⁷⁶ Britten's use of xylophone, whip and Chinese Block in the percussion variation (M) of *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* and of block, castanets and whip in the 'Finale' of *Spring Symphony* (1949) is therefore exceptional in bearing an affinity with Shostakovich's use of hard-edged percussion such as tom-toms and wood block in *The Nose*, *Lady Macbeth*, and the Fourteenth Symphony. Corkhill views this distinction as a reflection as Shostakovich's relationship to the Soviet machine, lending his use of percussion a mechanical and military complexion: hence the contrast between Shostakovich's 'military' use of tom-toms in the Second Violin Concerto (1967) and Britten's 'oriental' use in the contemporaneous Church Parables, or the use of a whip with varied pitch to depict the flickering fire in *The Burning Fiery Furnace* compared to what, he recalls, Kurt Sanderling described as a 'slap' in the Fifteenth Symphony.³⁷⁷

Nevertheless, this distinction should not be overstated. As early as 1952 Hans Keller had contended that a 'strong and heavily repressed sadism' lay beneath Britten's pacifism, accounting for 'the sadistic component...in

³⁷⁶Between R78 and R79, and R89: bar 3 to R90; Boosey and Hawkes miniature score, inscribed by Rosamund Strode: 'Pencil marks put in by RS taken from hired score prepared for performance (which didn't take place) Aldeburgh Festival 1972 by BB. Other pencil marks BB's anyway' (BPL: 2-9100341).

³⁷⁷Interview with the author, 19 May 2005. See also letter from Britten to James Blades, 8 February 1966: 'Is it possible, by hitting the normal clapper in different ways, to give the suggestion of changing pitch...I do not want any definite notes, but a suggestion of four or five different pitches' (BPL: James Blades correspondence).

his treatment of the percussion'.³⁷⁸ One could therefore compare the percussion which accompanies Tarquinius's approach to Lucretia's room and her awakening to *ff* whip in Act II of *The Rape of Lucretia* (R18 to R21, and R27: bar 1), or the graphic use of *ffz* whip or wood block with side drum sticks in *Billy Budd*, with the depiction of mob anti-Semitism in the first movement of Shostakovich's Thirteenth Symphony, which suggests an underlying affinity between the two composers in spite of the superficial differences. Indeed, the latter may have constituted an additional source of appeal for Britten: just as he regarded 'differentness' as a quality he valued in personal terms, Victor Hochhauser feels that in Shostakovich Britten admired 'something different from his own music'.³⁷⁹ Moreover, the work in which Britten's *ff* use of whip, wood block, tom tom and xylophone is most akin to that of Shostakovich is *Owen Wingrave*, the later stages of whose composition coincided with Britten's preparation of the first performance in the West of the Fourteenth Symphony, which suggests a limited degree of convergence between the two composers in their treatment of percussion but only at this relatively late stage in their creative lives (Examples 28 and 29).

³⁷⁸H. Keller, 'The Musical Character', in DMHK, p.350.

³⁷⁹Draft article for *The Observer* [1963] (BPL: 1-02053807), reproduced in Kildea, p.237, and appendix VII.

Example 28: Britten: *Owen Wingrave*, Act I, R178: bars 1-4

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Xylophone and SIR PHILIP. The Xylophone part is in the upper staff, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with accents. The SIR PHILIP part is in the lower staff, featuring a vocal line with lyrics: "A - ha! I was there - I've all the batt-le ar - ay". The lyrics are written below the notes. The score is in 3/4 time and B-flat major.

Example 29: Shostakovich: Symphony No. 14, V: 'On Watch', bars 1-9

The image shows a musical score for the Xylophone part of Shostakovich's Symphony No. 14, V: 'On Watch', bars 1-9. The score is in 2/4 time and B-flat major, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with accents.

This is also suggested by Britten's use of solo percussion to support the vocal line in sections of *Children's Crusade* a year earlier (cf. the 'dry' use of drums and wood block between R23 to R25). Whilst the juxtaposition of military and children's instruments in the latter work is distinctive to Britten, in all three works – *Children's Crusade*, *Owen Wingrave* and the Fourteenth Symphony - percussion is employed to expose the banality of militarism in the context of death.

The suggestion of a direct influence between the two composers in terms of use of percussion should therefore be viewed with caution. It is more likely that Britten's existing interest in percussion was an additional reason for the empathy he felt towards Shostakovich from 1935-36 onwards.³⁸⁰ Moreover, Britten may have been stimulated not only by an

³⁸⁰Appendix IX.

exceptional aural imagination which made him responsive to Shostakovich's use of percussion, but also a polemical consciousness that in the 1930s percussion made a piece sound 'modern' compared, for example, to Elgar or English 'pastoral' composers: in this sense, the diaries suggest that Stravinsky's use of percussion in *Les Noces* and *Oedipus Rex* was equally influential. In any case, it is unlikely that Britten was aware of Shostakovich's most exotic use of percussion in the scores for *Alone* (1931) or *The Tale of a Priest and His Servant, Balda*, and his lukewarm response to the Suite from Shostakovich's *The Nose* on 26 January 1934 - coupled with the testimony of James Blades regarding Britten's exceptional faculty for using percussion in 1935 - also suggest an existing creative trait which he was to develop through film, theatre and radio work.³⁸¹

Finally, although Britten used percussion extensively throughout his creative life, this was not the case with Shostakovich. As Edison Denisov points out, following the experimental use of percussion in pre-1936 scores such as *Nos* and the *Fourth Symphony*, most of his subsequent orchestral scores did not make significant use of percussion until its 'unexpected revival' in the final two symphonies, in which it is treated

³⁸¹Diary, 26 January 1934, and J. Blades, *Drum Roll* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977) p.152.

not only as equal to other groups in the orchestra but also employed symbolically; and one should add that this is first evident in the coda of the final movement of the Second Cello Concerto (1966). Thus, whereas in terms of use of percussion, one may view an 'arch' between Shostakovich's early and late works, symptomatic of the composer's reflection on his creative life, this is not the case for Britten, who employed percussion continuously as well as developmentally.³⁸² Moreover, although for Shostakovich from 1966 percussion may have come to represent the topic of death, for Britten its significance remained twofold: as a means of orchestral colour and a symbolic representation of positive and negative forms of attraction.

A related point of comparison and contrast can be made with regard to Britten's use of celesta, which Liudmila Kovnatskaia feels plays 'an 'exceptionally important role' in Britten's sound world, emphasising the impact on both Britten and Shostakovich of its 'accents of farewell' in the 'Abschied' of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*.³⁸³ One can, for example, compare Britten's use of an eight-note *pp bisbigliando* arpeggio in the

³⁸²Denisov, pp.175-6, who emphasises the 'enormous semantic and programmatic burden' placed upon non-metallic percussion in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Symphonies.

³⁸³Kovnatskaia, in 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p. 189, highlights the role of the instrument 'from *Peter Grimes* through *The Turn of The Screw* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Death in Venice*'. However, it should be noted that Britten does not employ the instrument in *Death in Venice*, and vibraphone and glockenspiel are instead employed to accompany Aschenbach's death.

context of the apprentice's death in *Peter Grimes* (at R69 bar 4 to R71 and R72 to the Act II quick curtain) to the *p* six-bar phrase repeated ten times in the coda of the Fourth Symphony (from R255 bar 4) or the nine-bar *p* solo from R96 in the coda of the Largo of the Fifth Symphony, in that in all three cases the instrument seems to be employed symbolically rather than solely for orchestral colour.

However, there are also several important distinctions. Firstly, the striking use Shostakovich makes of the instrument in a variety of contexts, such as the First Cello Concerto, *The Execution of Stepan Razin*, *Six Songs on Poems of Marina Tsvetayeva* (1974, op.143a) and the final three symphonies, suggests that the importance of its symbolic connection with themes of death and eternity increased for the composer during the final two decades of his life. Indeed, Shostakovich's use of celesta in his orchestration of Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina* not only for colour but also to depict moments of mysticism, rapture and magic (as between R135 and R136) may have stimulated his revived use of the instrument in later instrumental and vocal works, such as 'Night' in *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo Buonarroti* (R77: bar 2 to R79). Britten, on the other hand, seems to have been more ambivalent about the celesta, rarely employing it outside an operatic context, even in substantial instrumental works

with a possible programmatic basis such as *Sinfonia da Requiem* and the Cello Symphony. In fact, he only used celesta for the first time in *Paul Bunyan*, and primarily to add colour to two vocal numbers (nos. 8 and 14), suggesting instead the influence of Copland's *An Outdoor Overture* (1938). The evidence of Britten's diaries and miniature scores further suggests that the composer was more eclectic than Shostakovich in his use of the instrument, drawing upon *The Nutcracker*, *The Planets* and *Le Chant du Rossignol*, not least because in London in the 1930s he had greater access to the orchestral repertoire through wireless broadcasts as well as live concerts.³⁸⁴ Further, Imogen Holst's diary indicates that Britten remained relatively inexperienced in its use as late as the composition of *Gloriana*, and it is also revealing that as in *Death in Venice* he had instead employed glockenspiel instead to accompany Billy Budd's reflection on his imminent death in his previous opera.³⁸⁵

It is nevertheless correct to suggest that, as with Shostakovich, the symbolic use of the instrument may have become more important for Britten from the mid-1950s onwards, given its extended passages in *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Prince of the Pagodas*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

³⁸⁴See, for example, diary entry for *The Planets* on 23 April 1931: 'too sugary (celesta)' (BPL).

³⁸⁵C. Grogan, ed., *Imogen Holst A Life in Music*, (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007) pp. 170 and 208.

and *Owen Wingrave*. However, as Cooke suggests, this should be viewed as symptomatic of an increasing emphasis in Britten's music on a variety of sonorities – including vibraphone, gong, and harp - which recall the gamelan and symbolically represent the force of various forms of attraction, ranging from ghosts and fairies to the ideal of peace.³⁸⁶ Indeed, although the prominent celesta part in the final movement of the Fifteenth Symphony confirms the importance of its 'accents of farewell' for Shostakovich, Britten does not seem to have viewed the instrument in this light, and he seems to have made a point of not employing it *Death in Venice*. One can therefore qualify Kovnatskaia's assessment that 'if in the 1930s and 1940s Britten assimilated Shostakovich's musical language in the style of Mahler, then Shostakovich's late style betrays elements of Britten's musical language, again through a Mahlerian prism', since the evidence suggests that Britten's and Shostakovich's use of the celesta was not identical and developed independently.³⁸⁷ Indeed, as Mitchell has demonstrated, the significance Mahler himself may have attached to the use of the instrument is by no means unambiguous.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁶M. Cooke, *Britten and the Far East*, *passim*.

³⁸⁷L. Kovnatskaia, 'Notes on a Theme from *Peter Grimes*', p.184.

³⁸⁸D. Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death: Interpretations and Annotations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), pp. 415, 497.

2.10 The challenge of modernism

In his second letter to Shostakovich in December 1963, Britten wrote: 'For years now your work & life have been an example to me – of courage, integrity, & human sympathy, and of wonderful invention & clear vision. I must say that there is no one composing to-day who has an equal influence on me'.³⁸⁹ This statement is striking not only as the most explicit acknowledgement of Shostakovich's influence on Britten's part, but also because he had previously emphasised his reluctance to compromise his artistic freedom by associating with, and being seen to write for, other living composers. Indeed, the BBC birthday tribute to Britten a month earlier made no reference whatsoever to Shostakovich: the composer 'with whom beyond all others Britten feels the deepest kinship' was Purcell.³⁹⁰ Britten's choice of words also suggests that he had come to accept Shostakovich's stature as a great composer and that this represented an important aspect of his appeal.³⁹¹ In 1961 he had supported Harewood's idea of 'paying tribute to Shostakovich, especially

³⁸⁹Letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 26 December 1963, photocopy of handwritten original (BPL:DDS). Cf. 'Britten rasskazyvaet', p. 102, in which Britten acknowledges that, of living composers, he had also been influenced by Stravinsky.

³⁹⁰'British Music in the World Today', Kildea, p.271, and Humphrey Burton's script for *Britten at Fifty: A Birthday Tribute*, broadcast on 22 November 1963 (BBC Programme Archive: VT/T/20342; VC195506). Cf. Victor Hochhauser's observation that Britten was 'a very unique and isolated figure and didn't mix with other composers', appendix VII.

³⁹¹For Britten's description of Shostakovich as a 'great composer', see typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Lilian Hochhauser, 30 October 1973 (BPL: VH). Victor Hochhauser also feels that 'To Britten the idea that Shostakovich was a great composer appealed'; appendix VII.

via Rostropovich' in the following year's Edinburgh Festival; and Vishnevskaya similarly believes that Britten and Shostakovich had a 'very special respect for each other. Because each was very well aware of his significance in music. And from this height they treated each other with great, great respect'.³⁹² Neil Mackie adds that this assessment of Shostakovich on Britten's part was strongly shared by Pears.³⁹³

However, one can make three more nuanced observations relating to Britten's statement in December 1963. Firstly, his attitude is more striking given that Shostakovich's status was by no means accepted in the United Kingdom in the 1960s: the first performance in the West of the Twelfth Symphony during the 1962 Edinburgh Festival did little to enhance the composer's reputation, and both the Second Cello and Violin Concertos received a muted critical reception.³⁹⁴ Secondly, Britten does not appear to have elaborated this statement either in public or in private. Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, for whom the composer wrote three works between 1961 and 1965, recalls that Britten only mentioned Shostakovich on one

³⁹²Photocopy of letter from Britten to Lord Harewood, 15 May 1961 (BPL: Lord Harewood correspondence), and appendix XIII.

³⁹³Interview with the author, 16 August 2011.

³⁹⁴Vladimir Ashkenazy, for example, recalls that in his experience, the prevailing attitude towards Shostakovich in the West in the 1960s was largely negative; pre-concert discussion, Royal Festival Hall, London, 22 September 2009. See also Kay (1971), p.58, for the 'very insubstantial' Second Cello Concerto, and H. Keller, 'Shostakovich's Twelfth Quartet', *Tempo, New Series*, 94 (autumn 1970), p.7, for the 'incomprehension' which greeted this work.

occasion, and Lord Harewood also observes that Britten in private did not expand upon his 1966 tribute to Shostakovich, namely expressing particular admiration for *Lady Macbeth*.³⁹⁵ Keith Grant similarly notes that whereas a variety of composers regularly come up in his conversations with Britten, this was never the case with Shostakovich.³⁹⁶ Finally, whereas Britten's first letters to Shostakovich are indicative of musical admiration, a deeper personal empathy only seems to have developed more gradually, from 1964/5 onwards,³⁹⁷ and it may be that Britten's comments in December 1963 were, to a degree, overstated, not least because the purpose of the letter was to apologise that he had been unable to attend a performance *Katerina Izmailova* with Shostakovich in London. Indeed, when asked by the British Ambassador which guests Britten would like to be invited to the Embassy receptions in Moscow during his March 1963 visit, Britten's list included Shostakovich, but behind Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya ('to be included whenever possible'), Richter and Yevtushenko; and when Alan Brooke Turner interpreted for Britten and Shostakovich in the same year he was not

³⁹⁵Letter from Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau to the author, 25 October 2009: 'In a conversation regarding *War Requiem*, 'Britten agreed fully with my view that Shostakovich [showed] a close relationship concerning the effect both composers looked for: the tonality [and] tendency to stick with the old spirit and not leaving completely the old ways'; and appendix V.

³⁹⁶Appendix IV.

³⁹⁷Galina Vishnevskaya dates the friendship between the two composers from their meeting in September 1965; Vishnevskaya, p.389.

aware that they had met previously.³⁹⁸ In time Britten's relationship with Shostakovich would come to represent a phenomenon with marked similarities to the friendship he enjoyed with Poulenc until the latter's death in January 1963: indeed, the mutual tributes of Poulenc and Britten in 1962 and 1964 respectively are couched in not dissimilar terms to those used in the later Britten-Shostakovich correspondence.³⁹⁹

The wider evidence certainly suggests that by 1963 Britten's identification with Shostakovich was more complex than a straightforward acceptance of musical influence. Victor Hochhauser, who invited Britten to attend the performance of the First Cello Concerto during which the two composers first met in September 1960, recalls that 'I could see that Ben was genuinely impressed, but it was a different style of music which he called "dramatic music". [Only] in time did Britten come to appreciate...the vast panorama of suffering in some of the symphonies'.⁴⁰⁰ Moreover, whereas in the 1930s Shostakovich's avant-garde credentials may have appealed to Britten, by the 1960s he seems to have been increasingly aware that both he and Shostakovich were

³⁹⁸Typewritten telegram from H.M. Ambassador, Moscow, to the Foreign Office, attached to letter from Humphrey Trevelyan, British Embassy, Moscow, to Britten, 15 February 1963 (BPL: British Embassy Moscow), to which Britten has added his suggestions in pencil on the rear; and appendix II.

³⁹⁹See F. Poulenc, 'Hommage à Benjamin Britten', October 1962, in Gishford, p.13, and Britten's tribute to Poulenc in AFMA 1964, p.23.

⁴⁰⁰Appendix VII.

perceived as establishment figures in the eyes of a new generation of serially-influenced composers in the West who, in the United Kingdom, enjoyed increasing profile under William Glock as BBC Controller of Music from 1959 onwards. This realisation may partly have contributed to Britten's greater self-criticism and the re-evaluation of his musical language in the Church Parables following the success of *War Requiem*.⁴⁰¹ Britten thus emphasised during his first visit to the Soviet Union in 1963 that:

Young 'avant-guardists' of composition are mostly supported by the BBC, which broadcasts their music on radio and television, but otherwise their concerts do not attract a big audience. However, the majority of interesting young composers still work in the sphere of dodecaphonic music. I am not sure for how long this trend is going to last, or when the public will get more used to it. I, personally, cannot apply such music to my art or, indeed, life. I am primarily interested

⁴⁰¹See, for example, Ernst Roth's observation that from the late 1950s 'Britten became more self-critical, writing more slowly and examining what he had written more closely. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the *War Requiem* were more thoroughly revised between the first performance and the printed score than any other earlier work'; Roth, p.229.

in the composer's individuality, and not his or her musical style.⁴⁰²

On a subsequent visit to the Soviet Union, Britten added that his Cello Symphony would therefore be regarded as 'boring and old fashioned' in the future.⁴⁰³ Robin Holloway therefore feels that by the 1960s 'Britten and Shostakovich seem to have shared an attitude of anti-avant-garde, anti-"modern", a sentimentalised/simplified advocacy of the "natural" in music, whose conservatism, whether innate or compelled from without, makes a piquant contrast to their own youthful daring and provocativeness'.⁴⁰⁴ This should not, of course, be overstated. Although in 1963 Britten claimed that he had hitherto 'never seriously used [serial technique]', he had in fact made pragmatic use of twelve-note rows as a means organisation in *The Turn of the Screw* and *Cantata academica, carmen basiliense*, and went on to employ quasi-serial elements in *Owen Wingrave* and, to a lesser extent, *Death in Venice*.⁴⁰⁵ Levon Hakobian (2006) has

⁴⁰²'Britten rasskazyvaet', p.102

⁴⁰³'U nas v gostiakh Benjamin Britten', p.130.

⁴⁰⁴Letter to the author, 1 November 2009.

⁴⁰⁵Britten's draft article for The Observer (BPL: 1-02053807), p.6. Britten subsequently amended this reference to a twelve-tone system 'that I myself have so far found no need to use'. See also E. Roseberry in 'A Note on the Four Chords in Act II of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*': 'Britten's own recent cautious approach towards serialism is a development by no means unanticipated in the language of his earlier music...Although it seems most unlikely that Britten will ever become wholly committed to serial organisation, the parallel with Schoenberg, who discovered twelve-note composition through creative practice, is evident'; *Tempo*, New Series, 66-7, Britten's 50th Birthday

further demonstrated Shostakovich's own pragmatic use of twelve-note rows in a variety of Shostakovich's post-1963 works, although as a contrasting means of symbolically representing the composer's obsession with death and his dissatisfaction with his creative life.⁴⁰⁶ Such a difference arguably reflected not only the entirely different context in which Shostakovich worked as a composer, but also a greater receptiveness to drawing upon contemporary composers, including, in contrast to Britten, his composition pupils.

Britten's perception of his work, however self-consciously expressed, was certainly shared by his publisher. In an analysis of Britten's position in 1969, Ernst Roth described him as

the only truly successful paladin of tradition...a very solitary figure in contemporary music, and it would be difficult to find another period of European music when the public success of one man stood out so conspicuously as his today...[His] music lives not in the centre but at the very periphery of the music with which my generation

(autumn-winter 1963), p.36. See also A. Whittall, *Musical Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.95.

⁴⁰⁶L. Hakobian, 'Symbolism of Twelve-Tone Rows in Shostakovich's Late Music', paper delivered at 'Shostakovich 100' Symposium, Goldsmiths, University of London, 27 September 2006.

has grown up...And so one wonders whether with Benjamin Britten this 'old' music is celebrating its farewell.

Roth particularly linked Britten with Shostakovich, 'his only rival in the domain of traditional music. Listening to his [Second] Cello Concerto...one gets the impression of a certain complexity which seems to indicate the end of the road'.⁴⁰⁷ The Soviet cultural establishment clearly made a similar connection. In 1970 the British Ambassador reported to Britten a conversation with the Minister of Culture in which he said 'that you knew Soviet conditions, that your interest was a guarantee that there'd be no extremist experiments, etc., and that your music was a logical development of British traditions – to which she [Furtseva] replied that it was "not by chance" (the key phrase in these parts) that you and D.S. were so closely linked'.⁴⁰⁸ Indeed, Alan Brooke Turner notes that in contrast William Glock, 'who was determined to

⁴⁰⁷Roth, pp.231-2.

⁴⁰⁸Letter from Sir Duncan Wilson, British Embassy, Moscow, to Britten, 20 June 1970 (BPL: DW). Cf. 'Moskvichi aplodiruiut', p.98: 'Britten is a firm opponent of atonalism and of the 'serial' technique in music; he is adamant about art being humane and content-oriented, aimed at a wide popular audience...It is no accident that Britten is a good friend of the leading Soviet musicians – such as Shostakovich, who so much admires the composer's work. Our masters have found in Britten a close ally acknowledging his adherence to a truly humanistic art'. Cf. Gennady Rozhdestvensky: 'For me the most attractive thing in both Britten and Shostakovich is, above all, their exclusive individuality, instantaneous 'recognisability' of style and complete freedom from any sort of dogmas prevalent in the twentieth century. Both never employed serial methods unless they were absolutely necessary to express their musical intentions'; interview with the author, 16 November 2008.

track down any Russian composers working in the area of serialism...received no support or encouragement whatsoever from the Soviet musical establishment'.⁴⁰⁹

Graham Johnson therefore feels that by the end of the 1960s although Britten never talked specifically about Shostakovich's music, the Russian composer had clearly come to represent an important 'musical presence' and even 'lifeline' for him.⁴¹⁰ This assessment is confirmed by Britten's letters. In 1969 he wrote to Rostropovich: 'I hope [Dmitri] is as well as possible and able to write beautiful music to thrill us & to keep up our hopes & spirits. I treasure him so much'.⁴¹¹ Two years later he wrote to Shostakovich himself that 'it is so very important for us that you go on composing your great music'.⁴¹² Similarly, during Shostakovich's protracted compositional block following the completion of the Fourteenth Symphony Britten wrote to him that 'for many reasons I am delighted that [the Symphony] has made such an impact throughout the world. I am proud & grateful to be associated with it', although he never elaborated what he admired about the work in public or in private.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹Appendix II.

⁴¹⁰Interview with the author, 20 May 2010.

⁴¹¹Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich 1 January 1969 (BPL: MR).

⁴¹²Photocopy of letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 19 July 1971 (BPL: DDS).

⁴¹³Letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 10 January 1972, photocopy of typewritten original (BPL: DDS).

Thus, whereas many in the Soviet Union the 1960s had come to feel that Shostakovich was weak and could not stand up to or for anything, it is likely that Britten understood the torment that lay behind such a position and instead regarded the composer's continued compositional activity as indicative of integrity and courage, particularly in the light of both composers' increasing ill health.⁴¹⁴ In this sense, Britten may have come to regard the Shostakovich's post-1960 composition of chamber music in a similar light to the late string quartets of Haydn, in which he seems to have shown a particular interest from the early 1960s.⁴¹⁵ Britten's most revealing comment on the relationship was made in 1966: 'Abroad, to me the most touching and important figure of Shostakovich always interests me with every new work; I don't say that I can always understand them, or that I always understand what he is after, but he has an interesting mind and is a great, great figure'.⁴¹⁶ In his final letter to Shostakovich, written at the end of the year which had seen his tentative return to composition after open-heart surgery in May 1973, Britten thus expressed pleasure that 'You, my dear Dmitri, are still working with the same colossal energy as ever, producing master works for us all to enjoy'.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴Letter from Elizabeth Wilson to the author, 2 October 2008.

⁴¹⁵Interview with Charles Osborne', p.248, and Britten's autograph draft of Shostakovich's birthday tribute, in which he links the Haydn quartets with the 8th, 9th and 10th string quartets of Shostakovich (BPL:DDS).

⁴¹⁶'Benjamin Britten talks to Edmund Tracey', Kildea, pp. 298-9.

⁴¹⁷Photocopy of letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 2 December 1974 (BPL: DDS).

2.11 Conclusion

Britten's creative relationship with Shostakovich is therefore a more complex phenomenon than has hitherto been recognised, and certainly in contrast to his admiration for Tchaikovsky, which remained a more consistent feature of his creative outlook. The chronology of Britten's initial engagement with Shostakovich's music in 1934-6 suggests an appeal which was primarily extra-musical, particularly political, as well as tending to confirm rather than radically influence existing aspects of Britten's musical language, as in the case of Shostakovich's use of percussion and his predilection for parody and satire. The direct influence of Shostakovich on Britten's musical language at this earlier stage should not therefore be exaggerated, as is demonstrated by a comparison of both composers' use of percussion and celesta, by Britten's by no means unreserved admiration for Shostakovich's wider creative output in the form, for example, of *The Nose* and the symphonies, and, in particular, by Britten's relative indifference towards Musorgsky, which suggests two distinctive musical personalities whose later convergence was by no means inevitable. Indeed, it is striking that during the 1940s and 1950s there is no evidence in Britten's letters to suggest a particular interest in Shostakovich or his music.

By the 1960s Britten's attitude towards Shostakovich, if possessing a degree of continuity with the earlier period, focused on a wider variety of extra-musical and musical factors: Shostakovich's parallel status as the Soviet Union's greatest composer and Britten's empathy towards his uneasy accommodation with the political establishment; a shared aesthetic of social engagement; and Britten's identification with what he viewed as a composer willing to communicate private concerns in a musical language which eschewed doctrinaire serialism in the interests of communication: an attitude which reflected Britten's ambivalence not only towards Stravinsky but also to the popular reception of *War Requiem*, the work which, ironically, seems to have been most important in stimulating Shostakovich's initial admiration for Britten's music. Certainly, by the 1960s Shostakovich's 'Russianness' was not in itself the primary reason for Britten's attraction. Donald Mitchell feels that 'the relationship might have happened anywhere' and, in a sense, it can be viewed as a continuation in an entirely different context of Britten's earlier friendship with Poulenc.⁴¹⁸ On the other hand, as shall be seen, without Rostropovich and the unique political and cultural context of the 1960s it is highly unlikely that the relationship would have taken the particular form it did over the last fifteen years of each composer's life.

⁴¹⁸Appendix IX.

Chapter 3: Britten, Rostropovich and Shostakovich,

1960 to 1976: cello and chamber music

3.1 Introduction

Britten's decision to attend Rostropovich's performance of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto in London on 21 September 1960 can be regarded as a significant development in his creative life in three respects. Firstly, his encounter with the cellist would ultimately inspire him to resume instrumental composition, which he had largely abandoned since the early 1940s. Britten's works for Rostropovich would thus constitute a particularly important part of his creative output until the composition of his Third Suite for Cello in 1971.⁴¹⁹ Secondly, the meeting was symptomatic of a relatively short period of positive cultural relations between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union under the Khrushchev 'thaw'. Both Britten and Rostropovich appreciated the importance of this opportunity to form musical relationships in this context, Britten himself visiting the Soviet Union on six occasions

⁴¹⁹For the circumstances of this meeting, see M. Rostropovich, 'Dear Ben', in Gishford, p.16, and Blyth, pp.146-7. For Britten's acknowledgement of its importance, see 'Musician of the Year': 'I think I was getting a bit nervous about instrumental music. Rostropovich freed one of my inhibitions...I immediately realised this was a new way of playing the cello, in fact almost a new, vital way of playing music'; Kildea, p.267.

between 1963 and 1971.⁴²⁰ Britten's positive response can to a degree be viewed as an expression of his existing interest in Russian music, and Rostropovich appears to have recognised this by encouraging the development of Britten's creative and personal links with Vishnevskaya, Richter, and, ultimately, with Shostakovich himself.⁴²¹ Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya also seem to have stimulated Britten's existing appreciation of Tchaikovsky's music, and a mutual admiration for Tchaikovsky represented an important factor in their creative relationship, reflected in a significant number of performances at the Aldeburgh Festival from 1961 onwards.

Britten's Rostropovich-inspired cello works from 1960 to 1976 will be viewed in the light of Britten's wider interest in Shostakovich's music and the development of his friendship with the composer: various aspects of musical and extra-musical affinity will be considered. The chapter will also consider the development of Shostakovich's admiration for Britten's

⁴²⁰5-21 March 1963; 9-17 March 1964; 21 September - 20 October 1964; 3 August-4 September 1965; 24 December 1966-2 January 1967; and 15-25 April 1971 (BPL: Britten's pocket diaries).

⁴²¹See Richter, p.116: 'I remain grateful to [Rostropovich] for introducing me to Benjamin Britten'. Britten's appointment diary suggests that this first meeting took place in London on 24 July 1961 (BPL). Although Richter was later to incorporate Britten's Piano Concerto into his repertoire, and the composer highlighted the 'unbelievable brilliance and warm sympathy' of his interpretation, compositionally speaking the Britten-Richter relationship only resulted in Britten's cadenzas to the first and third movements of Mozart's Piano Concerto no. 22, K482; Banks, p.134. However, Britten also seems to have envisaged a large-scale piano piece for Richter in 1971; R. Strobe, 'A *Death in Venice* chronicle', in D. Mitchell, comp. and ed., *Benjamin Britten: Death in Venice*, p.29.

music in the 1960s, particularly the cello works, and how far he may have been influenced by Britten in his Second Cello Concerto (1966), together with the striking evidence for Britten's increasing interest in Shostakovich's chamber music from 1963/4 onwards. In each case, a range of evidence will be employed, including Britten's correspondence with Rostropovich and Shostakovich, and each composer's collection of the other's scores.

3.2 Britten, Rostropovich and Tchaikovsky

The evidence of Britten's complete Tchaikovsky edition strongly suggests that his interest in Tchaikovsky's songs and stage works developed from the early 1950s onwards, with Pears and, from 1960, Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya acting as particular catalysts.⁴²² Indeed, although the 1971 Aldeburgh Festival screened the Soviet film of *Iolanta* (1963), which, Britten wrote, 'contains some of Tchaikovsky's loveliest music', there is no evidence to suggest that he was acquainted with the work before he

⁴²²Appendix XIV. For the particular impact of Rostropovich's and Vishnevskaya's performances of Tchaikovsky's songs on Britten and Pears in August 1965, see Pears, p. 127: '...each time one hears [Vishnevskaya] sing them one realises his greatness as a song-writer, and how bad translations have managed to wipe them out of the English repertoire. They are big, original, varied songs and we must try to do some'. Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya presented Pears with a first volume (Tchaikovsky: PSS: vol. 45) four months later (see appendix XIV) and Britten received a further volume (?Tchaikovsky: PSS: vol. 43) of these 'wonderful songs' from Dzhemal Dalgat in response to Pears's conspicuous interest in Leningrad in December 1965; Pears, p. 147, and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Dzhemal Dalgat, 5 May 1967 (BPL: DD). See also the Vishnevskaya/Rostropovich recital on 28 June 1968, which opened with op. 28 no.3, op. 38 no.3, op.47 no.1, op. 57 no.2, and op.63 no.6 (BPL: programme supplement to AFMA 1968).

acquired the vocal score, probably in the 1960s.⁴²³ Britten's wish to programme the duet from *Romeo and Juliet* during the 1968 Festival is therefore likely to have been influenced not only by his long-term admiration for the Fantasy Overture and a predilection for exploring lesser-known works by composers he admired, but also by the enthusiasm of Vishnevskaya and Pears for the project.⁴²⁴

The evidence particularly suggests that Britten shared Rostropovich's and Vishnevskaya's desire to perform Tchaikovsky's music as the composer intended, an additional factor which is likely to have enhanced the empathy he felt towards them.⁴²⁵ Britten's diaries indicate that even in the 1930s he rejected what he viewed as an invented tradition of performance based upon a 'big sound' and exaggeration of effect, and his recorded performances of Tchaikovsky between 1962 and 1972, together with the detailed attention to phrasing and dynamics evident in his annotations to the conducting score of the Fantasy Overture *Romeo and Juliet*, suggest an interpretative approach towards the composer which was characterised by emotional restraint - albeit not at the expense of tension and coupled

⁴²³AFMA 1971, p.35; and Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 42 (1952).

⁴²⁴For this performance, see Britten's copy of AFMA 1968, p.80 (BPL: 1-901101), Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 62 (1948), pp. 267-92, and Pears's performing copy of these pages, in which he has transliterated the text into large capitals (BPL: 2-9300377).

⁴²⁵Both Galina Vishnevskaya and Marion Thorpe emphasise the importance of Tchaikovsky and a shared approach towards the interpretation of his music to the Britten-Rostropovich creative relationship; appendix XIII, and interview with the author, 5 September 2008.

with a clear sense of the 'shape' of the piece concerned - and scrupulous attention to tempo and dynamics.⁴²⁶ Britten's questioning of Romantic performance practice with regard to Tchaikovsky is a striking phenomenon, to be extended forty years later by Sir Roger Norrington in his rejection of vibrato and return to a nineteenth-century orchestral layout.⁴²⁷

Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya clearly possessed a very similar attitude to Britten's.⁴²⁸ Rostropovich thus saw the recording of *Eugene Onegin* which he conducted in 1970 as constituting 'a great work of cleaning up and restoration' so that 'the opera...appeared in all its glory, youth and freshness': a rejection of elements of the Russian performance tradition.⁴²⁹

Britten certainly seems to have deferred to Rostropovich's interpretation

⁴²⁶Diary entries for 29 October 1930, 7 February and 26 October 1932, 5 January 1935, and 27 January 1938 (BPL); *Britten the Performer*, vols. 1, 2, and 12 (BBC Music, 1999: BBCB 8001-2, 8002-2, 8012-2); and Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 23 (1950), pp.87-195 (BPL).

⁴²⁷Interview with Sir Roger Norrington, 12 July 2011. See also R. Norrington, 'In the Face of Death: Tchaikovsky's Pathétique', *The Romantics* (SWR Music DVD 93.901, 2007): 'The secret to me about how to approach Brahms and Tchaikovsky is to play Tchaikovsky as if it were Brahms and Brahms as if it were Tchaikovsky'.

⁴²⁸For Rostropovich's criticisms of the Russian tradition of Tchaikovsky performance constituting 'the overabuse [sic] of elements of dubious taste preserved through several generations, whose only goal is to make a big effect', see Glasow, pp.89-90. Cf. Rostropovich's tribute to Britten on the composer's fiftieth birthday ('Dear Ben'): 'The music is purified and revealed in its initial beauty, unspoiled by any "interpretation"', Gishford, p.17.

⁴²⁹Melodiya/HMV Angel Series SLS 951/3. Britten possessed a copy of this recording (BPL: 3-9204959). For Rostropovich's comments on his interpretation, see p. 7 of the sleeve note: 'When I read the score...I discovered in it wonders that had never been apparent to me at the Bolshoi Theatre...The movements were no longer Tchaikovsky's ...[and were] smothered under nuances that made it move more heavily'.

of Tchaikovsky's cello music: his conducting score of *Pezzo Capriccioso* indicates that he entirely adopted Rostropovich's phrasing.⁴³⁰ On the other hand, this could have been a pragmatic gesture of deferring towards his soloist, since in spite of possessing the original version of *Variations on a Rococo Theme*, Britten also deferred to Rostropovich in using the less authentic Fitzenhagen edition of the score.⁴³¹

3.3 Britten, Rostropovich and Shostakovich: Sonata in C (1961)

Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto clearly interested Britten: he requested a copy of the available piano and cello reduction within two weeks of hearing the work and subsequently obtained the first Russian edition of the full score.⁴³² He also sent a telegram to Shostakovich following the performance, but its text has been lost.⁴³³ However, although Rostropovich's playing certainly had an immediate impact on Britten, in the first instance he may have admired the work's craftsmanship and dramatic force, therefore assimilated its musical

⁴³⁰Tchaikovsky PSS: vols. 30B (1956), pp.47-69 (BPL).

⁴³¹The original version is in Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 30B, pp. 5-46 and is not annotated by Britten. See BPL: 2-9500565 for a Eulenberg miniature score of the Fitzenhagen edition (no. 788) on which Rosamund Strode transferred Britten's markings from the hired score from which he conducted Rostropovich at a Covent Garden gala performance on 13 December 1970.

⁴³²Ledger from Boosey and Hawkes to Britten, 7 October 1960 (BPL: BH). Britten possessed two identical copies of this arrangement, one marked 'BB', suggesting that he may have later played it in private with Rostropovich (BPL: 2-9300193). It is unclear at what exact point Britten obtained the full score (Moscow: State Music Publishers, 1960; BPL: 2-9300216).

⁴³³See Shostakovich's typewritten letter of thanks for Britten's telegram, Moscow, 5 October 1960 (BPL: DDS).

influence more gradually. Indeed, neither Rostropovich, nor Victor Hochhauser, who introduced the two musicians on this occasion, regarded the composers' musical language as similar at this stage, and Britten's decision to attend the concert seems primarily to have been inspired by the opportunity to hear the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra perform his own *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.⁴³⁴ Britten's view on Bartók (1943) further illuminates how he may have viewed the Shostakovich work: 'Even when one feels temperamentally unsympathetic to the music, one can but admire the skill and complete integrity of it', suggesting that its initial influence may primarily have been an inspiration to Britten to focus instead on the musical personality of Rostropovich.⁴³⁵ Britten's reaction is encapsulated in a letter he wrote two days after the performance: 'I had an exciting time with all the Russians on Wednesday. They were a marvellous orchestra & played my piece superbly. I had tea with some of them yesterday & the fabulous

⁴³⁴Appendices F and G; and Rostropovich in Blyth, pp. 150-1: 'Only in some passages in *Death in Venice* does one find the kind of anger, irony and tension found in so much of Shostakovich's work', which Rostropovich viewed as a reflection of Britten's fight against ill-health. Britten's appointment diary for 1960 also suggests this reason for attending the concert: he has clearly added 'Leningrad Orchestra' on 21 September at a late stage (BPL).

⁴³⁵Letter from Britten to Ralph Hawkes, Grove Hospital, Tooting Grove, London, 12 March 1943 (BPL: BH). Cf. Pears's recollection that Britten 'liked the clear unfussy directness of Shostakovich's music and its vitality', Blyth, p.21.

'cellist may be coming to the Festival next year. He's a dear, so I hope so'.⁴³⁶

In contrast to the Second Cello Sonata of William Wordsworth composed during the previous year after a meeting with Shostakovich in the Soviet Union, the Russian composer cannot be viewed as a primary source of influence on the Britten work, with the possible exception of the 'Elegia', in which he may have drawn upon Shostakovich's wider musical language by giving to the cello a 'long tune...against a sombre piano background' which is developed and intensified from *ppp* at R16 towards a *ff* climax at R18 and subsequent muted conclusion.⁴³⁷ Although one may draw a limited comparison with the Largo of Shostakovich's Cello Sonata (1934), and one commentator has viewed the thematic transformation in the coda of the first movement (from R18) as akin to Britten's more general 'ambiguity of expression', Britten seems to have been unfamiliar with the work until he obtained the score in 1962, and its extended first movement and overall Classical form are strikingly different.⁴³⁸ The

⁴³⁶Letter from Britten to Roger Duncan, 23 September 1960 (BPL: Roger Duncan correspondence).

⁴³⁷AFMA 1961, p.64.

⁴³⁸E. Roseberry, 'The composer at the piano', p.7, and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 14 March 1962: 'I have bought the Shostakovich Cello Sonata, and look forward enormously to doing with you, except for two or three pages I shall never be able to play even if I live to be a hundred...' In an undated [July 1962] later following the 1962 Aldeburgh Festival, Britten added: 'I find the Shostakovich very

musical atmosphere of the 'Elegia', for example, can more closely related to Britten's setting of Blake in the 'Elegy' of the *Serenade* (1943), and in its piano ostinato from R19: bar 8 to 'Nightmare' from *Who are these Children?* (1969), suggesting instead an extra-musical reference to the composer's characteristic preoccupation with night and dreams: Rostropovich himself viewed this movement as 'full of symbolic drama'.⁴³⁹

In an interview in the Soviet Union 1963 Britten revealed that 'When a musical theme is born in my head I already hear it sound in the voice of certain specific instruments. My experience tells me what is technically possible and what is not for an instrument which I personally do not play', adding that 'Listening carefully to other composers' works can be very useful here'.⁴⁴⁰ Similarly, eight years later he advised Ronan Magill to 'study scores to see how the great ones you admire get the effects you want'.⁴⁴¹ The Sonata is certainly broadly eclectic,⁴⁴² and apparently drawn from a variety of Russian and non-Russian sources. These are likely to

difficult: you must help me!' (BPL: MR). In the event, Britten and Rostropovich did not perform the Sonata until 1964; AFMA 1964, p.21.

⁴³⁹'Dear Ben', in Gishford, p.16.

⁴⁴⁰'Britten rasskazyvaet', *Sovetskaia muzyka* 1963/6, p.102.

⁴⁴¹Letter from Britten to Ronan Magill, Hotel Gabrielli Sandworth, Venice, 11 October 1971 (BPL: Ronan Magill correspondence).

⁴⁴²Cf. S. Walsh, 'Three New Britten Works', *Tempo*, New Series, 74 (autumn 1965): 'This work finds Britten in eclectic mood, assimilating and, at least in part, co-ordinating many varied influences'.

have included Schumann's *Fünf Stücke im Volkston*, Stravinsky's *Suite italienne*,⁴⁴³ and Bartók's use of guitar-like pizzicato in his Fourth String Quartet.⁴⁴⁴ In the final movement, Britten may also allude to the Tarantella in the fifth part and coda (from bar 291) of Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien*, a form for which he had shown an early predilection in the finales of three works composed between 1931 and 1932 as well as *Diversions*.

One must therefore be cautious in viewing the Cello Sonata in the light of the subsequent creative relationship between Britten and Shostakovich. Guy Johnson (2010), for example, writes that 'the last movement resonates with the Shostakovich Cello Concerto, most noticeably in Britten's use of the DSCH motif. There is no question that Britten had Russia in mind as well as the artist', but this is by no means apparent in the intervals of either the cello or piano part and it is only the Third Suite

⁴⁴³For Britten's early familiarity with the *Suite italienne* see his diary, 8 October 1936 (BPL); he probably performed the work with Maurice Gendron in December 1945; *Letters from a Life II*, p.1248. For striking evidence of Britten's contemporaneous interest in the cello works of Schumann, see his letter to Gerald Abraham, 3 January 1961: '...in your very useful symposium on Schumann you mention...five Romances for cello and piano...[which] I imagine have never been published. If this is not so, and you happen to know the publisher, could you let me have a card as I am most anxious to look at them?' (BPL: Gerald Abraham correspondence). In the event, Britten recorded *Fünf Stücke im Volkston* with Rostropovich in June 1961.

⁴⁴⁴Britten possessed miniature scores of the Fourth and Sixth String Quartets and a copy of Mátyás Seiber's *The String Quartets of Béla Bartók* (New York: Boosey and Hawkes, 1953), to which he referred in his programme note for a performance of the former at the 1954 Aldeburgh Festival. He regarded Bartók's string quartets as 'exploit[ing] every kind of technique of the instrument'; BPL: 2-9900374, 2-9900376, 1-9400592, and AFMA 1954, p.25.

which can be regarded as 'Russian' to any significant degree.⁴⁴⁵ Indeed, by the time of the Sonata's composition, Britten and Shostakovich had only met on one occasion and exchanged a single subsequent letter which is formal in tone and, in contrast to their post-1962 correspondence, typewritten.⁴⁴⁶ Moreover, for the 1961 Aldeburgh Festival, during which the Britten Sonata was first performed, Britten and Rostropovich chose to perform not the Shostakovich Sonata, but the Schubert 'Arpeggione' and Debussy Sonatas, together with Schumann's Cello Concerto, a work Britten particularly admired and felt required a musician of Rostropovich's calibre to do full justice.⁴⁴⁷

Britten's programme notes for these performances are indicative of a longer-term interest in the instrument and the wider cello repertoire, which had hitherto been centred on his professional association with Maurice Gendron. He thus noted that in the Debussy Sonata 'The writing for the instrument is original and resourceful throughout, and the second and third movements...have extensive use of pizzicato, *saltando* bowing, *ponticello* and harmonics. But these are never used for display: they lead

⁴⁴⁵G. Johnson, CD note for *Milo* (Orchid Classics: ORC100010, 2010), p.10, an interpretation shared by Julian Lloyd-Webber in 'The Cello Music of Benjamin Britten', *Strad* 86 (September 1975), p.387.

⁴⁴⁶Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 5 October 1960 (BPL: DDS).

⁴⁴⁷For the envisaged programme for the 1961 Aldeburgh Festival, see letter from Rostropovich to Britten, Moscow Conservatoire, 12 October 1960, and the typewritten carbon copy of Britten's reply on 1 November 1960 (BPL:MR).

us into Debussy's personal world of gaiety, sensitivity, mystery, and irony'. Britten may therefore have sought to develop such characteristics in his own writing for the instrument: the final movement of the Sonata, for example, is dominated by a *saltando* theme with a frequently changing mood drawn, perhaps, from his own interpretation of the Debussy Sonata, and Britten he is also likely to have admired the latter work's expression of a variety of moods within a compressed overall form.⁴⁴⁸

Although Britten asserted in January 1961 that he had not had 'much first-hand experience of the cello',⁴⁴⁹ as a viola player and practical musician with an extensive knowledge of the orchestral repertoire he already possessed a considerable understanding of string instruments, and works as early as the Double Concerto (1932) and *Three Divertimenti* (1936) make significant use of harmonics, glissandi, pizzicato, and sul ponticello.⁴⁵⁰ In spite of the challenge of returning to instrumental composition, he seems to have found the realisation of the work significantly more straightforward than the Cello Symphony and solo cello suites: by November 1960 he informed Rostropovich that the work

⁴⁴⁸AFMA 1961, p.64.

⁴⁴⁹Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 30 January 1961 (BPL: MR).

⁴⁵⁰Indeed, during lessons at the Moscow Conservatoire, Rostropovich argued that no other composer understood the nature of string playing so well; E. Wilson, *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p.180.

was 'progressing well' and he completed it two months later.⁴⁵¹ Indeed, although Britten initially seems to have considered sending Rostropovich 'some problematic passages which need your advice', in the event he composed the work without consulting the cellist, whom he did not meet again until March 1961.⁴⁵² In this sense the Rostropovich-Britten relationship between 1960 and 1976 appears strikingly different from that between Rostropovich and Prokofiev between 1947 and 1953 which – if one accepts Rostropovich's testimony – involved a significant influence during the composition stage, something which Rostropovich never suggested with regard to the works Britten composed for him.⁴⁵³ Thus, only in Britten's letter of 30 January 1961 accompanying the completed score did he discuss several secondary questions of bowing and fingering, and cellists have unanimously viewed the cello writing as lying comfortably under the fingers as well as effective.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁵¹Handwritten draft of a telegram from Britten to Rostropovich, n.d. [November 1960], and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich informing him of the work's completion on 30 January 1961 (BPL:MR). See A. Khudoian, ed. A. Budagian, *Vospominaniia* (Yerevan: Amrots grup, 2001), p.76, for Britten's acknowledgement of the difficulty of writing for solo cello.

⁴⁵²Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 1 November 1960, and Britten's pocket diaries, 1960-61 (BPL).

⁴⁵³M. Rostropovich. 'The Russian Years', pp. 7-8. The evidence for Rostropovich's influence on Prokofiev beyond technical corrections is questioned in Morrison, pp.377, 379, and in his 'Rostropovich's Recollections', *Music & Letters*, vol. 91, no 1 (2010).

⁴⁵⁴Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 30 January 1961 (BPL:MR), and Wilson, *Mstislav Rostropovich*, p.180.

This uncharacteristically short gestation reflected both the relatively small scale of the work as well as the immediate personal as well as musical rapport Britten established with Rostropovich during their first two meetings in September 1960.⁴⁵⁵ Indeed, if Rostropovich's 'Russianness' was not in itself a primary consideration, Britten does seem to have strongly identified with what he saw as the 'enormous feeling of generosity you get from the best Russian players, coming to meet you all the way'.⁴⁵⁶ Britten elaborated this statement in his later response to Rostropovich's studio recordings of the First and Second Cello Suites: 'You make my little hills into great mountains – the performances are monumental!'⁴⁵⁷ Certainly, Britten's later description of the first Rostropovich-inspired work as 'our Sonata' also points to his later

⁴⁵⁵Cf. letter from Britten to Paul Sacher, 26 November 1960: '...these days I feel strongly I must know the person's work and love it before I agree to write for them' (PS: Britten/Sacher correspondence, microfilm 156.1-0260). For the immediate warmth of Britten-Rostropovich relationship, see Rostropovich's birthday telegram to Britten received on 23 November 1960: 'Youre [sic] coming to the world was happiest present for musicians of many countries...on your 48th year I as well as whole band of cellists expecting an extras [sic] present from you', to which Britten immediately responded: 'Delighted with kind telegram on my birthday your good wishes make me very happy...look forward to meeting you again & working with you...'. Indeed, at some point during Britten's meetings with Rostropovich on 20 and 21 September 1961, he clearly asked the cellist to inscribe his Moscow address at the rear of his appointment diary (BPL: MR).

⁴⁵⁶'Musician of the Year', Kildea, p.267.

⁴⁵⁷Handwritten draft of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 1 January 1969 (BPL:MR). Cf. letter from Donald Mitchell to Britten, Faber and Faber, London, 4 July 1966: 'The [first] cello Suite was an astonishing experience, with Slava...almost airborne during the last movement...He certainly gets the scale of it across, and holds the tension from first note to last' (BPL: Faber correspondence). See also Stephen Walsh's review of the first performance of the Third Suite: 'The emphasis is rather on the full sweep of the bow, which in Rostropovich's hands certainly takes on a quite new expressive meaning', 'Britten's latest', *The Observer*, 29 December 1974, p.16.

descriptions of the Cello Symphony as well as of Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony, and the consistent spontaneity and warmth of the Britten-Rostropovich correspondence is amplified by Vishnevskaya's recollection that 'Britten and Rostropovich were very close to each other in spirit as musicians...when they performed together, it was an incredible understanding, as if one continued the other...Britten [also] cherished Slava for his spontaneousness, which disregarded his high status as a composer'.⁴⁵⁸ As has been observed, in contrast the Britten-Shostakovich relationship developed more gradually and possessed an entirely different dynamic.

Further examples of musicians with whom Britten collaborated in the 1960s such as Osian Ellis suggest that Britten regarded Rostropovich's ability to play whatever he composed as a particular creative stimulus. Britten therefore seems primarily to have viewed the work not in terms of his interest in Shostakovich's musical language, but as an opportunity to explore the expressive possibilities of the instrument on an intimate scale

⁴⁵⁸Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 14 March 1962; photocopy of handwritten letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 1 June 1970; transcription of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 13 January 1965 (BPL: MR/DDS); and appendix XIII. For Britten's evaluation of Rostropovich's musicianship, see typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 3 September 1962: 'Could there ever be a finer cellist?' (BPL: DDS).

and within a traditional, if imaginative, tonal structure.⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, when the Sonata was performed during the Britten Festival in Yerevan in August 1965 it was regarded as entirely characteristic of his musical language: the sole musical influence detected by the reviewer of *Sovetskaia muzyka* was the 'somewhat Prokofiev-style' 'Marcia'.⁴⁶⁰ However, Britten's parody is also characteristic: the initially sinister military fanfares and *f pesante* piano accompaniment (as from R21: bar 11) metamorphose seamlessly into a luminous bell-like sonority and *chiaro* texture in the piano part from R23 and the subsequent harmonic glissandi, and he seems primarily to have regarded this movement in terms of a compressed demonstration of at least three different cello techniques.⁴⁶¹ Further, although a Russian tribute to Britten on his sixtieth birthday also emphasised the fact that the Sonata was written in C major, and one can add that Prokofiev's Cello Sonata is written in the same key and has a first movement similarly dominated by first and second subjects, it is by no means certain that Britten was acquainted with the work, since the scores of Prokofiev's Cello Sonata, Cello Concerto and

⁴⁵⁹I am enjoying thinking about [the Sonata] enormously, especially with your lovely playing in mind. I hope I shall not go too far in exploiting the technique of the instrument, knowing that you can play anything!'; typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 1 November 1960. Cf. translation of letter [author not given] from Rostropovich to Britten, Hotel Imperial, Vienna, n.d. [6 June 1962]: 'My dear Ben, write for the 'cello everything that your heart tells you, never mind how difficult it is, my love for you will help me to master every note, even the most difficult ones' (BPL:MR).

⁴⁶⁰E. Oganessian, 'Dni Brittena v Armenii', p.110.

⁴⁶¹AFMA 1961, p.64.

Symphony Concerto were added to the collection after Britten's death.⁴⁶² Rostropovich himself consistently emphasised the originality of Britten's Sonata, viewing it as unlike any other piece of chamber music he knew and 'a new kind of expressive and powerful dramatic composition'.⁴⁶³ Indeed, one of the more immediately striking features of the work as a whole, its economy, can be seen as a reflection of a wider development in Britten's musical language in the 1960s. Moreover, he had already made significant use of cello pizzicato and harmonics in the entirely different context of *The Prince of the Pagodas* as a means of emulating Balinese sonorities. Britten's request to Rostropovich that he wanted the 'Scherzo-Pizzicato' to be played "'Non arpeggiando" with 2 or 3 (sometimes 4!) fingers – rather like guitar technique!' therefore suggests that the Sonata, and subsequent unaccompanied Suites, can be seen as a development of the interest in exploring unconventional sonorities which he had conspicuously demonstrated in the ballet score.⁴⁶⁴ Just as his early enthusiasm for Tchaikovsky's *Capriccio Italien* is likely to have been encouraged by the composer's not dissimilar use of sauté strings to emulate guitar rhythms (bars 180-197), this interest had more recently

⁴⁶²'Gordost' *Angliiskoi Muzyki*, p.16. For Britten's Prokofiev scores, see L. Henderson, 'His Influence on Britten: the Vital Prokofiev', p.16, qualified by communication from the BPL to the author, 1 August 2010.

⁴⁶³M. Rostropovich, 'Dear Ben', Gishford, p.16.

⁴⁶⁴Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 30 January 1961 (BPL: MR).

been stimulated by his collaboration with Julian Bream in *Songs from the Chinese* (1957). Britten thus viewed the Sonata's third movement as 'A study in pizzicato', which he later developed in the 'Serenata' of the First Suite.⁴⁶⁵

Further, the titles Britten chose for the five movements – 'Dialogo', 'Scherzo – pizzicato', 'Elegia', 'Marcia', and 'Moto Perpetuo' – indicate that Britten consciously adopted the suite-like form of instrumental music which he had employed from the late 1920s and would arguably finally adopt in the Third String Quartet, which he originally considered a 'divertimento'.⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, the Suite for Violin and Piano (1935) prefigures the Sonata not only in its near identical duration, but also in its structure of six relatively short character movements ('Introduction', 'March', 'Moto perpetuo', 'Lullaby', and 'Waltz'), its concentrated variety of moods, and an imaginative use of a variety of string techniques such as glissandi and harmonics. Thus, in Britten's letter to Rostropovich at a key point in the work's gestation, he revealed that the Sonata 'will not be a long work, and I feel inclined to call it not a sonata but a Sonatina, or some qualified name. The movements will be short and there may be five

⁴⁶⁵AFMA 1961, p.64.

⁴⁶⁶Colin Matthews in Blyth, p.179.

or six'.⁴⁶⁷ Indeed, as Kovnatskaia (1974) has pointed out, the Second Cello Suite, in which Britten adopts a more Germanic model - perhaps in recognition of Rostropovich's unparalleled mastery of the unaccompanied Bach Cello Suites – in fact more akin to sonata form than the Sonata itself.⁴⁶⁸ One should add that, in contrast to the later cello works, and notwithstanding the sombre musical atmosphere of the 'Elegia', the overall character of the work, if not entirely unambiguous, is largely positive: an expression, perhaps, of Britten's creative exhilaration as well as of a largely positive international situation at the time of the work's inception.

3.4 Symphony for Cello and Orchestra (1963): the influence of Rostropovich?

Britten's creative reference during the composition of the Cello Symphony, his second and largest-scale scale work for Rostropovich, is more elusive. Commentators have tended to give the work less attention than Britten's operas, and to accept rather than define the work's 'enormous complexity and great originality of structure'.⁴⁶⁹ Rostropovich

⁴⁶⁷Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 1 November 1960 (BPL:MR).

⁴⁶⁸Kovnatskaia, *Benjamin Britten*, p.309.

⁴⁶⁹Wilson, p.197. Richard Taruskin, for example, does not discuss the work in his consideration of Britten in *Oxford History of Western Music, vol. 5: Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2005).

himself described it as 'an innovative work which sets out brave new paths in the development of cello music';⁴⁷⁰ and the work cannot be related to the conventional lyrical/elegiac outpouring of either the Myaskovsky (1944) and Weinberg (1948, revised 1956) cello concertos – if indeed Britten was aware of these works, which is unlikely – nor to their English counterparts. Britten clearly found its composition 'excessively difficult', as is indicated by the work's extended gestation from the spring of 1962 to April 1963 and the composer's uncertainty with regard to its title.⁴⁷¹ Moreover, the programme note for the delayed first English performance is perfunctory and did not comment on the music, and only in the 1970 programme was the work analysed, in a note written by Donald Mitchell, although it is unclear how far Britten endorsed this interpretation.⁴⁷² Indeed, although Britten was characteristically reticent about his music, this was particularly the case with the Cello Symphony. It is therefore a more difficult work to assess than, for example, *Sinfonia da Requiem* and the Piano and Violin Concertos, which can, to a degree, be viewed as its antecedents in Britten's output.

⁴⁷⁰V. Vlasov, 'Mstislav Rostropovich', p.69.

⁴⁷¹Typewritten carbon copies of letters from Britten to Rostropovich, 15 November 1962 and 11 April 1963 (BPL:MR), and composition full score (BPL: British Library: Additional MS 60611), received at Boosey and Hawkes on 24 April 1963 (first and second movements), 26 April 1963 (third movement), and 13 May 1963 (final movement). For Britten's uncertainty with regard to the title, see also 'Britten rasskazyvaet', p. 102: 'I have still not decided what to call it – a Symphony or a Concerto'.

⁴⁷²AFMA 1964, p.32.

The work can certainly be viewed as inspired by Rostropovich in the first instance, in so far as Britten seems purposefully to have composed a complex and large-scale cello part and confessed to the cellist that he could hear him 'in every note and every bar'.⁴⁷³ Moreover, the final movement (from R71 to R75: bar 12) may make a deliberate reference to a Rostropovich virtuoso encore piece such as David Popper's *Dance of the Elves* or his own *Humouresque*, or to the bravura passage in Variation IV of Tchaikovsky's *Variations on a Rococo Theme* (bars 187 to 193). In any case, Britten would have been aware that Shostakovich had given several bravura passages to Rostropovich in the finale of his First Concerto, as in the succession of arpeggios between R81 and R82, which may themselves allude to Popper's *The Spinning Wheel*. In this respect the work can also be related to other highly characterised instrumental works composed by Britten for exceptionally gifted musicians in the 1960s, albeit it is on a significantly larger scale and in this case Britten uniquely insisted upon Rostropovich's exclusivity until the autumn of 1965, partly in order for the cellist to be permitted by the Soviet authorities to record the work for Decca.⁴⁷⁴ Certainly, as was noted at the time, Britten responded to the opportunity to develop his use of unprecedented cello techniques first

⁴⁷³Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 15 November 1962 (BPL: MR).

⁴⁷⁴Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to E. Roth at Boosey and Hawkes, 20 March 1964 (BPL: BH).

explored in the Sonata, as in the harmonic trills from R47: bar 10 to the end of the second movement, of which he was particularly proud.⁴⁷⁵

Moreover, given that Britten acknowledged in the same year that he was frequently inspired by writing for specific occasions and buildings, the opportunity to create a work for the foremost Soviet cellist to be first performed in the Great Halls of the Moscow Conservatoire and Leningrad Philharmonic – venues intimately associated with Tchaikovsky and the Russian musical tradition - would have represented a particular stimulus.⁴⁷⁶ Indeed, it was Britten who suggested to Rostropovich that the Cello Symphony first be performed in the Soviet Union and his March 1964 visit was almost entirely devoted to the two first performances of the work.⁴⁷⁷ Moreover, given that the work is still considered as one of Britten's most 'difficult' compositions, it may also be the case that he was more confident of a positive reception in the Soviet Union in the light of the overwhelmingly enthusiastic reception his music

⁴⁷⁵Vlasov, 'Mstislav Rostropovich', p.69; and interview with Ronan Magill, 19 September 2010.

⁴⁷⁶Cf. Aspen, p.11: '...almost every piece I have ever written has been composed with a certain occasion in mind, and usually for definite performers; and appendix II.

⁴⁷⁷For Britten's desire for the work to be performed in the Soviet Union, see typewritten carbon copy of letter to Rostropovich, 15 November 1962: 'I do not think...that there is any chance of my having it ready for the first performance in Moscow when we all come over in March...This does not distress me very much because it means there will be an excuse to come back to Russia the following year!' (BPL: MR), and from J.W. Cullum to Alan Brooke Turner, 8 July 1963: '[Britten] asked me to tell you that because of the cancellation of the first performance of the Cello Concerto here, he has suggested that this performance should now take place during his visit in March' (BPL: USSR Moscow).

had received in Moscow and Leningrad a year earlier, although he may also have been conscious of the need for the work's finale to be viewed as positive and life-affirming in line with official ideology and, in the event, the Soviet musical establishment was somewhat perplexed by the work.⁴⁷⁸

One should nevertheless acknowledge that the Cello Symphony is not mentioned in detail in the Britten-Rostropovich correspondence and that if Britten and Rostropovich met in August and September 1962, there is no evidence to suggest that they discussed the work beyond very general terms given Britten's habitual reticence about pieces upon which he was working.⁴⁷⁹ It is therefore unlikely that the influence of Shostakovich or Prokofiev would have operated through the channel of Rostropovich, and the cellist never implied that he had a direct influence on the work

⁴⁷⁸My strongest impressions after visiting Moscow and Leningrad [in 1963] are those of the Soviet audience and the reception we were given here'; 'Britten rasskazyvaet', p.101. For the Soviet response to the work, see, for example, Vlasov, p.69: 'The new work...surprised many listeners...for me personally, not everything is clear in this complex and big work...The material in the first part seemed confused and the form imprecise'. Cf. J. Warrack: 'It was cordially received at the premiere...though as far as the musical establishment in the smart seats went, I thought a trifle too politely'; 'Britten's Cello Symphony', p.419.

⁴⁷⁹In a letter to Rostropovich on 14 March 1962, Britten wrote that '...I am determined to write [a cello concerto] for you, and we can at least discuss what it will be like'. Britten's appointment diary for 1962 indicates that Britten and Rostropovich subsequently met in Aldeburgh between 11 and 14 August and Long Melford between 14 and 16 September; and Britten's next letter to the cellist on 15 November, with which he enclosed the piano reduction of the first movement, refers to an intervening period of 'excessively difficult' work (BPL: MR). Rosamund Strode, who succeeded Imogen Holst as Britten's music assistant in 1964, emphasised that in her experience Britten never discussed a work on which he was working; letter to the author, 26 November 2007.

during its composition, in contrast to his contribution to Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto. The parallel case of Britten's collaboration with Osian Ellis sheds light on this question, the harpist recalling that 'Britten did not consult me on his harp writing; he had a great imagination, and he would pick up on any players' (or singers') idiosyncrasies or sounds and techniques and expand them still further'.⁴⁸⁰ Thus, by the time Britten first rehearsed the work with Rostropovich in Moscow in March 1963, a year ahead of the delayed first performance, it was largely complete.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, given that the cadenza of the work in the composition full score is written out by Imogen Holst, the composition of whose cello variations *Fall of the Leaf* in November 1962 coincided with Britten's completion of the first movement prior to her preparing its piano reduction, it is possible that she rather than Rostropovich advised the composer on minor technical questions relating to the instrument.⁴⁸² It is also significant that Britten obtained the score of Bridge's 'charming, although very early' Cello Sonata in March 1961, a week prior to his first mention of the Cello Symphony in a letter to Rostropovich, since he profoundly admired Bridge's meticulous understanding of string technique and it is

⁴⁸⁰Appendix III.

⁴⁸¹AFMA 1963, p.38.

⁴⁸²Composition full score, pp. 105-8 (BPL), and C. Grogan, ed. *Imogen Holst: A Life in Music*, p.322.

likely that he would have wished to consult his former teacher's work.⁴⁸³

In any case, Britten was content to leave bowings and fingering for Rostropovich to complete or correct, although it should be acknowledged that some of Britten's writing for the instrument is not always practical, as in the stretches between R44 and R46, the closely interwoven melodies in the cadenza, which are difficult to project with sufficient volume on the lower strings, and the writing for the lower register between R69: bar 1 and R69 bar 8.⁴⁸⁴

3.5 The influence of Shostakovich and Prokofiev?

Although Britten's Cello Symphony and Shostakovich First Cello Concerto can be linked chronologically and by the fact that they were both composed for Rostropovich, there are several important differences. Shostakovich's sardonic humour and juxtaposition of the tragic and

⁴⁸³Ledger from Boosey and Hawkes to Britten, 7 March 1961 (BPL: BH); typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 14 March 1962; and transcription of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 13 January 1965 (BPL: MR). For Britten's admiration of Bridge's knowledge of string technique, see letter from Britten to Carey Blyton, Faber and Faber, 15 May 1965, in which he noted that Bridge 'bowed his parts so exactly that they are as important as dynamics' (BPL: Faber correspondence).

⁴⁸⁴Letter from Rostropovich to Britten, Tyringham, Massachusetts, n.d. [11 November 1963]: 'If you want me to I will be glad to prepare...the cello part of your symphony for your publishers', and Britten's response on 15 November: '...I leave these details to you whom I often feel knows my music better than I do myself' (BPL:MR). Cf. Rostropovich's observation (1981) that very few alternations were necessary: 'In that...[Britten] was on a par with Shostakovich. Both were so meticulous in their scoring that changes were minimal. Britten apparently wrote for the cello as if he had played the instrument himself. He even wrote passages that Rostropovich would have thought to be impossible on the instrument, but such was Britten's technical knowledge that they proved capable of execution'; Blyth, p.150.

satirical are not features of the Britten work, nor was Britten influenced by two striking features of the Shostakovich concerto, the characteristically shrill *ff* writing for piccolo and the possibly symbolic use of celesta in conjunction with cello harmonics between R57 and R60; and he also employed a wider range of cello techniques. One should also acknowledge that the work is not mentioned in the Britten-Shostakovich correspondence, and that although the composers met on at least two occasions in March 1963 there is no evidence to suggest that they discussed the work prior to its first performance a year later.⁴⁸⁵

It is therefore more appropriate to suggest that Britten and Shostakovich responded to two compositional problems in a similar, if not identical, way. Both works address the problem of how to project the solo cello in the context of a concerto work; indeed, Shostakovich's re-orchestrations of the Schumann (1963) and Tishchenko (1969) cello concertos – which have been viewed as less successful in this respect than the First Cello Concerto – suggest that in the 1960s this represented an area of creative

⁴⁸⁵On 10 and 20 March (BPL: Britten's appointment diary; and information in Shostakovich's diary from Ol'ga Dombrovskaia, Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow). Marion Thorpe's testimony in Blyth, p.41, that Britten and Shostakovich discussed their latest works on one occasion in Moscow refers to Britten's March 1964 visit, by which time the Cello Symphony was complete; interview with the author, 5 September 2008.

interest independent of Britten.⁴⁸⁶ Thus, both the First Cello Concerto and Cello Symphony demonstrate a striking clarity of texture, albeit one not achieved by identical means, and both can be viewed as ensemble pieces. Shostakovich removed all brass other than a (solo) horn obbligato and placed particular emphasis on upper and lower orchestral sonorities, as at R33: bars 1 to 4, and elsewhere he employed dynamic contrast to ensure the projection of the solo cello line, as between R54 and R55. Britten, on the other hand, employed a classical orchestra with a significant brass section but achieved clarity of texture and projection through a more sophisticated use of orchestral colour and dynamics: horn is one of a variety of solo instruments employed alongside the cello soloist. The Cello Symphony was thus conceived 'in groupings of great clarity', and Britten's use of violins in particular was more selective than that of Shostakovich.⁴⁸⁷ Britten's concern for clarity is also apparent in his alterations to the composition full score between R14 and R15 and R20: bar 4 to R21: bar 2, whereby he substituted a flute for clarinet solo and vice versa, and in the fact that, uncharacteristically, the composer made

⁴⁸⁶Cf. letter from Shostakovich to Boris Tishchenko, 5 January 1966, regarding the latter's Cello Concerto, which criticises the 'over-saturated' orchestration and the fact that 'in places the cello is not heard', Tishchenko, p.21.

⁴⁸⁷Warrack, *op. cit.*, p.418.

several further alterations to the orchestration in the light of the Moscow and Leningrad first performances.⁴⁸⁸

To what extent Britten was influenced in this regard by Shostakovich is debatable. The Shostakovich Concerto also makes particular use of expressive solo instrumentation and demonstrates a greater refinement in use of dynamics than in Shostakovich's earlier works, as between R57 and R61. Britten may have been stimulated by Shostakovich to explore the possibilities of treating the orchestra as an ensemble of instruments in the context of a concerto; certainly in this respect, the work can be distinguished from his earlier Violin and Piano Concertos, which to a degree adopt a more nineteenth-century virtuoso model. On the other hand, Britten's 'scoring for selected ensembles, while using the full orchestra for specific purposes, [as] a method of artistic economy which...has never been applied so consistently' had been highlighted as characteristic by 1952,⁴⁸⁹ and a refined use of dynamics is a hallmark of his earliest published scores. Moreover, the first movement of the Cello Symphony displays a wider variety of solo parts than the Shostakovich

⁴⁸⁸Composition full score (BPL), and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to E. Roth, Boosey and Hawkes, 25 March 1964 (BPL:BH).

⁴⁸⁹Erwin Stein, 'The Symphonies', in DMHK, p. 256. Cf. Britten in 'British Music in the World Today' (December 1964): '...I find now that when I do use...a full orchestra – in the Cello Symphony, for instance...I don't want to use the orchestra as it's normally constituted – that particular kind of sound that became the bread and butter of the nineteenth century'; Kildea, p.272.

First Cello Concerto (as between R13 and R15) and the roles of soloist and orchestra are in fact reversed at R17 bar 8 to R18, arguably a reassertion of Britten's early admiration for Brahms's Second Piano Concerto.⁴⁹⁰ Further, Britten made more use of timpani solo as well as double bassoon than Shostakovich; indeed, the former dominates the third movement and plays a crucial part in the work as a whole, whilst the latter is also on occasion employed in a very high register, as from R38: bar 13 to R39.⁴⁹¹ Britten's overall use of dynamics is also more refined than in the Shostakovich Concerto: the first movement, for example, concludes with *pp* solo cello and *ppp* solo double bass, together with *ppp* double bassoons and double basses and *pppp* gong.

Further, although Peter Evans emphasises the novelty of the effects employed in the work,⁴⁹² and it is certainly the case that at least two passages (between R6 to R8 and at R46: bar 14) look forward to *Death in Venice* in their texture and use of rhythm and pizzicato, the Cello Symphony should also be seen as a development of Britten's existing musical language: the work should therefore be viewed as both

⁴⁹⁰Diary, 11 March 1931 (BPL).

⁴⁹¹In one of his few comments on Cello Symphony, Britten described it (together with *Nocturne*) as 'difficult percussive nuts to crack'; Britten's suggested introduction to James Blades's book on percussion, enclosure to Britten's letter to Donald Mitchell, 31 December 1969 (BPL: Faber correspondence). Blades himself emphasised the need for 'really fine timpani' in the work; Blades, p.244.

⁴⁹²Evans, pp.323-4.

characteristic and transitional. This is particularly evident in his use of percussion: Britten had previously employed a variety of refined percussion effects, including vibraphone, gong and timpani glissandi, in *Spring Symphony*, as well as combining tambourine with solo cello in *Noye's Fludde* (1958; R98 to R99), and his use of whip in the final movement of the Cello Symphony (from R73: bar 5) is prefigured in contexts as varied as the finale of the Piano Concerto and the incidental music for the radio drama *The Rescue*. It is more plausible to suggest that Britten was inspired to develop this existing interest in percussion not by Shostakovich, but by his professional relationship with James Blades, whom Britten considered 'a very great artist' and for whom the percussion part of Cello Symphony was conceived.⁴⁹³ One should add that Britten's interest in double bass sonorities, with effects ranging from *p tremolo (non marcato)* and *ppp col legno* to simultaneous use of arco and pizzicato, was also a long-term creative trait, evident as early as *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* and recently expressed in the depiction of the forest by means of glissandi in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Britten and Shostakovich both addressed a second compositional problem, the position and function of the cadenza, by means of a substantial cadenza thematically linking the final two movements and

⁴⁹³Letter from Britten to Blades, 4 November 1970 (BPL: James Blades correspondence).

adding significantly to the work's dramatic impact: this is an area in which Britten does seem to have been influenced by the Shostakovich work, particularly if one compares the shorter and more functional cadenza of his Violin Concerto; moreover, both cadenzas are introduced a *pp* timpani trill. However, one should add that Britten had already employed a repeated semiquaver timpani figure as a means of linking the second and third movements of his Double Concerto (bars 118-19), which pre-dated his knowledge of Shostakovich's music. It may also be that the independent tempi of soloist and timpani at the opening of the cadenza in the Cello Symphony primarily reflects the increasing importance of heterophony in Britten's musical language.⁴⁹⁴ Moreover, Britten's cadenza in Cello Symphony is arguably more elaborate than that of the Shostakovich First Cello Concerto, developing a variety of effects he had already employed in the Sonata, one of which, rhythmic accelerando, he had employed as early as 1938 in the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* (1937; 'Introduction and Theme', bar 9), and which was to become an important feature of his later musical language. Such observations suggest that, as with the Cello Sonata, Shostakovich did not constitute a primary source of creative reference for the Britten in 1962 and 1963, and that his influence served largely to stimulate existing areas of Britten's musical development. One should add that contemporary Soviet

⁴⁹⁴Cooke, *Britten and the Far East*, p.224.

reviewers did not highlight the influence of Shostakovich on any aspect of the work, including the woodwind fugato writing in the Scherzo (as between R69 and R70), which bears some resemblance to the composer's symphonic scherzo writing in, for example, the Ninth Symphony.⁴⁹⁵

The works' titles and shared characteristic as ensemble pieces provide more revealing points of comparison and contrast with Prokofiev's Symphony-Concerto, as was recognised at the time of the first performance.⁴⁹⁶ Both works employ a variation-based finale and second-movement scherzo, and demonstrate a variety of solo parts and an inventive use of percussion in conjunction with the soloist. On the other hand, Britten did not possess the score of this work, nor does he appear to have heard Rostropovich perform it at any point between 1954 and 1962, although he did attend the first performance in Western Europe of the Cello Concerto upon which the Symphony-Concerto is largely based.⁴⁹⁷ He may therefore have been influenced by the work indirectly, through an understanding of Rostropovich's musical personality or the prism of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto, since Shostakovich acknowledged that his admiration for the Prokofiev work was the

⁴⁹⁵Britten possessed the 1946 ASMP edition (BPL: 2-100474).

⁴⁹⁶Vlasov, 'Mstislav Rostropovich', p.69.

⁴⁹⁷*Letters from a Life II*, p.1247, and Britten's appointment diary for 9 December 1945 (BPL).

'original impulse' for his own concerto.⁴⁹⁸ One should add that the Symphony-Concerto is a significantly more monumental, and more lyrical, work than Britten's: there is nothing in the Cello Symphony to compare, for example, with the *cantabile* cello writing between R11 to R16, and its three-movement structure, with the cadenza placed within the extended scherzo of the second movement, is also distinctive. Further, whereas Britten's use of cello techniques is more original, Prokofiev exploited the upper register of the instrument to a far greater degree, as in the first movement from R21: bar 2 to R21: bar 6 and from R31: bar 5 to the end of the third movement. The evidence suggests that Britten felt that it was unidiomatic to write for the cello in this way.⁴⁹⁹

3.6 Non-Russian eclecticism and programmatic basis

Britten's sources of creative reference in the Cello Symphony are in fact broadly eclectic: the Adagio, for example, can be viewed as a reassertion of Britten's Mahler-inspired fascination with funeral marches from 1936 onwards. Two particular non-Russian influences can be suggested: Elgar, and Bridge. Whereas Britten seems consciously to have rejected the

⁴⁹⁸D. Shostakovich, *Sovetskaia Kul'tura*, 6 June 1959, quoted in *D. Shostakovich: O vremeni i o sebe*, p.222.

⁴⁹⁹See letter from Britten to Ronan Magill, 25 November 1971: 'Look – I do know a little about cello standards in this country & abroad (besides having worked with the greatest of the lot!) Why do you always like to write so high for the cello?! If you want that sound, a viola can give you that tension without the insensitivity'. Three days later, Britten added: 'When you go up to that height on a cello it's got to be in a cello way, & not in the way of another instrument' (BPL: Ronan Magill correspondence).

rhapsodic-pastoral characteristics of, for example, the Delius, Bax and Moeran cello concertos, some comparisons can be made with the Elgar Cello Concerto.⁵⁰⁰ Both works open with a commanding double-stopped recitative, a device Britten was also to employ in the opening of his final cello work for Rostropovich, the *Tema 'Sacher'* of 1976.⁵⁰¹ Both share an unconventional structure, with a short second-movement scherzo and what appears to be a deliberately truncated coda, and are also notable for their refinement and economy of texture, with an emphasis on lower, especially lower string, sonorities. The *presto inquieto* of the Scherzo may also have been influenced by the *leggierissimo* writing for cello in the scherzo of the Elgar work, whilst its astringent scoring also recalls passages of Frank Bridge's *Oration* (as between R2 and R4 and R12 and R14), a work whose première Britten attended in 1936 and in which he retained a keen interest.⁵⁰²

In some ways, it is Bridge's *Oration*, a work 'haunted by mental images' of war and concluding with an ambiguous epilogue, which constitutes

⁵⁰⁰Britten possessed a copy of the 1957 edition of the miniature score (BPL: 2-9900735).

⁵⁰¹Cf. D. McVeagh, *Elgar the Music Maker* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), p.182: 'Is there another concerto with such a strange start?'

⁵⁰²Although *Oration* remained unpublished during Britten's lifetime, his diary records that he attended the première on 17 January 1936 (BPL). In August 1964, Mitchell wrote to Britten that he had found the full score of *Oration*, which Britten 'mentioned to [him] some time ago'; and in 1972 Britten hoped that Rostropovich would be able to perform the work at the Aldeburgh Festival, encouraging Donald Mitchell to make an appeal in the *Times* for the recovery of the orchestral parts; see letters from Mitchell to Britten, 19 August 1964 and from Britten to Mitchell, 5 July 1972 (BPL: Faber correspondence).

the closest parallel to the work in the cello repertoire as opposed to the Shostakovich Concerto.⁵⁰³ There are certainly hints of a programmatic element in the Britten work, which can be viewed as a reassertion of an area of pre-1945 affinity between Britten and Shostakovich; indeed, Britten first seems to have envisaged writing a cello concerto as early as 1941.⁵⁰⁴ Two years earlier Britten thus referred to *Sinfonia da Requiem* as ‘rather topical, but not of course mentioning dates or places’ and as a ‘short programme symphony’, and in the same light emphasised the ‘very serious’ character of his Violin Concerto.⁵⁰⁵ He obliquely referred to this aspect of the Cello Symphony in 1963: ‘Certainly, I respond very deeply to words, but not necessarily only in opera. At the moment, I think the finest thing I’ve written is my work for cello and orchestra’.⁵⁰⁶ Britten also alluded to the work’s programmatic basis in conversation with Ronan Magill in the late 1960s.⁵⁰⁷

Donald Mitchell certainly feels that ‘Ben was much more aware of the international situation than people generally realise. It was all the harder for him because there were many periods in his life when he felt

⁵⁰³P. Hindmarsh, CD note to *Bridge: Orchestral Works*, vol. 4 (CHAN 10188; 2004), p.7.

⁵⁰⁴*Letters from a Life II*, p.743.

⁵⁰⁵Letters from Britten to Ralph Hawkes, Long Island Home, Amityville, New York, n.d. [October 1939] and 19 October 1939, and 16 June 1939, from Grand Rapids, Michigan (BPL: BH).

⁵⁰⁶Interview with Charles Osborne’, *Kildea*, p.245.

⁵⁰⁷Interview with Ronan Magill, 19 September 2010.

optimistic but [as the 1960s progressed] the old horrors of the pre-war years seemed to be repeated endlessly'.⁵⁰⁸ Indeed, Britten's 'excessively difficult' period of work between September and November 1962 coincided exactly with the Cuban Missile Crisis as well as a period of ill health.⁵⁰⁹ Moreover, although Britten had completed *War Requiem* in January 1962, its longer-term creative preoccupations continued to influence him during the following year: *A Hymn of St. Columba* is a stark setting of an apocalyptic vision of the day of judgement, *Cantata misericordium* contains an equally significant timpani part, and there are echoes of *War Requiem's* fanfares in the brass writing of the Cello Symphony, between R57: bar 1 to R57: bar 2.⁵¹⁰ In the third movement of the Cello Symphony, Britten's juxtaposition of a series of violent timpani crescendos to *f/sfp*, culminating in the cadenza, with *pp dolciss.* writing for woodwind and an elegiac solo cello line may therefore symbolically represent some form of violence. The composition sketch also indicates that Britten found the final movement of the work a particular compositional challenge: of the sixteen discarded pages eleven are from

⁵⁰⁸Appendix IX.

⁵⁰⁹Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 15 November 1962 (BPL:MR).

⁵¹⁰'I have had a very bad year, illness after illness...I think the cause, honestly, is that I gave out a great deal of myself in the War Requiem, & my body has taken revenge! My 'cello concerto (due to be finished now) is only half-way through'; microfilm copy of letter from Britten to Paul Sacher, 13 January 1963 (PS: 156.1-0277-0281).

this movement.⁵¹¹ Given that his use of a passacaglia was hitherto reserved for tragic or deeply serious dramatic/psychological contexts, its optimism may be apparent rather than real. Whereas it opens with a brilliant fanfare and resolves on a D major chord following a passage of bright string and woodwind sonority, the coda (from R79) is palpably truncated, and in this respect it may be distinguished from the 'life-asserting' finale of the Shostakovich First Cello Concerto.⁵¹² Thus, a Western reviewer of the first Russian performances of the Cello Symphony noted that 'the closing pages did not seem to support the weight of all that had before', and he found it difficult to equate the 'dark intricacy of the first movement and its nervous, shifty scherzo companion' with the 'glowing Adagio and the final triumph'.⁵¹³

Boris Tishchenko viewed a preoccupation with war and death as the most fundamental area of affinity between Britten and Shostakovich, encompassing both the pre-and post-war periods.⁵¹⁴ This is supported by the title of *Russian Funeral*, which evolved from 'Russian work' (24 February 1936), to 'Russian March' (27 February), 'the Funeral' (29

⁵¹¹BPL: microfilm of composition sketch of Cello Symphony.

⁵¹²L. Ginzburg, preface to the first Soviet edition of the full score (Moscow: State Music Publishers, 1960).

⁵¹³Warrack, p.418. Arnold Whittall similarly notes the 'precariously triumphant' harmony of the ending in Whittall, p.208.

⁵¹⁴Appendix XI.

February), 'Russian Funeral' (2 March, autograph full score), to 'War and Death' (8 March, first performance).⁵¹⁵ However, this interpretation should also be qualified in three respects. One should be cautious of making programmatic assumptions concerning instrumental works: the instrumentation and dynamics of the opening *maestoso* theme of *Diversions* (R1 to R3) recall *Russian Funeral*, but it is tendentious to view this work beyond the particular creative challenges posed to Britten by the Paul Wittgenstein commission; and his most extended funeral march is in the *Scottish Ballad* (1941; bars 30 to 143), a work written as a virtuoso vehicle for solo piano duet. Britten's use of brass and percussion in *The Rescue*, as a harbinger of violence at the moment Odysseus beholds his palace (R:S: bar 4 to R:T), also suggests that Britten's creative preoccupation with the contexts in which violence is perpetrated had a wider dramatic application and should not exclusively be linked to international events.

Secondly, Britten's compositional output between *Sinfonia da Requiem* in 1940 and 1945 indicates a far lesser preoccupation with the impact of war than during the five years previously, and a focus instead on the wider compositional challenges of operetta, ballet, radio and opera, until the composer's concert tour of the German concentration camps in July 1945

⁵¹⁵Britten's diary and microfilm of full score (BPL).

inspired the *Holy Sonnets of John Donne*. This suggests that this aspect of Britten's creative personality was fluid and liable to assert itself in response to specific events.

Finally, for Britten and Shostakovich the expression of this shared creative preoccupation took different forms. Britten never envisaged a large-scale trilogy of war symphonies and with the exception of *War Requiem* and *Owen Wingrave* the expressions of his anti-war stance were on a relatively smaller scale; yet, in contrast to Shostakovich, he did not express this aspect of his creative personality by means of chamber music. One could argue that this distinction reflected the different national/cultural contexts in which such responses to war and expressions of grief were conceived. In 1966 Boris Iarustovskii drew a distinction between Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* and the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies of Shostakovich not only in terms of the former's smaller scale and apparently Christian content but also in that Western 'war symphonies' were composed away from the battlefield, whereas from 1941 to 1945 Soviet composers were surrounded by war both physically and psychologically.⁵¹⁶ In this sense, a more valid comparison could be made between the Cello Symphony and Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements*, a work which, although not deemed programmatic

⁵¹⁶B. Iarustovskii, *Simfonii o voine i mire* (Moscow: Nauka, 1966), pp. 263-4 and *passim*.

by the composer, was 'written under the impression of world events...[which] excited [Stravinsky's] musical imagination'.⁵¹⁷ Britten's reference to Stravinsky in December 1966 certainly suggests that of contemporary composers he had Stravinsky rather than Shostakovich in mind during the work's composition, and he would also have been aware that the composer had visited the Soviet Union four years earlier to considerable popular and official acclaim.⁵¹⁸

3.7 The Three Suites for Cello (1964-71)

Britten's three unaccompanied Suites for Cello develop features of the Sonata and Cello Symphony, and the chronological coincidence of their composition with the deepening of the Britten-Shostakovich association into a personal friendship suggests that Britten would have been more receptive to musical influence from Shostakovich in these works. Peter Evans, for example, links the Second Suite (1967) 'with the world of Prokofiev and Shostakovich', whilst Eric Roseberry feels that the influence of Shostakovich is apparent in all three Suites, particularly in terms of their intensity of expression.⁵¹⁹ However, Britten's exploration of the expressive possibilities of the cello develops conspicuously across the

⁵¹⁷Igor Stravinsky, CD note [n.d.] to *Igor Stravinsky Edition* (SM2K 46294) vol. IV, p.6.

⁵¹⁸Pears, p.139; and appendix II.

⁵¹⁹Evans, p.325; E. Roseberry, 'The Solo Chamber Music', in Palmer, p.381. See also Walker in 'Britten, Rostropovich and the Cello', AFMA 2011, p.159, for the 'prominently Russian flavour' of the three Suites.

three works, and it is likely that he viewed writing for the solo instrument within a relatively compressed but free form as the primary compositional challenge, hence the distinctive structure and idiom of each Suite and Britten's interest in the form of Shostakovich's Ninth String Quartet in 1964.⁵²⁰ Indeed, the composer's use of solo cello to accompany the recitative interpolations in *Phaedra* (1975), with significant use of pizzicato and tremolo sul ponticello, suggests that exploring the expressive possibilities of the instrument within an ostensibly Baroque form continued to act as a creative stimulus. The reviewer of *Sovetskaia muzyka* thus described the First Suite as 'so rich in colours and hues of sound that it seems orchestrated for the cello in the true sense of the word', whilst Rostropovich viewed the work as a symphony for solo cello which 'exacted the limit from the instrument'; the Second Suite similarly 'developed all the beautiful sounds'.⁵²¹ Moreover, one of the most striking features of the Third Suite, its asceticism, with fewer notes and passages of double stopping, reflects a wider development in Britten's musical language for which Shostakovich cannot be held primarily responsible. Michael Kennedy feels that 'The asceticism of Britten after *War Requiem* would have happened anyway, but with lots more *Pagodas* music, so Shostakovich coming along at that time solved a problem; the real

⁵²⁰'Musician of the Year', Kildea, p.267.

⁵²¹'Dni Brittena v Armenii', p.110, letter from Donald Mitchell to Britten, 4 July 1966 (BPL: Faber correspondence), and K. Mitchell, 'Edinburgh Diary 1968', in Reed, p.203.

influence was Rostropovich who led Britten back to instrumental composition'.⁵²² It is therefore more plausible to suggest that both composers were independently moving towards a more ascetic, yet expressive, musical language by the time of their creative relationship, a development which enhanced the empathy each felt towards the other's music.

The intensity and context of the three Suites certainly suggests that Britten may increasingly have viewed their composition as, to a degree, parallel with Shostakovich's post-1964 chamber music, an interpretation which is supported by a variety of evidence. Although he seems only to have become familiar with the Second Trio in the second half of 1962,⁵²³ he referred explicitly to the Eighth, Ninth and Tenth String Quartets in his 1966 birthday tribute and described the Tenth String Quartet as 'a great new development for [Shostakovich]'.⁵²⁴ Britten also acquired the scores of twelve of Shostakovich's string quartets from 1960 onwards, together with the first recording of the Fourteenth String Quartet from Shostakovich himself in June 1975, and he programmed six of Shostakovich's string quartets as well as the Violin Sonata at the

⁵²²Letter to the author, 23 November 2010.

⁵²³*Letters from a Life V*, pp. 424-5.

⁵²⁴Britten's autograph draft of birthday tribute (BPL: DDS), and 'Musician of the Year', Kildea, p. 267.

Aldeburgh Festival between 1964 and 1974 (tables 3 and 4).⁵²⁵ Britten's interest in this aspect of Shostakovich's output is particularly striking given its generally delayed reception and consequent unfamiliarity in the West.⁵²⁶

Britten's own Third String Quartet can, to a degree, be viewed as the culmination of this engagement with Shostakovich's chamber music, although one should note that the evidence strongly suggests that Britten was not familiar with the composer's Fifteenth String Quartet – and certainly not the Viola Sonata – by the time of its composition.⁵²⁷ Moreover, one should not discount other sources of influence on this

⁵²⁵See photocopy of cover of Melodiya C10 05137-8, inscribed in Russian: 'To dear Ben Britten as a sign of love and great respect, Moscow, 13 June 1975' (BPL: DDS). Britten also possessed the Fitzwilliam String Quartet's recording of the Seventh, Thirteenth and Fourteenth String Quartets released in December 1975 as L'Oiseau-lyre DSLO 9 (BPL).

⁵²⁶See typewritten carbon copy of letter from Rosamund Strode to Mark Lubotsky, 28 November 1970: 'And have you perhaps a Programme Note that we could use for the Shostakovich [Violin Sonata, premièred in May 1969]? We have no details about it at all (Opus number, movements, key etc.) and shall be grateful for any information you could send us about it' (BPL: Mark Lubotsky correspondence). See also typewritten carbon copy of letter from Alan George on behalf of the Fitzwilliam String Quartet to Shostakovich, University of York, 8 July 1972: 'Eventually we hope to have every one of your quartets in our repertoire; we feel that they are not performed quite as often as they should be so...we hope to make them as well known as your symphonies and concertos' (Alan George's private archive). Alan George also recalls Shostakovich's 'genuine surprise that anyone should bother to play his music'; conversation with the author, 2 February 2010.

⁵²⁷Britten possessed the Fitzwilliam String Quartet's recording of the quartet (L'Oiseau-Lyre DSLO 11), which was not released until April 1976, although he was aware of its composition from a letter from Shostakovich dated 16 December 1974 in which the composer told him that he had recently sent the parts to the Fitzwilliam Quartet, and suggested the possibility of their performing it at the 1975 Aldeburgh Festival (BPL: DDS).

aspect of Britten's output between 1960 and 1971, such as Bach, Bartók and Haydn.⁵²⁸

Table 3: Scores of Shostakovich's String Quartets acquired by Britten after 1960 (Britten-Pears Library)⁵²⁹

String Quartet	Edition	Date of Britten's acquisition
4	London: Musica Rara, 1961	Probably 1961-3
5	London: Musica Rara, 1961	Probably 1961-3
6	London: Musica Rara, 1961	Probably 1961-3
1-8	Moscow: Muzyka, 1964 (two volumes)	Probably 1964
9	Moscow: Muzyka, 1966	Probably 1966-7
11	Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1967	Signed and dated by Shostakovich, 7 June 1968
12	Printing of hand engraved score, n.d.	Inscribed in Russian to Britten by Shostakovich, 'a true admirer of his wonderful music', 7 June 1968

⁵²⁸In the early 1970s, for example, Ronan Magill recalls a number of conversations with Britten about Bartók, whom he described as 'a very great composer'; interview with the author, 19 September 2010. In 1968 Britten also wrote to Hans Keller: 'I will (&do) think alot [sic] about that St. Quart. (but I'm now mad about Haydn's, & need we add to them?)' (BPL: Hans Keller correspondence).

⁵²⁹BPL: 2-1000461-6; 2-1000468; 2-1000470.

13	Printing of hand engraved score, n.d.	Inscribed in Russian to Britten by Shostakovich, 'an affectionate admirer of him himself and his wonderful music', 23 April 1970 [sic; 1971]
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Table 4: Chronology of Britten's cello music and Third String Quartet compared to Shostakovich's post-1960 chamber music and its performance at the Aldeburgh Festival⁵³⁰

Year	Britten	Shostakovich
1961	Sonata in C	First Performance of a Shostakovich chamber work – the Piano Quintet – at the Aldeburgh Festival, with Britten at the piano.
1963		First performance of a Shostakovich string quartet (no. 4) at the Aldeburgh Festival. A performance of Trio no. 2, with Britten at the piano, proves abortive due to Rostropovich's illness.

⁵³⁰AFMA 1961, pp.34-5; 1963, pp.17-18; 1964, pp.20-1, 23-4; 1965, pp.30-32; 1968, p.69; 1970, pp.74-5; 1971, p.59; 1973, pp.26-7; 1974, pp.28-9. These have been checked against Britten's own copies in the BPL, which confirm whether the performances took place (BPL: 1-901101).

1964	First Suite ; composition sketch completed in December	String Quartets nos. 9 and 10 Britten hears both works in Moscow in October.
1965		String Quartet no. 8 performed at the Aldeburgh Festival.
1966	Britten's sixtieth birthday tribute to Shostakovich highlights String Quartets 8, 9, and 10	String Quartet no. 11
1967	Second Suite	
1968		String Quartet no. 12 String Quartet no. 8 performed at the Aldeburgh Festival (no. 9 originally programmed). Violin Sonata
1970		String Quartet no. 13 String Quartet no. 12 given its UK première at the Aldeburgh Festival.
1971	Third Suite : composition sketch completed in February	Britten plays his Third Suite to Shostakovich and hears String Quartet no. 13 in Moscow in April. Violin Sonata performed at the Aldeburgh Festival.
1973		String Quartet no. 14 String Quartet no. 13 performed at the Aldeburgh Festival.

1974		String Quartet no. 15 String Quartet no. 3 performed at the Aldeburgh Festival; UK première of the 14 th String Quartet at Aldeburgh proves abortive.
1975	Third String Quartet: composition sketch completed during October and November	Viola Sonata (Russian première in October) Shostakovich dies (August)
1976	<i>Tema – ‘Sacher’</i>	Viola Sonata given UK première at Aldeburgh Festival. Britten dies (December)

Given that Britten seems to have envisaged a complete cycle of six suites, he may increasingly have viewed their composition in the same light as Shostakovich’s later string quartets in affording an unprecedented opportunity to develop a private narrative. In 1970 Donald Mitchell highlighted Rostropovich’s ‘quality of intense intimacy, which...has encouraged the composer...to entrust to his soloist inspirations of a peculiarly personal and intense character’.⁵³¹ Rostropovich himself viewed the first movement of the Sonata as ‘Pezzo della vita reale’, ‘a literally human conversation between two instruments ...embracing...a

⁵³¹AFMA 1970, p.67.

whole word of intermingled feelings attached to every note', whilst one Soviet reviewer also felt that the 'unexpected (barbaric) power and dynamic surge [of 'Moto Perpetuo'] suggests something bigger'.⁵³² The First Suite employs four 'Cantos' within a suite-like structure which become progressively darker, which seems to suggest a non-vocal narrative on Britten's part, and in the last movement the Canto motif attempts to assert itself above the moto perpetuo before it is subsumed in the final two bars. The Second Suite opens with an expressive *f* 'Declamato' and includes a particularly intense fourth movement which is, exceptionally for the three suites, untitled, whilst in the Third Suite the variation structure causes the 'author's utterance' to overshadow the entire work. Indeed, the Suites progressively adopt the character of a lament, with repeated note pitches assuming increasing importance from the 'Lamento' of the First Suite to their dominating use in Britten's final cello work for Rostropovich, the *Tema 'Sacher'*.

However, one should add that in contrast to Shostakovich from 1960 onwards, Britten did not employ self-quotation as a form of autobiographical reference in the cello suites and the device remained exceptional in his wider output. There is also no evidence to suggest that

⁵³²Rostropovich in a masterclass in Florence on 16 October 2006 (conversation with Alexander Ivashkin, 10 December 2009), 'Dear Ben,' p.16, and 'Dni Brittena v Armenii', p.110.

he was influenced by Shostakovich in the references to *Death in Venice* in the final movement of the Third String Quartet, as opposed to completing the work during what would clearly be his final visit to Venice and a degree of self-identification with the opera's protagonist.

3.8 Shostakovich's knowledge of Britten's music prior to 1963

Britten's music did not benefit from the significant publicity accorded to British music in the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War.⁵³³ Alexander Ossovsky's high-profile wartime lectures, for example, did not refer to the composer.⁵³⁴ Notwithstanding a degree of promotion by the British Council during the honeymoon in Anglo-Russian relations immediately following the war, the profile of Britten's music remained limited.⁵³⁵ Following the death of Stalin, it was Arthur Bliss who was the first English composer approached by the Russian Embassy in London to visit the Soviet Union, although one should add that Shostakovich does not appear to have shown anything more than polite interest in his music and, in contrast to Britten, the profile of Bliss's works during the

⁵³³See M. Iakubov's commentary to *D. Shostakovich: NSS* vol. 149, pp. 86-9 and 148-9.

⁵³⁴Schwarz, pp.187-8.

⁵³⁵However, see 'Records sent from The British Council, London', for the British Music Library, Moscow, 3 June 1946, which includes Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols*; and 'Extract from notes of a meeting of Mr. Dumbar, the Press Attaché, and Mr. White, with Mr. Karaganov, acting head of VOKS, and Mr. Shneerson, head of VOKS Music Section, at VOKS, on January 16th 1946': 'Soviet composers [Shneerson said] frequently studied the scores and records; any duplicates were sent to musical organisations such as the Union of Soviet Composers. He asked us to continue supplying him, especially with the works of modern composers' (NA: BW 64/13).

subsequent decade was to remain limited.⁵³⁶ Whereas Shostakovich described himself as an 'ardent admirer' of Britten's music as early as his first communication with Britten in October 1960, Britten was in fact rarely mentioned in Soviet musical periodicals in the 1950s.⁵³⁷ Notwithstanding Grigory Shneerson's admiration for *Peter Grimes* and his close professional relations with Shostakovich,⁵³⁸ it is therefore unlikely that the latter's familiarity with Britten's music extended beyond the relatively small number of Britten works which enjoyed a degree of popularity in the Soviet Union during the initial stages of the Khrushchev 'thaw', particularly the *Four Sea Interludes* from *Peter Grimes* and the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁶Letter from Arthur Bliss to Britten, 3 March 1955 (BPL: Arthur Bliss correspondence). For Bliss's meeting with Shostakovich during this visit, see Arthur Bliss, 'A personal reminiscence of Shostakovich', in G. Roscow, ed., *Bliss on Music: Selected Writings of Arthur Bliss* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp.253-4. For Bliss's limited profile inside the Soviet Union, see letter from Rostropovich to Britten, n.d. [December 1968]: 'Hochhauser has brought me to Moscow a new cello concertino by Bliss...What are your feelings for Bliss? I hardly know him at all, although as a person he strikes me as being much more sympathetic than Walton' (BPL:MR).

⁵³⁷Typewritten letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 5 October 1960, author's translation (BPL:DDS), and Kovnatskaia, 'Nadezhda Golubovskaia i Benjamin Britten: eskiz siuzheta', p.302.

⁵³⁸For Shneerson's admiration for *Peter Grimes*, see 'Benjamin Britten i ego Opera', *Sovetskaia muzyka* 24, October 1960; and for his particular association with Shostakovich in 1956, *D. Shostakovich: NSS* vol. 92 (Moscow: DSCH, 2010), pp.123-4.

⁵³⁹Rozhdestvensky recalls that he first became acquainted with Britten's music when he heard his father Nikolai Anosov conduct the *Peter Grimes* interludes in the Column Hall of the House of the Unions in Moscow in the mid-1950s; interview with the author, 6 November 2008. Sviatoslav Richter also notes that *Peter Grimes* was the first Britten work he encountered, in Budapest in 1958; Richter, p.206. For the popularity of *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* when performed in Moscow and Leningrad by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in May 1957, see C. Reid, *Malcolm Sargent* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1968), pp.420/3.

Shostakovich would have been aware that Britten had been among the foreign composers attacked at the All-Union Composers' Congress in April 1948, but when Gerald Abraham met Khrennikov, Shaporin and Iarustovsky in 1948, he was amused to report to Britten that they 'had been publicly condemning you as a decadent bourgeois formalist...(not quite a Fascist beast, but very nearly)...in almost complete ignorance of your music'.⁵⁴⁰ The position of other Soviet musicians sheds light on this issue. Despite Britten's assertion that Rostropovich previously 'knew a great deal of [his] music intimately' in 1960, given that this formed part of his justification to Gendron for composing a work for Rostropovich instead, this is unlikely; and Vishnevskaya was also not acquainted with Britten's music until they met in person in June 1961.⁵⁴¹ Edward Mirzoian similarly recalls that his acquaintance with Britten's music was limited until he heard a Britten-Pears recital in Warsaw in September 1961, and Mark Lubotsky's first encounter with Britten's music was a performance of *The Turn of the Screw* in Riga three years later.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰Letter from Gerald Abraham to Britten, Brightstone, Isle of Wight, 24 December 1948. Abraham continues: 'I was able to seduce them into a sort of secret session of records of contemporary British stuff, and your Serenade...was a howling success. They would have listened to any amount of this poisonous, formalist stuff! And they pumped me with questions about you and your music' (BPL: Gerald Abraham correspondence).

⁵⁴¹Letter from Britten to Maurice Gendron, 18 December 1960, *Letters from a Life II*, p.1248, and appendix XIII.

⁵⁴²Interviews with Edward Mirzoian, 8 April 2010, and Mark Lubotsky, 30 October 2010.

One can therefore assume that Rostropovich did much to encourage Shostakovich's initial admiration for Britten's 'deep musicality and lofty musical taste' from September 1960 onwards, not least by means of the scores and recordings with which he returned to the Soviet Union following his first meeting with Britten.⁵⁴³ Indeed, Britten's correspondence with Rostropovich and Sir Duncan Wilson indicates that the cellist vigorously promoted the relationship throughout the decade. The development of Shostakovich's attitude at this stage is also apparent in his inscription of Britten's birthday in his diary every year from 1961 onwards.⁵⁴⁴ Two years later David Webster reported to Britten that he had asked Shostakovich 'if there was anybody he specially wanted to meet [during his visit to London] and the only name he mentioned was you'.⁵⁴⁵

Three works seem to have had a particular impact on Shostakovich between 1961 and 1963: *War Requiem*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Cello Sonata.⁵⁴⁶ In November 1961, for example, his diary records that he

⁵⁴³Handwritten letter from Rostropovich to Britten, 24 September 1960: 'I am taking with me from England many recordings of your music (including "Noye's Fludde")...'
(BPL:MR).

⁵⁴⁴Information from Ol'ga Dombrovskaja (Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow).

⁵⁴⁵Letter from David Webster to Britten, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 18 November 1963 (BPL: English Opera Group file, 1963).

⁵⁴⁶For Shostakovich's admiration for *War Requiem*, see the author's 'Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony: a response to Britten's *War Requiem*?' in Walker. Yevgenii Dolmatovskii's last memoir of Shostakovich suggests the possibility that Shostakovich

attended a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Komische Oper in Berlin, and by the end of 1965 he had seen the opera four times; and the composer's profound admiration for *War Requiem* from the late summer of 1963 is also well documented.⁵⁴⁷ Whereas the impact of the Cello Sonata on Shostakovich has been given limited attention, a variety of evidence suggests that was significant. Shostakovich first heard the work in Leningrad in November 1961 and 'listened to it for several times in Moscow afterwards and literally fell in love with it'. Indeed, following a further performance in Moscow in January 1962, which included the Chopin and Debussy cello sonatas, Shostakovich told Rostropovich and Richter that 'Britten's sonata was the best music you played tonight'.⁵⁴⁸ Shostakovich was also able to hear Rostropovich's performance during the 1962 Edinburgh Festival, albeit Britten was unable to perform the piano part due to illness, and he possessed a copy of the Russian edition of the score from at least March 1964 and probably earlier.⁵⁴⁹

may have considered writing a not dissimilar work, probably after 1953, although this is not supported by any other documentary source; P. Fairclough, 'Dolmatovskiy on Shostakovich: a last memoir', Fairclough, pp.262, 315.

⁵⁴⁷On 3 November 1961 (information from Olga Dombrovskaya, Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow); and letter from John Morgan to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 29 October 1965: 'Shostakovich told me after the performance that he had seen four performances of [the opera] but this was the one he had enjoyed most' (BPL: British Embassy, Moscow). Shostakovich had previously informed Britten of his admiration for this 'wonderful' opera in a letter from Moscow on 20 June 1965 (BPL: DDS).

⁵⁴⁸Letter from Rostropovich to Britten, n.d. [early 1962], Moscow (BPL:MR).

⁵⁴⁹For Shostakovich's admiration for Britten's music during the 1962 Edinburgh Festival, see Rostropovich, 'Dear Ben...', 'p.18, and *D. Shostakovich: O vremeni i o sebe*, p.255-6. Shostakovich's copy of the Cello Sonata (Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962) is

Shostakovich did not elaborate what he admired about the work, but it is likely to have included Britten's melodic invention and imaginative use of cello techniques, features which distinguish it from, for example, Weinberg's near-contemporary Second Cello Sonata (1959) and First Solo Cello Sonata (1960). These aspects of the work may have stimulated Shostakovich's own subsequent writing for cello: R6 to R7, for example, may have influenced the style of open-string cello technique between R74: bar 7 and R76 in the Second Cello Concerto and, more generally, the latter work makes particular use of pizzicato and adopts a more percussive approach to cello writing, as in the pizzicato in the first twenty bars of the final coda, and the left-hand pizzicati and arco between R34 and R35: bar 1, which are unprecedented in Shostakovich's writing for the instrument; and one can similarly highlight the novelty of the cello glissandi (and double glissandi) in the second movement. Indeed, Britten's exploration of cello techniques in Britten's works for Rostropovich may have stimulated Shostakovich more generally in his approach to string writing. Fyodor Druzhinin thus emphasised how Shostakovich extended the expressive range of viola and cello in his later string quartets, and whilst Elizabeth Wilson highlights the variety of

inscribed: 'For my dear friend/and colleague/Dmitri Shostakovich/with great admiration & affection/Benjamin Britten/Moscow 1964' (Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow).

sonic effects employed in the Twelfth String Quartet,⁵⁵⁰ one should note the earlier use of *sul ponticello* in the Tenth and Eleventh String Quartets respectively, suggesting the possibility of Britten's influence from as early as his first encounter with the Cello Sonata in November 1961. The imitation of guitar rhythms in the second movement of the Fourteenth Symphony and the 'Serenade' of the Fifteenth String Quartet also suggests the influence of Britten's 'Scherzo-Pizzicato' and a more percussive approach towards string writing, although, as in Britten's case, the string quartets of Bartók may have constituted an additional source of influence.⁵⁵¹ Certainly Shostakovich's post-1964 writing for strings in concerto and chamber music contexts increasingly exploited the expressive possibilities of a unconventional variety of effects - pizzicato, glissando, *sul ponticello* and trills, sometimes juxtaposed - together with a more experimental approach towards dynamics, as in the striking use of *sforzando* in the Thirteenth String Quartet.

On the other hand, Shostakovich's use of pizzicato and viola and cello glissandi in the Seventh String Quartet pre-dated his first meeting with Britten, which suggests that the composer had already and independently

⁵⁵⁰Wilson, p.460.

⁵⁵¹See Fay, p.176, for Shostakovich's familiarity with Bartók's Fourth and Sixth String Quartets from 1949 and his admiration for the latter. In *Iunost* 1968, no. 5, he also cited Bartók alongside Prokofiev, Miaskovsky, Stravinsky, Berg, and Britten as great twentieth-century composers; *D. Shostakovich: O vremeni i o sebe*, p.308.

begun to explore a more expressive musical language. One can make a similar observation with regard to Shostakovich's increasing avoidance of a four-movement structure after the Sixth String Quartet. Although this suggests the influence of Britten's characteristic predilection for suite-like forms – and Shostakovich certainly possessed a recording of the Violin Suite – it may instead represent the reassertion of the composer's own earlier model in the *Aphorisms*; and even in the earlier quartets, as Judith Kuhn has demonstrated, Shostakovich's accommodation with sonata form was less than straightforward.⁵⁵² In short, the evidence suggests that in terms of chamber music, Shostakovich took a considerable interest in Britten's chamber works for Rostropovich but, in contrast to the Shostakovich-Weinberg creative dialogue focusing on each other's string quartets from the 1950s, they did not constitute a primary source of musical influence on his 'late style'.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵²J. Kuhn, 'The String Quartets: in dialogue with form and tradition', in CCDS. Shostakovich's recording of the Britten Violin Suite ['Sonata'] is performed by Boris Gutnikov and Lidiia Pecherskaia (Melodiya 5281-61) (Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow).

⁵⁵³For Shostakovich's interest in Britten's new works, see appendix X, and letter from Rostropovich to Britten, n.d. [December 1968], address and author of English translation not given: 'I played your Ilcnd Suite in Moscow on Nov. 11th...and Shostakovich who attended the concert, rang me up the next morning, and at his request I went to see him at his dacha so as to play him the suite a second time. He is completely and utterly delighted by your music' (BPL: MR).

3.9 Shostakovich's relationship with Britten, 1963-66, with particular reference to the Second Cello Concerto (1966)

The Britten-Shostakovich relationship developed considerably between 1963 and 1966. The composers met on six occasions in the Soviet Union during this period and there is unanimity amongst those who encountered Britten in this context that he possessed an exceptional personal magnetism and that his sensitivity towards others was a defining aspect of his character.⁵⁵⁴ From the middle of 1965 Shostakovich's letters to Britten indicate a warm personal affection as well as musical admiration, addressing Britten by his first name and expressing a concern both for his health and for Peter Pears.⁵⁵⁵ The twenty-one surviving letters from Shostakovich are mostly handwritten and relatively short compared to Shostakovich's correspondence with Isaak Glikman, and given Britten's extremely limited knowledge of Russian he was always obliged to employ Keith Grant or Marion Thorpe

⁵⁵⁴See Gennady Rozhdestvensky's recollection that 'We were surprised [in 1963 and 1964] to find that Britten was extremely modest and shy; he did not want to emphasise his presence in any way'; interview with the author, 6 November 2008. This view was echoed by I. Nest'ev's description of Britten as 'a very unassuming and agreeable person' in 'Moskvichi aplodiruiut'. See also appendices B and D.

⁵⁵⁵See handwritten letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 20 June 1965, in which Shostakovich explained his decision to address Britten in the letter by his first name, asking him not to consider the first-name form of address too familiar (BPL:DDS). Cf. Wilson, p.496 for Shostakovich's more usual preference for the formal Russian forms of address.

to make translations.⁵⁵⁶ Moreover, specific works are infrequently mentioned and never discussed in any depth, nor are technical musical matters or the works of other composers. Nevertheless, the emotional content of the letters, if compressed, is vivid and, certainly from 1965, indicative of a genuine and unspoken mutual admiration and affection.

Shostakovich had two particularly important first-hand encounters with Britten's music during this period, and in both cases the works were conducted by Britten himself. Firstly, the visit of the English Opera Group to the Soviet Union in September and October 1964 enabled him to encounter Britten's wider operatic output beyond *Peter Grimes*, which he had seen for the first time in London in December 1963 and regarded as 'remarkable'.⁵⁵⁷ Shostakovich also encouraged his composition students such as Boris Tishchenko (1960-65) to attend the Leningrad performances of *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Albert Herring* and *The Turn of the Screw*. Although he appears particularly to have admired *The Turn of the Screw*, whose horn fanfare in Act II (R5: bar 2 to R6) may have resurfaced two years later in the final movement of the Second Cello Concerto (Examples 30 and 31), he also recorded in his diary attending a Moscow performance of

⁵⁵⁶See undated letter from Britten to Keith Grant: 'They all say that Shostakovich's writing is very difficult, but I couldn't read it, even if it weren't, I am ashamed to say!' (Keith Grant's private archive).

⁵⁵⁷Appendix X, and letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Waldorf Hotel, Aldwych, London, 5 December 1963, accompanying translation by Marion Thorpe (BPL: DDS).

Albert Herring, and it was probably after a performance of *The Rape of Lucretia* that he presented Britten with his photograph dedicated ‘to one of my favourite composers’.⁵⁵⁸ Shostakovich did not elaborate on what he admired about these works, but one can assume that he recognised their expressive force and lyricism, achieved through a highly inventive use of restricted orchestral means as well as the instrumental identification of individual characters, which he had similarly attempted over thirty years earlier in *The Nose*.⁵⁵⁹

Example 30: Britten: *The Turn of the Screw*: Act II, R5: bars 2 to R6 (horns)

The image shows a musical score for two horn parts. The top staff is for Horn in F, marked 'muted'. It begins with a dynamic of *ff*, followed by *fp*, then *ff*, then *fp*, then *ff*. A dashed line indicates a 'rall.' section. The bottom staff is for Horn, marked 'Hn.', with dynamics *mf*, *dim.*, and *p*.

⁵⁵⁸Appendix XI, and ‘Musician of the Year’, Kildea, p.268. For the chronology of the English Opera Group’s performances in Leningrad and Moscow, see *Letters from a Life V*, pp. 608-9. Shostakovich’s diary records a ‘Britten opera’ on 13 October 1964 and what appears to have been a private meeting with Britten on at 1p.m. on the previous day (information from Ol’ga Dombrovskaiia, Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow). That this performance was *Albert Herring* is further suggested by his possession of vocal score (*ibid.*). For the photograph presented by Shostakovich to Britten, see AFMA 1968, plate 6.

⁵⁵⁹The programmes for these performances indicate that Britten’s orchestra comprised, as he had originally intended, thirteen players, although it did not include favoured instrumentalists such as Emanuel Hurwitz and Osian Ellis; appendix IV, and programmes in Keith Grant’s possession. For Britten’s view that chamber opera was ‘more flexible for the expression of intimate feelings. It allows us to focus on human psychology’, see ‘Govorit Benjamin Britten’, p.63.

Example 31: Shostakovich: Second Cello Concerto, III, R66: bars 1-8

The musical score for Example 31 consists of two systems. The first system includes parts for Horn 1, Horn 2, and Tambourine. Horn 1 and Horn 2 are in F major and play a melody of eighth notes with triplets, marked *ff*. The Tambourine part is in 3/4 time and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests, marked with *f* and *tr m* symbols. The second system includes parts for Horn 1, Horn 2, and Tambourine. Horn 1 and Horn 2 continue the melody, marked *f*. The Tambourine part continues with the same rhythmic pattern, marked *f* and *tr m* symbols.

The Moscow première of Britten’s Cello Symphony on 12 March 1964 was of particular interest to Shostakovich, who returned to Moscow to coincide with Britten’s visit.⁵⁶⁰ Rostropovich recalled that during the performance Shostakovich followed the score closely, subsequently emphasising to Britten the importance of the fermata in the second movement.⁵⁶¹ Although there is no further documentary evidence to suggest what Shostakovich specifically admired about the work, it seems that both composers came to appreciate an affinity between it and the subsequent Second Cello Concerto. When Britten telegraphed Shostakovich following the first performance of the latter outside the Soviet Union that ‘...your beautiful concerto...made the deepest

⁵⁶⁰Sollertinsky, p. 168.

⁵⁶¹Wilson, *Mstislav Rostropovich: Cellist, Teacher, Legend*, p.197. Shostakovich’s diary indicates that in addition to the concert, Britten and Shostakovich met on 10 and 13 March (information from Ol’ga Dombrovskaia, Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow).

impression on me/it is one of your most profound works', Shostakovich wrote to Isaak Glikman that 'I was very pleased by the telegram, as I consider Britten a very good composer who has a true understanding of music', a statement which he repeated to Britten himself a week later.⁵⁶² Britten went on to programme the work for the Aldeburgh Festival as early as 1968, and intended to conduct Rostropovich in it four years later, an exceptional gesture towards a contemporary composer at this stage in Britten's creative life.⁵⁶³

One can suggest that Shostakovich was particularly impressed by three aspects of the Cello Symphony, in which it can be regarded as distinctive compared to, for example, Weinberg's Cello Concerto, which enjoys greater superficial similarity with his own musical language: its overall conception as a cello symphony, since the cello and orchestra are integrated to an unprecedented degree; its exploration of a variety of innovative sonorities within a clear orchestral texture; and the programmatic aspect of the work. Shostakovich may have viewed the latter in the same light as a work such as the Third Symphony of

⁵⁶²Handwritten draft of telegram from Britten to Shostakovich, n.d. [October 1966] (BPL:DDS); letter from Shostakovich to Glikman, 9 October 1966, in Glikman, pp.133-4; and from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 15 October 1966, transl. Keith Grant: 'Your appreciation of my new opus is very dear to me. I love your music and I feel your deep musicality and lofty musical taste. And therefore your kind appreciation of my music delights me' (BPL:DDS).

⁵⁶³AFMA 1968, p.56 and 1972, pp.71-2.

Honegger, which he had transcribed for his composition students in 1946-8. What made Britten's work particularly impressive was the economical means by which this was achieved: in this sense, Shostakovich may have shared the prevailing Soviet view of Britten's music, which consistently described it as 'humane' and 'humanistic' and highlighted its avoidance of contrived effect.⁵⁶⁴

Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto can to a degree be regarded as influenced by Britten in the first two respects. The obligato role of the soloist closely resembles that of the Cello Symphony; indeed, Shostakovich may initially have viewed the work as his Fourteenth Symphony with a highly expressive solo cello part, and the relationship between the soloist and orchestra is more effectively balanced than in the First Cello Concerto.⁵⁶⁵ Thus, as Alexander Ivashkin points out, 'the work

⁵⁶⁴See, for example, I. Nest'ev in 'Moskvichi aplodiruiut', p.98: '[Britten] is adamant about art being humane and content-oriented'. Cf. his criticism of the 'superficial use of decorative onomatopoeia' in the 'Four Ritual Dances' from Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*, *ibid.*, pp.98-9. See also Sviatoslav Richter's view of Britten as 'a representative of a very "humane" (if I can use such a word) music. Britten always combines a certain type of conceptuality with human feeling', in S. Richter, *O muzyke: Tvorcheskie dnevniki* (Moscow: Pamiatniki Istoricheskoi Mysli, 2007), p.26 (author's translation); and Gennady Rozhdestvensky: 'Nothing in Britten's music was done for effect; yet his economy was never at the expense of what he wanted to express', interview with the author, 16 November 2008.

⁵⁶⁵Letter from Shostakovich to Dmitrii Shepilov, September 21 1966, quoted in V. Rubtsova, ed., *Tak eto bylo: Tikhon Khrennikov O vremeni i o sebe* (Moscow: Muzyka, 1994), p.142, cited in Fay, p.247.

is a real Symphony-Concerto'.⁵⁶⁶ The work is also characterised by a refinement which may have been influenced by Britten. Its orchestration is notably sparser than its predecessor and its texture often akin to chamber music, whilst its use of dynamics is also similar to the Cello Symphony: the work is *p* until R8 and Shostakovich uncharacteristically employed *p* xylophone and piccolo, as between R92 and R93, and primarily for orchestral colour; and even in the work's coda the xylophone is marked *mf*. Similarly, if Shostakovich emulated Britten in employing a whip, he did so for only two bars in the entire work (R100: bar 4 and R101: bar 1).

Shostakovich may particularly have been inspired by Britten to experiment with a more unconventional range of sonorities, not least in terms of addressing the question of how to project the cello. He was already familiar with Britten's imaginative use of double bass sonorities in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as well as the chamber operas, and this striking feature of the Cello Symphony, as in the use of the instrument *ppp* and *col legno* from R41: bar 1, is arguably reflected in the Second Cello Concerto, although the exploitation of double bass sonorities in the Thirteenth Symphony and orchestration of the 'Serenade' of Musorgsky's

⁵⁶⁶A. Ivashkin, 'Cooling the volcano: Prokofiev's Cello Concerto op. 58 and Symphony-Concerto op.125', in *Three Oranges: the Journal of the Serge Prokofiev Foundation*, no. 18, October 2009, p.13.

Songs and Dances of Death suggests an existing predilection for this sonority.⁵⁶⁷ Shostakovich's use of bassoon and double bassoon sonorities, as from R61: bar 1 to R61: bar 7, may have also been stimulated by Britten, though similarly representing a refinement of the orchestration of the First Cello Concerto also evident in his orchestration of Musorgsky's 'Trepak' as well as in the first movement of Thirteenth Symphony. Finally, Shostakovich's highly refined use of harp in unusual combinations, especially in conjunction with xylophone and bassoon and counter bassoon, may reflect Britten's treatment in *War Requiem*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and his chamber operas, in which he was inspired by the more ascetic style of Osian Ellis:⁵⁶⁸ the two-bar rocking figure in first movement (R30 to R32) thus bears some similarity to the harp writing in, for example, *Albert Herring* (cf. R14: bar 5 to R16). On the other hand, Shostakovich had already made a not dissimilar use of harp in his Thirteenth Symphony (cf. R77: bar 5 to R77: bar 11), as well as his recent orchestration of Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* (cf. R31: bar 1 to R31: bar 6). It is therefore equally likely that Britten's 'highly original timbre effects'⁵⁶⁹ served to stimulate a wider aspect of Shostakovich's musical language increasingly evident after 1960 and

⁵⁶⁷Cf. handwritten letter from Rostropovich to Britten, n.d. [?August 1963] confirming arrangements for the Leningrad première of the Cello Symphony 'with the first Leningrad orchestra (where double-basses are so clever!)' (BPL).

⁵⁶⁸Appendix III.

⁵⁶⁹'Moskvichi aplodiruiut', p.98

prior to his wider acquaintance with Britten's music from mid-1963 onwards. Indeed, Sioned Williams feels that although there are some similarities between both composers' writing for harp in these works, this is in terms of the refinement and skill with which the instrument is employed; and she also emphasises that Britten's writing is generally more multifaceted within an individual work.⁵⁷⁰

Given that Shostakovich only first encountered *War Requiem* in the spring of 1963, Britten's influence on Shostakovich may therefore have represented both a confirmation of an existing post-1960 creative trait as well as a stimulus to the re-emergence of an interest in the soloistic possibilities of individual instruments displayed in a work such as *Five Fragments* (1935).⁵⁷¹ It is therefore possible that Shostakovich was stimulated by Britten's use of a variety of percussion instruments in conjunction with the soloist: for example: tambourine (between R41: bar 6 and R45: bar 12), whip (from R73: bar 5 to R75: bar 1), and cymbals; indeed, Britten's use of whip and tambourine may have had an immediate influence given the prominent part accorded to these instruments in *The Execution of Stepan Razin*. Shostakovich thus adopted

⁵⁷⁰Conversation with the author, 16 September 2010.

⁵⁷¹Cf. G. Khubov, in his preface to Shostakovich's orchestration of Musorgsky's *Khovanshchina* (Moscow: State Music Publishers, 1963), vol. I, pp. 12-14, who commends Shostakovich for his 'chiaroscuro' approach to orchestration and his 'contrasts of pure timbres'.

his existing practice whereby the cadenza is introduced by a side drum trill but, possibly under Britten's influence, this is assumed by the tambourine at R68: bar 10 and - in contrast to Britten - accompanies the entire cadenza; although, again, this was sonority with which Shostakovich had already experimented in 'Arrival of the Players' in his film score for *Hamlet* (1964). Similarly from R97 to R98 there is an extended passage for *f* soloist accompanied by *mf* side drum; and his use of *ff secco* bass drum quavers in conjunction with the soloist between R26 and R28: bar 3 may also reflect Britten's use of the instrument, although Britten characteristically employed a wider range of drums and more usually marked the bass drum *p(pp)*.

3.10 Conclusion

Several observations can therefore be made with regard to the relationship between Britten's and Shostakovich's music after 1960. Firstly, in Britten's case, the initial influence of Shostakovich should not be overstated, tending to confirm existing areas of musical language, particularly its asceticism. The Cello Sonata and First Cello Suite thus show little apparent influence, and at this stage Britten seems instead to have been primarily inspired by the musical personality of Rostropovich and the opportunity to develop the expressive possibilities of

instrumental composition. Further, the Cello Symphony suggests that if Britten was influenced by Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto it was primarily in the sense of the musical personality of the dedicatee and a not dissimilar approach towards the compositional problems raised by a concerto; and Bridge's *Oration* can be viewed as a more plausible model for the work's asceticism and possible programmatic basis. On the other hand, from 1964 onwards the evidence suggests that to a degree Britten viewed the unaccompanied Cello Suites as a form of autobiographical narrative in the same light as Shostakovich's post-1964 string quartets and identified closely with these works.

In terms of musical influence, the conception and instrumentation of Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto and the chronology of its composition, together with the development of expressive string techniques in the composer's post-1964 string writing, suggest that Britten's influence upon Shostakovich may have been more significant. On the other hand, the 'fertile interaction' between the two composers is ultimately difficult to quantify and should not be exaggerated: the shared stimulus of Rostropovich's musical personality may be regarded as equally important, whilst Shostakovich's reference to Britten in a television interview in 1974 suggests that he may primarily have admired

Britten's wish to communicate with audiences.⁵⁷² Moreover, it is also a significant point of comparison – as well as a plausible source of the empathy between the two composers – that to a degree both Britten and Shostakovich had begun to seek to re-evaluate, and to simplify, their musical language before their personal association.⁵⁷³ Shostakovich's preference for ensemble writing in the Second Cello Concerto and Fourteenth Symphony can therefore to a degree be attributed to the influence of Britten, but can also be seen as reflecting an increasing concern for chamber music from the spring of 1960. Finally, in contrast to Britten and to a degree as a result of the entirely different context in which he had spent his creative life, his pre-1936 compositions retained a particular significance, as did the works of other contemporary composers, not least his composition pupils.

⁵⁷²E. Roseberry, 'The composer at the piano', p.6; letter from Shostakovich to Glikman, *Nizhnyaya Oreanda*, 27 April 1966, highlighting the stimulus of Rostropovich's 'fabulous' playing, Glikman, p. 129; and *Music from the Flames: Dmitri Shostakovich Composer*, broadcast on 10 November 1974, in which Shostakovich sees the sole use of twelve-tone music as 'limiting opportunities above all for creative individuality', quoting Britten's remark: 'What a pity these composers never meet an audience of children. They would find it very salutary and useful. It would help the ones with real talent to write good, beautiful, inspired music' (BBC Programme Archive: VC033220). Shostakovich seems to be referring to 'Britten rasskazyvaet', p.102.

⁵⁷³Cf. Alexander Arutiunian's opinion that 'Both Britten and Shostakovich tended to simplicity and each had his own approach towards it in his music', interview with the author, 8 April 2010.

Chapter 4: Britten and Shostakovich: vocal composition, 1960 to 1969

4.1 Introduction

Britten's creative relationship with Russia can be further assessed by a comparison of Britten's and Shostakovich's vocal compositions after 1960. Central to this assessment will be consideration of Britten's selection of poetry and the Russian musical influences in *The Poet's Echo* (1965), placed in the longer-term context of his creative interest in Russian music, together with an assessment of how far Britten's vocal music may have influenced Shostakovich in his *Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok* (1967), and more generally in his increasing preoccupation with vocal composition in the last fifteen years of his life.

A variety of evidence will be employed to assess the most detailed analyses of the work in Evans (1979), Johnson (2003), and Kovnatskaia (2009):⁵⁷⁴ Britten's and Pears's collection of Russian vocal music, and interviews with Galina Vishnevskaya, the joint-dedicatee of the cycle, Edward Mirzoian, the Head of the Armenian Composers' Union at the time of Britten's visit to the country in August 1965, and Alexander Arutiunian, the other surviving composer who accompanied Britten during his visit. Britten presented Mirzoian with a copy of the autograph

⁵⁷⁴Kovnatskaia, 'Angliiskoe ekho russkoi poezii'.

score, and Arutiunian with an unfinished composition sketch of 'The Nightingale and the Rose', which are partially reproduced in Appendix XV.⁵⁷⁵

4.2 *The Poet's Echo* (1965): context

Britten's creative output by 1965 indicates an existing faculty for setting poetry in a variety of languages which he did not speak fluently, and *The Poet's Echo* can partly viewed in this light. However, the first reference to the possibility of Britten setting Russian is surprisingly late, in an unpublished letter to Britten in May 1963 from Rufina Ampenoff at Boosey and Hawkes: 'Your interest in setting some Russian poetry to music is very much in my mind and I have ordered a selection of Pushkin poems in Russian with an English translation. I have also ordered a collection of poems by Evtoushenko [sic]. As soon as I receive all these books I will send them to you and I do hope that you will find something which appeals to you'.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁵The autograph score in Edward Mirzoian's possession is engraved by Britten in ink and dated 'Dilizhan 13.8.1965'. A photocopy of p.28 of this manuscript is reproduced in *Letters from a Life V*, p.694. The manuscript in Alexander Arutiunian's possession consists of seventeen bars of 'The Nightingale and the Rose', written by Britten in pencil and inscribed in ink: 'For Alexan/with every good wish/&warmest thanks./Benjamin B.' (appendix XV)

⁵⁷⁶Letter from R. Ampenoff, Boosey and Hawkes, to Britten, 29 May 1963 (BPL: BH).

Britten's letter to Ampenoff does not survive, but the date of her reply suggests the importance of two relatively short-term factors. In the first instance, Britten was stimulated by what he saw as the unique character of Vishnevskaya's voice, which he had admired by means of records prior to first hearing the soprano in person at the 1961 Aldeburgh Festival.⁵⁷⁷ Vishnevskaya emphasises the importance of this recital in influencing Britten's conception of the soprano part in *War Requiem*, particularly citing the influence of 'The Field Marshal' from *Songs and Dances of Death* on the declamatory nature of 'Liber scriptus proferetur'.⁵⁷⁸ On the other hand, Britten made no reference to the Musorgsky work in his correspondence, and in fact employed the upper register of Vishnevskaya's voice in *War Requiem* to a greater degree, to top C rather than A in the 'Liberate me', which he considered 'perhaps her biggest task'.⁵⁷⁹ Moreover, the recital's inclusion of three Tchaikovsky songs and Katerina's Act I aria from *Lady Macbeth* suggests that her voice may have been equally significant in stimulating his longer-term admiration for these two composers.⁵⁸⁰ Britten's setting of Blake's 'A Poison Tree', a poem he had set thirty years earlier, for Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in 1965

⁵⁷⁷Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Vishnevskaya, 1 April 1961: 'I have recently heard several of your wonderful records, which have made me a great admirer of yours' (BPL: MR).

⁵⁷⁸Appendix XIII.

⁵⁷⁹Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich, 14 March 1962 (BPL: MR).

⁵⁸⁰BPL: PG/AF/1961/10; the programme is not detailed in AFMA 1961.

certainly indicates that a particular singer could cause a longer-term aspect of his creative sensibility to be reasserted.

Britten's admiration was heightened by the experience of conducting the soprano in *War Requiem* in the recording of January 1963. Three months later Britten wrote to her that 'I wish I had something to send to you, my dear Galya; one day perhaps there will be some nice Russian songs especially for you, but I am afraid my Russian will have to get much better before that happens'.⁵⁸¹ However, it is unlikely that Britten had given the projected work detailed thought at this stage, given his preoccupation with *Curlew River* in the spring and summer of 1964, and the subsequent preparations for English Opera Group tour to the Soviet Union.⁵⁸² Indeed, although in December 1964 the composer also spoke in terms of an operatic project for Vishnevskaya, he made no serious attempt to learn Russian prior to his 1965 visit to the Soviet Union and it was Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau rather than Vishnevskaya for whom Britten composed a vocal cycle during the spring of 1965.⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya, 11 April 1963 (BPL: MR).

⁵⁸²Appendix IV

⁵⁸³'Musician of the Year', p.269. At the rear of his diary for 1964, Britten has written several words in Cyrillic, including his own name and that of Shostakovich, and practised several letters, which parallels his practice in the 1963 diary at the time of his trip to Greece (BPL).

Britten also seems to have been motivated by an interest in the poetry of Yevtushenko. He had hoped to meet the poet in person during his first visit to the Soviet Union two months earlier, although in the event Yevtushenko chose not to attend the British Ambassador's reception for fear of political disapproval.⁵⁸⁴ The composer had already obtained a copy of the *Selected Poems* in translation on their first publication in the West in 1962, and his first setting of Russian poetry was in the form of a three-line translated extract of 'Lies' in *Voices to Today*, composed immediately prior to his departure to the Soviet Union in August 1965.⁵⁸⁵ It is not altogether clear why Britten chose Yevtushenko for this purpose since a correspondence between the composer and poet does not exist, and in December 1964 Britten claimed that he was not in particular sympathy towards Shostakovich's most recent symphonies such as the Thirteenth and only received a copy of *The Execution of Stepana Razin* in 1967. Moreover, he seems initially to have considered Tolstoi instead as the Russian representative of 'the great peace lovers of history'.⁵⁸⁶ However, the work's composition for the United Nations suggests that by his departure for the Soviet Union in July 1965 Britten had come to view the

⁵⁸⁴Britten's annotation to a letter from Humphrey Trevelyan, British Embassy, Moscow, 15 February 1963, and H. Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart* (London: MacMillan, 1971), p.210.

⁵⁸⁵Britten possessed two copies of *Yevtushenko: Selected Poems*, transl. R. Milner-Gulland and P. Levi (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), one of which was kept at Chapel House, Horham, suggesting that he retained an interest in the poet's work up to and beyond 1970. This anthology includes both 'Lies' and 'Babiy Yar' (BPL: 1-9600059).

⁵⁸⁶'British Music in the World Today', Kildea, p.272, and letter from Britten to Donald Mitchell, 10 May 1965, reproduced as no. 1140 in *Letters from a Life V*, pp. 671-2.

poet as an authentic polemical voice of the Khrushchev thaw with a universally applicable message, just as Shostakovich primarily admired the 'ethical basis' of the poet's work at the same time.⁵⁸⁷

Although Britten subsequently claimed that his wish to set Pushkin in the original language in August 1965 was a practical decision designed to help his 'obstinately bad Russian', it was, in fact, a highly considered gesture on his part and should be set in the longer-term context of his interest in Russian culture and related, for example, to his support for the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR in the 1960s.⁵⁸⁸ A year earlier Britten had written to his publisher that 'You realise, I know how seriously I take this link with Russia; ~~this~~ the importance of it was confirmed during my last visit there, & in these warm meetings with Madame Furseva [sic], & Shostakovich'.⁵⁸⁹ By setting Russia's greatest poet Britten was making a profound statement of Anglo-Russian friendship which he, and Rostropovich, were fully conscious would be highly appreciated.⁵⁹⁰ Indeed, although the setting can be placed in the

⁵⁸⁷Letter from Shostakovich to Glikman, Zhukova, 24 September 1964, Glikman, p.119.

⁵⁸⁸See, for example, Britten's draft message to the Anglo-Soviet Journal on the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution, n.d., but typewritten version sent on 23 May 1967 (BPL: Anglo-Soviet).

⁵⁸⁹Handwritten draft of letter from Britten to E. Roth, 10 May 1964 (BPL:BH).

⁵⁹⁰Cf. photocopy of letter from Alan Brooke Turner, British Embassy, Moscow, 18 March 1965, to David Adams, Boosey and Hawkes, London, 18 March 1965: 'Mr. Britten enjoys widespread and enormous popularity in the Soviet Union...In this he is greatly helped by the efforts of Rostropovich' (BPL: BH).

context of 'the long-term relationship between the [British and Russian] musical cultures', it was in fact unprecedented for a British composer to set Pushkin, let alone in the original language, and whereas the works of Tolstoi, Dostoevskii, Chekhov and Turgenev enjoyed a considerable profile in Western Europe, this was far less the case with Pushkin.⁵⁹¹ This would suggest that it was particularly through Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya that Britten came to comprehend not only that 'The Russian love for Pushkin cannot be exaggerated' but also that the poet was deemed by Russians to possess 'a specifically Mozartean genius...And so, like Mozart, Pushkin and Glinka were granted the rank of universal artists'.⁵⁹²

It is certainly striking that the theme of Pushkin runs as a leitmotiv through Pears's description of the August/September 1965 holiday, from the visit to the monument of Alexander Griboedov to the final excursion to Mikhailovskoe; and by his return from the Soviet Union in September 1965 Britten had clearly come to recognise the poet as a creative genius of

⁵⁹¹L. Kovnatskaia, 'Forward' to *Russko-britanskie muzykal'nye sviazi*, p.3. For Pushkin's relative neglect in Western Europe, see I. Stravinsky, 'PUSHKIN: POETRY AND MUSIC' (1940), reproduced in E. Walter-White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and his Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966, 2nd ed. 1979), pp. 588-91.

⁵⁹²'A Composer in Russia', Kildea, p.284, and Frolova-Walker, p. 73. See also 'Britten in Armenia', p.110: 'It is interesting to note that the cycle was composed in Armenia, in Dilizhan. Britten was setting the music to original Pushkin verses, and not a translation. These curious details of the cycle's creation will certainly increase the audience's interest in and love of this work'. For Adam Khudoian's 'great surprise' that Britten was employing Pushkin in the original, see Khudoian, *Vospominaniia*, p.76.

comparable stature to, for example, Goethe and Shakespeare and, in terms of Russian music, to Tchaikovsky. Indeed, the title and cyclical form Britten adopted for the cycle, and his use of an eight-bar piano postlude in the final setting, suggests a desire to highlight Pushkin's universal status in the same light, albeit on a smaller scale, as Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, which Britten and Pears had recently recorded in October 1963 and went on to perform to considerable critical acclaim in Moscow and Leningrad in December 1966; and it is also likely that Britten also appreciated the chronological coincidence of Pushkin's poetry with Schubert's *Die Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*.⁵⁹³ Thus, following his return from the Soviet Union, he telegrammed Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya that '...I look forward to hearing about the Echo poeta (russian) premiere [in December 1965, in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory] and how the Russians like my pushkin [sic]'.⁵⁹⁴ In this sense, Britten's engagement with Pushkin in the summer of 1965 can also be viewed as the realisation of a statement he made to his publisher five years earlier: 'I know you realise how keen I am to have my music performed [in the Soviet Union], and how grateful and affectionate I feel towards many individuals living there. I am also touched that they

⁵⁹³Reviewing this performance, L. Zhivov concluded that 'It would be no exaggeration to say that the *Dichterliebe* by Britten and Pears is a truly unique example of the contemporary art of music recital', 'Prazdnik Muzyki', p. 53.

⁵⁹⁴Handwritten draft of telegram from Britten to Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya, n.d. [September/October 1965] (BPL: MR).

should want so much of my music'.⁵⁹⁵ However, one should add that the evidence for how Britten viewed Russian performances over which he had no control is in fact ambiguous. For example, whilst he greatly admired Mark Lubotsky's performance of his Violin Concerto in 1971, he was decidedly unenthusiastic about the production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Bolshoi Theatre he attended in the same year.⁵⁹⁶

The interpretation that 'the name of Pushkin is absorbed in Britten's general and constant...interest in Russian music' can also be qualified. Although Britten referred to 'dipping into...Boris Godonof' in May 1939 and had attended the British première of *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* six years earlier, in contrast to Tolstoi and Chekhov there is no direct reference to the poet in his pre-1938 diaries or elsewhere in his correspondence, suggesting a wider sensibility towards Russian literature on Britten's

⁵⁹⁵Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Roth, 20 November 1961 (BPL: BH).

⁵⁹⁶Britten regarded Mark Lubotsky's 1967 Melodiya recording of his Violin Concerto under Kirill Kondrashin as 'the performance I had been waiting for', presumably on account of the violinist's 'devastating skill and assurance', AFMA 1971, p.70 and M. Bowen, 'Lubotsky's devastating skill', *Music and Musicians*, 19 September 1970, p.20. For the performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Bolshoi Theatre Britten attended on 25 April 1971 see A.D. Wilson, "'DAYS OF BRITISH MUSIC" IN THE SOVIET UNION', p.5: '[Britten's] patience had already been sorely tried by the performance, and he is thinking how to devise a "Bolshoi-proof" opera'. It is unclear whether this was for musical reasons - on account of the female casting of Oberon, for example, or the increased orchestra employed on account of the height of the ceiling - the production itself, which Sviatoslav Richter considered 'Grandiose Kitsch', or the political climate of the visit. See appendix XIII; letter from John Morgan to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 29 October 1965 (BPL: British Embassy, Moscow); and Pears, p.141.

part, both in translation and, in the case of Dostoevskii, film adaptation.⁵⁹⁷

He may have been acquainted with Tolstoi's *My Confession* and *The Spirit of Christ's Teaching* prior to 1928 through his brother's copy, and, as has been observed, had acquired a copy of Chekhov's plays as early as 1930.⁵⁹⁸ Britten's long-term interest in both authors seems to have reasserted itself in the 1960s, both in relating the dramatic form of his chamber operas to Chekhov and in the operatic version of *Anna Karenina* he envisaged between 1964 and 1968.⁵⁹⁹

The evidence also suggests that Pears's knowledge of Russian literature was greater than Britten's, and that he may have influenced the composer in this respect. In 1943, for example, he gave Britten a copy of *War and Peace*, and an analysis of the volumes in the Red House and Horham collections which originally belonged to Pears suggests an extensive familiarity with the works of Dostoevskii, Turgenev and Lermontov.

Pears also possessed two volumes of Pushkin which significantly pre-

⁵⁹⁷Kovnatskaia, 'Angliiskoe ekho russkoi poezii', p.276; letter from Britten to Lennox Berkeley, 3 May 1939, reproduced in *Letters from a Life II*, no. 173, p.633; and diary 21 October 1933 (BPL). Kovnatskaia suggests that 'There might have been other, so far undocumented, instances of Britten's referring to Pushkin', but this has not been confirmed by the author's research. For Britten's enthusiasm for Enrich Engels and Fyodor Otsep's *Der Mörder Dimitri Karamasoff* (1931), see diary for 10 May 1935.

⁵⁹⁸L. Tolstoi, *My Confession* (London: Walter Scott, n.d.), inscribed 'Robert V. Britten/With best wishes/from Nellie', 14/1/24 (BPL: 1-9501591).

⁵⁹⁹'Govorit Benjamin Britten', p.63; and Colin Graham's 'A SCHEME FOR "ANNA KARENINA"', preliminary and second and third drafts of libretto, the second of which is annotated by Britten (BPL: 91000361-5). The first reference to the project in Britten's correspondence is his letter to Colin Graham from Thekkaday, Kerala, dated 19 February 1965 (BPL: Colin Graham correspondence).

dated Britten's engagement with the poet in 1965.⁶⁰⁰ Indeed, although Pears's wider sensibilities towards Russian literature have not been recognised by Headington (1992), his annotations in Britten's copy of Chekhov's *The Bear* relating to a chamber-opera realisation – a project he suggested to William Walton five months prior to his and Britten's departure to the Soviet Union in August 1965 – further suggest that his own literary and musical tastes were influential upon as well as complementary to those of Britten's.⁶⁰¹ Neil Mackie certainly emphasises how keen Pears was for Britten to set Russian poetry in 1965.⁶⁰² It is also revealing that during his penultimate year at Lancing College in 1927, Pears participated in a student reading of *The Cherry Orchard* and presented a paper to boys and staff on 'Russian Composers', a striking similarity to Britten's own cultural formation.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰⁰For evidence of Pears's considerable interest in Russian literature see, for example, his copies of L. Tolstoi, *War and Peace*, transl. L. and A. Maude (London: Macmillan/Oxford University Press, 1943), inscribed to Britten in 1943; F. Dostoevskii, *The Brothers Karamazov*, transl. C. Garnett (London: William Heinemann, 1915); *The Plays of Ivan S. Turgenev*, transl. M.S. Mandell (London: William Heinemann, 1924); and M. Lermontov, *A Hero of our own times*, transl. E. and C. Paul (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) (BPL: 1-9501592; 1-9700026; 1-9700018; 1-9700041). Pears's copy of *The Poems, Prose and Plays of Alexander Pushkin*, selected and ed. A. Yarmolinsky (New York: The Modern Library, c.1936) (BPL: 1-9700010) includes the poem 'Lines written during a sleepless night', which Britten set in 1965.

⁶⁰¹Headington, p.328; BPL: 1-9501590, pp. 231-252; and letter from William Walton to Britten, 25 March 1965, published in M. Hayes, ed., *The Selected Letters of William Walton* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp.351-4.

⁶⁰²Interview with the author, 16 August 2011.

⁶⁰³*The Lancing College Magazine*, June 1927, pp.86-7 reports that 'Pears deserves mention as Lopahin' in the reading and that 'The Society ['Dilettanti'] was unanimous in recognition of the great knowledge and insight...displayed [in Pears's paper], but were keenly divided over his views on art in general' (Lancing College Archives).

Britten's personal engagement with Pushkin in 1965 is also striking given that although the composer stated in his Aspen Award acceptance speech that he found composition difficult away from home, and by this stage Venice and Wolfsgarten were the only other locations outside Suffolk in which he chose to bring new works to fruition, he purchased a Pushkin anthology immediately prior to his departure and seems to have set to work immediately on arrival in Dilizhan. Edward Mirzoian recalls how constantly Britten worked during this initial period and ten days later he had begun the fourth setting and hinted at the work's progress: 'Russian not getting very good, but reading ПУШКИН to some purpose'.⁶⁰⁴ The speed at which he completed the six settings which constitute the cycle (6 August – 24 August 1965) suggests that, as with *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* composed exactly twenty years earlier (2 – 19 August 1945), a particularly potent stimulus served to unleash a variety of existing creative preoccupations, both an expression of his longer-term romanticised interest in Russian culture and an opportunity to consider the timeless position of the creative artist in a context in which he seems to have been uniquely relaxed.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰⁴Aspen, p.21; interview with Edward Mirzoian, 8 April 2010; Britten's diary 1965 (BPL); Pears, pp. 109-10; and postcard from Britten to Keith Grant, n.d. but stamped 17.8.65 (Keith Grant's private archive).

⁶⁰⁵Britten's diary 1965 (BPL), Pears, p.120.

Two more practical considerations may have influenced Britten in 1965. Completing the work at the Composers' Colony for Creative Work would be seen to endorse the promotion of cultural activity by the Soviet state and to highlight the contrast with the British political and musical establishments, hence Britten's statement of the circumstances of the work's composition on the autograph and published scores, and his enthusiastic description of these arrangements in the British press immediately on his return, a eulogy which Mirzoian remembers with gratitude forty-five years later.⁶⁰⁶ Britten's desire to compose a work for Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya in 1965 may also have been stimulated by the need to add to the catalogue of his new publishers following his estrangement with Boosey and Hawkes from late 1963 onwards. Indeed, what Britten viewed as the latter's inflexible attitude towards the dissemination of his music within the Soviet Union on account of copyright, particularly following the composer's three visits to the Soviet Union between 1963 and 1964 which caused requests for scores of his music from this source to multiply, had significantly contributed to the latter stages of the rift.⁶⁰⁷ Four days before Britten's departure to the

⁶⁰⁶'A Composer in Russia', Kildea, pp. 281-4; interview with Edward Mirzoian, 8 April 2010; and undated letter from Mirzoian to Britten and Pears: 'We read with interest and pleasure your article...and are very grateful for your good words about Armenia' (BPL: Edward Mirzoian correspondence).

⁶⁰⁷See, for example, typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to David Adams, Boosey and Hawkes, London, 27 November 1965, in which the composer felt

Soviet Union in 1965, in a meeting attended by Rostropovich to discuss this question, Britten's representatives observed that 'Faber's approach to these problems seemed to be basically different from that of B & H. Their primary concern was to facilitate the performance of Russian works in Britain and British works in Russia. They did not want to lose money, but the amount of money they might make was a secondary consideration'.⁶⁰⁸ Faber thus went on vigorously to promote the 'exalted lyricism' of Britten's Pushkin cycle as well as allowing the manuscript score of *Curlew River* to be sent to Moscow for a sixtieth birthday exhibition for Britten organised by the British Council in the foyer of the Tchaikovsky Concert Hall eight years later.⁶⁰⁹

4.3 Selection of poetry

Although Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya assisted Britten with an understanding of the Russian stress of each poem, as is indicated by the annotations in all but the last two selected poems in his copy of the Pushkin anthology, this seems to have occurred after his initial

'embarrassed and distressed about disappointing the Leningrad Conservatoire' by being unable to provide the full score for a performance of *Albert Herring* (BPL: BH).

⁶⁰⁸Note of a conversation between D. Mitchell, A. Gishford and M. Rostropovich', 30 July 1965 (BPL: Faber correspondence).

⁶⁰⁹First edition of *Tit for Tat* (London: Faber, 1969), and typewritten carbon copy of letter from A. Wood, Drama and Music Department, British Council, to M. Kingsbury, Faber Music Ltd., London, 22 October 1973 (NA: FCO 34/222).

selection.⁶¹⁰ Vishnevskaya thus emphasises that, in common with Shostakovich's selection of poetry in the works he composed for her, this selection was entirely Britten's and constituted 'a ready-made programme'.⁶¹¹ However, previous commentators on the cycle have not discussed Britten's choice of poetry in detail, nor have they noted that Britten's copy of the Pushkin anthology indicates that, characteristically, he initially considered setting two further poems: 'Sing not before me, fair maiden, the songs of sad Georgia' (1828) and 'A deaf man summoned a deaf man to be judged by a deaf judge' (1830), the latter as an alternative to 'Epigram'. It is likely that Vishnevskaya or Pears pointed out to Britten that the first poem had already been set by Rachmaninoff, Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov, and he therefore selected 'I thought my heart had forgotten' as a shorter and less celebrated alternative.⁶¹² On the other hand, in contrast to song cycles such as *Winter Words* and *Who are these Children?*, Britten did not compose more settings than eventually constituted the cycle, which suggests that he viewed it as a one-off project on a smaller scale.

⁶¹⁰Britten's copy of *Pushkin Selected Verse with an introduction and prose translations by John Fennell* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964) contains pencil annotations relating to choice of poem and highlighting correct stress on pp. 18, 35, 36, 41, 61, 63, 72 and 74 (BPL: 1-9104809).

⁶¹¹Appendix XIII.

⁶¹²*Pushkin Selected Verse*, pp. 41 and 61 (BPL). The Rachmaninoff setting was a staple of Vishnevskaya's repertoire, the soprano recording it on her second tour to the United States in 1961 (RCA Victor Red Seal: LM/LSC-2497; 1961), and Pears also possessed a 1922 edition of the song (BPL: 2-9501297).

Alexander Arutiunian emphasises that what struck those who first heard the songs in August 1965 was how deeply Britten entered into the emotional world of the poetry. In this sense, the work represents ‘a special kind of composition’⁶¹³ distinct from the ‘second generation’ of Pushkin romances such as those of Rachmaninoff, in which poetic meaning and prosody became subordinate to increasingly elaborate music: indeed, Britten and Pears did not acquire a collection of the latter’s songs until at least 1973.⁶¹⁴ Britten’s selection of poems is striking in reflecting several existing creative preoccupations, although these have not been fully acknowledged by previous commentators and are obscured by the heavily anglicised translations Pears made at the same time as Britten composed each song with a view to his own performance. The draft of these translations indicates Pears’s close involvement in the linguistic side of the project, with detailed scansion of each line, and it is therefore possible that he influenced the initial selection of poetry as in the Blake cycle composed earlier in the year, which has hitherto not been recognised in this case.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹³Interview with the author, 8 April 2010.

⁶¹⁴B. Gasparov, ‘Pushkin in music’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Pushkin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp.167; and BPL: 2-01050969/70.

⁶¹⁵Peter Pears’s translation of *The Poet’s Echo* (BPL: uncatalogued; file is labelled by Pears: ‘DIARY (RUSSIA) + PUSHKIN’), and Pears, p.110. Cf. P. Reed’s ‘Introduction’ to *Letters from a Life V*, p.xxxi: ‘Pears often played a defining role in shaping Britten’s creative path, especially when the tenor was destined to take a major performing role in the piece in question’, and letter from Britten to Peter Diamond, 3 January 1975: ‘I am afraid you must settle the problem of language for “The Poet’s Echo” for the next [Edinburgh]

Notwithstanding earlier settings of 'Echo' by Rimsky-Korsakov (1897) and Medtner (1916), Britten's selection is somewhat broader and more unconventional than the relatively narrow range of exotic, amorous and elegiac Pushkin poems set in the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 'Echo' immediately sets a serious tone, comparing the solitude and isolation of the creative artist to the unresponsiveness of nature and reflecting the theme of eternity as the artist addresses posterity. Although Graham Johnson views Britten's choice of a poem in which the poet is asking what the creative artist receives back from society as a subversive means of 'using images from [Russian] culture to reproach the cruelty of [Soviet] artistic suppression', this is speculative: as has been observed, it is unlikely that Britten would have wished to make such a statement in 1965, and the choice is more likely to reflect the complexity of Britten's attitude towards the popular and establishment success accorded *War Requiem* and his increasingly ambivalent position thereafter with regard to artistic communication.⁶¹⁶ However, one should add that the song can also be seen in primarily musical terms and as a

Festival. It would be very hard for Slava and Galia not to perform it...if they want to do it themselves...but [if not] Peter's version, as he has often demonstrated, works very well' (Diamond correspondence).

⁶¹⁶Johnson, p.200. Cf. Pears's remarks which conclude his account of the trip: 'Never could any two guests have been more royally treated; never can any country be more generous and hospitable to us than the Soviet Union was...and we came back with much increased friendly feelings for these marvellous people', Pears, p.134, and Britten's comment that during his visits to the Soviet Union in 1964 and 1965 he had 'always been treated with the utmost kindness', draft message to the Anglo-Soviet Journal on the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967, *op. cit.* (BPL: Anglo-Soviet).

development of Britten's sophisticated depiction of the echo in the setting of Tennyson's 'Nocturne' in the *Serenade* (1943) and 'Birthday song for Erwin' (1945) (bars 8 to 13), again suggesting that Pushkin's poetry served as a stimulus for existing creative preoccupations.

The theme of the isolation of the creative artist, and his relationship with the source of his inspiration, is further developed in 'The Nightingale and the Rose', the cycle's longest and most elaborate setting, in which Britten adopts a solemn tone in contrast to the spring-like image of the poem, and develops an existing predilection for depicting bird song. This may have been initially stimulated in 1936-7 by the image of nocturnal birdsong in the 'Abschied' of *Das Lied von der Erde* (R18: bar 3 to R19: bar 4) and was to find further expression in contexts as varied as the satirical allusion of the 'Bird Music' from *The Sword in the Stone*, the third variation of *The Turn of the Screw* (R22: bar 7 to R22: bar 8), and, finally, in the cadenza (bars 39 to 43) of 'Solo' in the Third String Quartet, in which its depiction in a high register further suggests its personal importance to the composer.⁶¹⁷ Indeed, although Liudmila Kovnatskaia views the bird motif of *Curlew River* (R46 to R47) as the song's most important antecedent, one can equally cite the depiction of bird song in *Night-Piece*

⁶¹⁷Cf. *Letters from a Life I*, pp. 193-4 and *Gustav Mahler: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death: Interpretations and Annotations* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p.368.

(*Notturmo*) of 1963.⁶¹⁸ Moreover, Britten's depiction of bird song in the Pushkin setting is in fact highly original and, as Vishnevskaya observes, extremely complicated, employing the pulsating rhythms of the right hand of the piano part in percussive counterpoint to an 'oriental' vocal line, and, to a degree, reflecting the longer-term influence of Balinese heterophony on his musical language since 1955. Indeed, the unfinished composition sketch in Alexander Arutiunian's possession suggests that Britten found this aspect of the setting particularly demanding to realise, given that the right hand of the piano part is significantly expanded, and the vocal line more elaborate, in the autograph score.⁶¹⁹

In selecting 'Angel', Britten may have been aware that Pushkin and Lermontov regarded the Demon as the embodiment of the poet's spirit, doomed to solitude and outcast from society, which may to a degree have reflected his consciousness of his homosexuality and pacifism, albeit this has not been highlighted by previous commentators on the cycle. Indeed, Britten was already aware of the importance of the figure of the Demon in Russian culture, given that he and Pears almost certainly saw Vrubel's paintings in the Treťiakov Gallery during their October 1964 visit.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁸Kovnatskaia, 'Angliiskoe ekho russkoi poezii', p.292.

⁶¹⁹Appendix XV.

⁶²⁰Appendix IV. Neil Mackie also emphasises the importance of Pears's interest in Russian art; interview with the author, 16 August 2011.

Thus, in an interview with *Sovetskaia muzyka* in the same month Britten concluded that 'I want to come back to the Soviet Union in the near future in order to travel around your enormous country...to visit the Caucasus and to see the mountains over which Lermontov's freedom-loving Demon once flew', and the setting's agitato piano part vividly depicts the Demon's restless flight in the context of a highly compressed operatic scena.⁶²¹ Although Pears's translation of this poem distorts the original by translating Demon as Satan and 'dukh somnen'ia' as 'soul of envy' rather than 'spirit of self-doubt', Britten may have identified with this poem most closely of the five: not only in its depiction of relationship between innocence and evil, but also in the parallel position of the Demon and creative artist, above the crowd yet also wishing to communicate with it. He had already addressed this theme in his setting of Hölderlin's 'Menschenbeifall' seven years earlier, and, as has been observed, the tension between 'public' and 'private' communication had become acute for Britten by 1965. In this case Britten's romanticised conception of Russia thus seems to have fused with the expression of his most deeply held personal convictions, and if, in the event, Britten was unable to visit Georgia in August 1965, his visit to the monument to

⁶²¹'Govorit Benjamin Britten', p. 64.

Alexander Griboedov close to the Georgian border seems to have had a particular impact.⁶²²

Two further creative preoccupations are evident in Britten's cycle: 'I thought my heart had forgotten' highlights 'the mighty power of beauty', just as 'The Nightingale and the Rose' (1827) parallels the creative artist's search for beauty in the face of unresponsiveness: a theme partly reflected in his decision to set *Death in Venice* six years later. On the other hand, the first and fourth poems – and the initial selection of 'Sing not before me, fair maiden, the songs of sad Georgia' – also reflect Britten's romanticised sense of the Russian landscape in their depiction of the savage forest and mountains and the 'eastern nightingale'. Edward Mirzoian, Alexander Arutiunian and Galina Vishnevskaya all emphasise the inspiration Britten took from the natural landscape of the Caucasus in August 1965, which is also suggested by Pears's private photographs of the visit.⁶²³

Finally, 'Lines written during a sleepless night' reflects Britten's characteristic preoccupation with the world of night, sleep and dreams, just as 'The Nightingale and the Rose' is set 'in the darkness of the night'.

Britten had addressed this theme as recently as 1963 in his *Nocturnal after*

⁶²²'A Composer in Russia', Kildea, p. 284.

⁶²³Interviews with the author, 8 April 2010 and appendix XIII. For photographs of Britten's visit, see, for example, BPL: PH/1/269-282; PH/4/384-414; PH/5/254-272.

John Dowland; and in terms of the *pp* ostinato figure in the piano part which depicts the inexorable passage of time in 'Lines written during a sleepless night', the cycle can also be related to 'Um Mitternacht' (1962) and to Proverb VI of the *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*. All four works reflect a pessimistic attitude towards the passage of time: 'Um Mitternacht' reflects spiritual isolation; the words of the Dowland song on which *Nocturnal* is based regards sleep as 'the image of true Death', and in Proverb VI 'The hours of folly are measured by the clock; but of wisdom, no clock can measure'. On the other hand, Britten's cycle does not depict death, a reflection, perhaps, of his optimistic and relaxed disposition during the 1965 visit or in recognition of official suspicion towards the theme in the Soviet Union.

Although Rostropovich suggests that Britten initially considered individual settings rather than a unified cycle,⁶²⁴ with the exception of 'Epigram' – which he may have set in order to place the fourth and final songs in sharper relief as well as on account of the connection of the subject to England – the cycle as a whole therefore addresses the position of the creative artist with regard to the world he inhabits, and can be regarded as highly autobiographical in the concerns it addresses. The choice of Pushkin as a means of doing this is indicative of Britten's

⁶²⁴'Dni Brittena v Erevane', p. 17.

originality of approach and, as shall be seen, akin to Shostakovich's treatment of Pushkin in 1936 and 1952: thus, the most valid similarity between *The Poet's Echo* and Shostakovich's 1936 and 1952 settings is the degree of autobiographical identification with the text, although one should add that the emotional range of Britten's cycle is somewhat broader and may have stimulated Shostakovich in his selections of Blok in 1966.

4.4 Musical reference

Three preliminary observations can be made regarding Britten's musical reference during the work's composition. The compressed period during which Britten composed the cycle suggests that he drew upon existing sources of creative reference, as opposed to Armenian music, which Pears's diary indicates that he only significantly encountered once the cycle was complete. Indeed although Graham Johnson feels that the music of Armenia may have influenced the atmosphere of 'The Nightingale and the Rose', Mirzoian recalls very limited contact with Britten on the part of Armenian composers during this initial period and does not recognise this as a significant feature of the score.⁶²⁵

⁶²⁵Pears, p.115, Johnson, p.202, and interview with Edward Mirzoian, 8 April 2010.

Secondly, the cycle as a whole can primarily be seen as reflecting what Britten viewed as the unique qualities of Vishnevskaya's voice with which by 1965 he was intimately acquainted in a variety of Russian and non-Russian repertoire. The soprano thus recalls that, as was the case with the works Shostakovich composed for her, Britten did not show her the cycle until it was complete.⁶²⁶ The cycle is written within the same range as the original version of *Songs and Dances of Death* (middle C to top A) which Britten heard the soprano perform in June 1961, and at one of the first performances of the work Donald Mitchell was 'very much struck by the way Galya found exactly the right tone for their inward quality...[She] summoned up any amount of ravishing and perfectly controlled soft tone'.⁶²⁷

Finally, in terms of reference to Russian music, Britten's diaries from 1928 to 1938 and his collection of vocal music suggest that he did not draw upon the Russian tradition of setting Pushkin, but from a wider range of Russian and non-Russian music which by 1965 was fully assimilated within his musical language. However, there is no agreement as to which Russian music may have influenced Britten in the longer term, and the cycle's less than straightforward relationship to the Russian tradition of

⁶²⁶Appendix XIII.

⁶²⁷Letter from Donald Mitchell to Britten, 4 July 1966 (BPL: Faber correspondence).

Pushkin romances has not been discussed by Boris Gasparov (2006). Indeed, there is no evidence in Britten's diaries or correspondence to confirm whether Britten was acquainted with the Pushkin romances of Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov; and although Graham Johnson highlights the 'brooding, pessimistic shadows of Musorgsky, the ghostly shadows of the lyrical melodic expansiveness of Tchaikovsky, and the spare textures, and economy of diction, of Shostakovich' in the cycle, and the influence of Borodin, Rimsky-Korsakov and Balakirev in 'The Nightingale and the Rose', the evidence presents a more complex picture.⁶²⁸ The only reference to Balakirev in Britten's diaries is to finding his songs 'rather dull' when he heard a performance in December 1936.⁶²⁹ Moreover, the Russian editions of Balakirev's songs in the Britten-Pears Library originally belonged to Pears, who seems to have possessed a significantly greater interest in Russian vocal music from the mid-1930s, acquiring collected editions of the songs of Glinka, Musorgsky and Taneev and early editions of operatic works by Dargomyzhsky, Glinka, Naprawnik and Rimsky-Korsakov during his visits to the Soviet Union and from sources as diverse as Musica Rara, Marjorie Fass and Joan Cross, who performed in the British première of *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* in 1933.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁸Johnson, pp. 199, 202.

⁶²⁹Diary, 31 December 1936 (BPL).

⁶³⁰*M. Balakirev: Romansy i pesni* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1937) and *Russkikh narodnykh pesen* (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1936) (BPL: 2-9204104/5); *Glinka: PSS 10: Sochinenia dlia golosa*

Although Vishnevskaya feels that Britten's settings of Pushkin are most akin to those of Glinka – comparing, for example, 'Ia dumal, serdtse pozabylo...' with 'Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnoven'e...' - this is in terms of the equivalence of the poetry and music as opposed to similarity of musical language.⁶³¹ Indeed, the evidence of Britten's diaries and miniature scores suggests that by 1965 he was only familiar with the most celebrated extracts from Glinka's operas, and he seems to have had no knowledge of other composers from the first half of the nineteenth century who set Pushkin, such as Verstovsky, Aliabiev and Varlamov. Similarly, whilst Sviatoslav Richter regarded Dargomyzhky's *The Stone Guest* as an influence on Britten's musical language,⁶³² it is by no means clear that Britten was familiar in any depth with the composer's vocal works. In any case, and in contrast to Vishnevskaya, Joan Rodgers feels that interpretatively *The Poet's Echo* differs from the Pushkin settings of Glinka and Dargomizhsky 'who give the singer a rather blank canvas on which to interpret, whereas Britten, Shostakovich and, to some extent,

(Moscow: GMI, 1962), signed 'P.P.' and annotated by Pears for performance (BPL: 2-9204125); *Musorgski: Romansy i pesni* (Leningrad: GMI, 1960, signed 'Peter Pears' (BPL); and Taneev, *Romansy dlya golosa s fortepiano* (Moscow: GMI: 1947), in which Pears highlighted the mandolin obbligato in op. 9, nos. 1 and 2 (BPL: 2-01050963). The Britten-Pears Library also includes early Russian editions of the vocal scores of Dargomyzhsky's *Rusalka*, Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Liudmila*, Naprawnik's *Dubrowsky*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *May Night*, *Sadko*, *The Snow Maiden*; *Le Coq d'Or* and *The Maid of Pskov*, which were also acquired by Pears. Several of the Rimsky-Korsakov scores also exist as gifts from Joan Cross; and the score of the latter opera, a gift from Marjorie Fass, was kept by Pears in his study during his lifetime (BPL: 2-9204131; 2-1000706, 2-9202329; 2-1000780; 1-000807; 2-1000811; 2-9203166; 2-1000812; 2-9401886).

⁶³¹Appendix XIII.

⁶³²Richter, p.194.

Rimsky-Korsakov, give the singer much more to work with'.⁶³³ Thus, whether consciously or through lack of familiarity, Britten seems to have distanced himself not only from the later Russian tradition of setting Pushkin, but from the nineteenth-century Russian art song more generally, and, as Johnson observes, 'of all Britten's [vocal] stylizations, *The Poet's Echo* is the least open to charges of parody or eclecticism'.⁶³⁴ Indeed, it was the 'high simplicity' of the second and fifth settings, as opposed to specific musical influences, which impressed those who heard them at their first performances in Yerevan in August 1965, and the cycle as a whole is ascetic in texture, a wider feature of Britten's musical language in the 1960s.⁶³⁵

Britten's diaries from 1928 to 1938 suggest that the longer-term influence of three other Russian sources reasserted itself in 1965. During this formative period Britten expressed particular admiration for Borodin's chamber, orchestral and operatic music, purchasing the miniature score of the Second String Quartet as early as April 1929 and enthusiastically recording performances and broadcasts of *From the Steppes of Central Asia*, the 'wild and vigorous' Polovtsian Dances, and the 'lovely' Second

⁶³³Letter to the author from Joan Rodgers, 3 November 2009.

⁶³⁴'Voice and Piano', in Palmer, p.303.

⁶³⁵'Dni Brittena v Armenii', p. 110.

Symphony, whose miniature score he also obtained.⁶³⁶ It is likely that, as with Tchaikovsky, Britten particularly admired the composer's melodic invention, characterised in this case by the use of ornamental turns and grace notes, which suggests that in so far as he consciously drew from an exotic 'oriental' idiom in *The Poet's Echo*, as in the vocal line of 'The Nightingale and the Rose' and the shimmering harmonies on the pedal point of the ostinati of 'Lines written during a sleepless night', it was from this source. This is also suggested by the manuscript of former song in Arutiunian's possession, which indicates that Britten subsequently elaborated this aspect of the vocal line to produce what Vishnevskaya regards as vocally the most demanding setting of the cycle.⁶³⁷

Secondly, between 1929 and 1935 Britten was also stimulated by the colour and rhythmic fertility of Rimsky-Korsakov in a variety of works: *Capriccio Espagnol*, *Scheherazade*, the Suite from *Le Coq d'Or*, together with *Sadko* and *The Tale of Tsar Sultan*, staged performances of which he experienced in June 1931 and October 1933: which suggests the appeal of the composer's fusion of Spanish and oriental elements to create an exotic idiom. As early as June 1930 Britten had also obtained the scores of

⁶³⁶Diary, 27 April 1929, 17 June 1931, 15 February, 30 August and 13 December 1934, 25 March 1935, 3 July 1936, and 31 December 1937. Britten has dated his copy of Borodin's Second String Quartet 27 April 1929; and his diary suggests that he obtained his miniature score of the Second Symphony in 1934 (BPL: 2-9900598, 2-9900607).

⁶³⁷G. Vishnevskaya, *Dedicated to Galina Vishnevskaya*, p.7.

Capriccio Espagnol and the Suite from *Le Coq d'Or*, and he went on enthusiastically to record six performances of the former between 1929 and 1935 and to obtain the miniature score of *Scheherazade* in 1937.⁶³⁸ Given that a number of the performances of Borodin and Rimsky Korsakov which Britten attended or heard on the wireless were conducted by Bridge, it is likely that, as in the case of Tchaikovsky, this represents a further unrecognised area of Bridge's influence upon Britten, although it is only the full text of the diaries which highlights the importance of this phenomenon.

By the mid-1960s, and in the context of his creative relationships with Russian musicians and first-hand visits to the Soviet Union, Britten's early interest in Rimsky-Korsakov and Borodin may have reasserted itself. In 1971 Pears recorded that he and Britten augmented their collection of Rimsky-Korsakov during their visit to Moscow, and both the Soviet film of *The Tsar's Bride* and the Polovtsian Dances were programmed during the subsequent Aldeburgh Festival.⁶³⁹ However, such influence seems to have operated in the form of the wider features

⁶³⁸Britten has dated his copy of *Capriccio Espagnol*, October 1927, the Suite from *Le Coq d'Or* June 1930, and *Scheherazade* 1937 (BPL: 2-1000340, 2-1000349, and 2-1000345). For his admiration for Rimsky-Korsakov see diary entries for 2 August 1929, 24 June 1930, 8 March 1931, 1 January, 17 March, 5 September, 14 October and 20 December 1932, 21 October 1933, 20 January and 4 February 1934, and 29 January and 5 September 1935.

⁶³⁹Pears, p.163, and AFMA 1971, pp. 66, 80.

of each composer's style. Rimsky-Korsakov's conventionally dramatic setting of 'The Echo', for example, bears no similarity to Britten's sophisticated use of anticipated and real silence to accentuate the image of the poet's isolation; and whilst the exotic musical atmosphere of Britten's setting of 'The Nightingale and the Rose' does recall that of Rimsky-Korsakov's 'The Rose and the Nightingale', it is unlikely that he had acquired his edition of the composer's songs by 1965.⁶⁴⁰ Moreover, as has been observed, Britten's piano part is characteristic, as well as distinctive, in employing the device of heterophony as accompaniment to the melismatic semiquavers of the vocal line.

Britten's long-term admiration for Tchaikovsky is also reflected in the cycle, although, again, this influence is not entirely straightforward to assess. By 1968 Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich tended to programme *The Poet's Echo* alongside a selection of Tchaikovsky songs, and at Britten's suggestion it was in this form that the first recording of the cycle was released in 1970.⁶⁴¹ On the other hand, as has been observed, by 1965 Britten's acquaintance with Tchaikovsky's vocal music encompassed

⁶⁴⁰Rimsky-Korsakov, *Romansy* (Moscow/Leningrad: GMI 1946) (BPL: 2-01050967). There are no annotations in the score to suggest how far, if it all, Britten was familiar with these settings.

⁶⁴¹Programme supplement to AFMA 1968 (BPL: PG/AF/1968/25); *Songs by Tchaikovsky and Britten* (Decca SXL 6428, 1970), side two of which consists of op. 6 no. 5, op. 38 no. 3, op. 57 no. 2, op. 63 no. 6, op. 73 no. 2, and op. 28 no. 3; and appendix XIII.

operatic works rather than songs.⁶⁴² Thus, although Tchaikovsky's settings of 'The Canary' and of Pushkin's 'The Nightingale' also employ ornamental grace notes in the piano part as a depiction of bird song, Vishnevskaya's recital programmes at the Aldeburgh Festival suggest that Britten was not familiar with these songs by 1965 and, in any case, with the exception of *Eugene Onegin* and *Pique Dame*, Tchaikovsky showed a 'remarkable reticence' towards Pushkin's poetry, only setting two Pushkin songs.⁶⁴³ Nevertheless, one can detect a degree of similarity between the expressively wistful inflections of Britten's setting of 'My Heart...' and those of the three Tchaikovsky songs Vishnevskaya had performed at the Aldeburgh Festival four years earlier:

Example 32: *The Poet's Echo*, 'My Heart...', bars 1-4

Adagio *pp*

Я д-мал, сердце по-за-бы-ло Спо-соб-ност

Example 33: Tchaikovsky: 'Ia li v pole da ne travushka byla...', op. 47, no.7, bars 9-10

p

Я ли в по-ле да не тра-вуш-ка бы-ла, _____

⁶⁴²Letters from a Life IV, pp. 28 and 261, indicates that Britten and Pears included Tchaikovsky operatic extracts in their recitals as early as 1952 and 1954.

⁶⁴³Gasparov, p.169.

closely associated with the role and he had accompanied her in this extract during the 1963 Aldeburgh Festival:⁶⁴⁵

Example 36: Tchaikovsky: *Eugene Onegin* no. 9, from bar 300 (vocal line)



Example 37: *The Poet's Echo 'My Heart...'*, bars 21-4



The evidence for the cycle's relationship to twentieth-century Russian music is inconclusive. Britten was unenthusiastic about the Mosolov songs he heard in 1935⁶⁴⁶, and during his visit to the Soviet Union thirty years later showed no interest in the contemporary Soviet vocal writing of, for example, Babadzhanian, Sviridov or Gavrilin. The most significant reference in Britten's diaries to twentieth-century Russian vocal music is to Stravinsky's *Four Russian Songs* in 1936, which he considered

⁶⁴⁵AFMA 1963, p.33, and programme supplement (BPL: PG/AF/1963/4). On this occasion, Britten used his copy of the vocal score (New York: Schirmer, 1936; BPL: 2-1000852), whose piano part he has annotated in the light of the full score (Tchaikovsky PSS: vol. 4).

⁶⁴⁶Diary, 19 September 1935 (BPL).

'wonderful'.⁶⁴⁷ He had already obtained the score of *Berceuses du Chat* in 1932, suggesting that it was primarily Stravinsky's syllabic treatment of the text which appealed to him.⁶⁴⁸ 'The Nightingale and the Rose' has also been viewed as akin to Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* in dynamics and texture, but Britten's knowledge of the Stravinsky opera seems to have been through the prism of the later symphonic poem, a broadcast of which he heard in May 1936, which suggests that if Britten drew from Stravinsky in this setting it may equally have been from *The Firebird*.⁶⁴⁹

The evidence also suggests that with the exceptions of *War and Peace* and *The Story of a Real Man*, Britten was acquainted with relatively little of the Prokofiev's vocal music by the time he began work on *The Poet's Echo*. Although he obtained a Russian edition of Prokofiev's 'The Ugly Ducking' at some point after Vishnevskaya's performance of the song during the 1961 Aldeburgh Festival,⁶⁵⁰ there is no evidence to suggest that he was aware of the composer's *Three Pushkin Romances* of 1936, notwithstanding a not dissimilar mood of autobiographical reflection in 'The Pines' and the fact that Britten would have been aware of the extent

⁶⁴⁷Diary, 8 October 1936.

⁶⁴⁸Britten has inscribed his copy of *Berceuses du Chat* 'Cobbett Prize: June 1932' (BPL: 2-1000545).

⁶⁴⁹Kovnatskaia, 'Angliiskoe ekho russkoi poezii', p. 29, and Britten's diary, 20 May 1936 (BPL).

⁶⁵⁰Moscow: Sovetskii kompozitor, 1962 (BPL: 2-1000295).

of Prokofiev's wider engagement with Pushkin in 1936 as a result of receiving the orchestral score of *Pushkiniana* from Rozhdestvensky.⁶⁵¹ Vishnevskaya did not perform these romances during her career, choosing instead to record the composer's op. 104 arrangements of Russian folk songs after Britten's death, and she did not discuss either opus with Britten.⁶⁵² This suggests that in so far as Britten drew from Prokofiev in *The Poet's Echo*, it was through the indirect prism of Vishnevskaya's 'simply unforgettable' vocal interpretation of Natasha in the performance of *War and Peace* Britten attended in 1964.⁶⁵³

Although Michael Kennedy feels that 'the Shostakovich affinity which began in the 1930s...found its apotheosis' in *The Poet's Echo*, there is also no evidence to suggest that Britten was significantly influenced by the composer's 1936 and 1952 settings of Pushkin, notwithstanding their publication in the Soviet Union and the fact that Pears did subsequently acquire the score of both works.⁶⁵⁴ Given that both composers set Pushkin, as well as Burns, Michelangelo, Shakespeare and Yevtushenko

⁶⁵¹Britten's copy of *Pushkiniana* is inscribed in Russian by Rozhdestvensky 'To the inspired B. Britten' and dated '11 III 63/Moscow' (BPL: 2-9300205).

⁶⁵²Communication to the author from Galina Vishnevskaya, 21 September 2010.

⁶⁵³See 'U nas v gostiakh Benjamin Britten', p. 129, in which Britten described the performance he attended in March 1964 as 'a wonderful show....Vishnevskaya's Natasha is simply unforgettable. Prokofiev is a great master; I especially like the lyrical bits of the opera; and the stage was superb'.

⁶⁵⁴M. Kennedy in A. Blyth, ed., *Song on Record: 2* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988), p.224, and BPL: 2-9402133. Pears's copy is the 1967 Edition Peters edition, which was kept in his study during Britten's lifetime.

during their creative lives, and Britten possessed anthologies of all but one of the poets – Küchelbecker - Shostakovich chose to set in the Fourteenth Symphony, it is equally appropriate to highlight a shared literary sensibility, albeit one which operated in entirely different artistic and political contexts. In op. 46, 'Renaissance' thus shares the preoccupations of 'The Poet's Echo' as an autobiographical reflection on the relationship of the creative artist to the contemporary situation and to posterity, whilst 'To a young man, sobbing bitterly' highlights the topic of 'ethereal sleep', a highly characteristic creative preoccupation for Britten. The ascetic texture of both Shostakovich's cycles is also akin to Britten's, suggesting a desire to convey the inner meaning of the poetry. On the other hand, their overall tone is unremittingly pessimistic, explicitly addressing the theme of death in 'Stanzas', whereas, as has been observed, Britten did not do this in *The Poet's Echo* and his setting of 'Epigram' provides a degree of humour and satirical contrast.

The evidence is also unclear as to how far Britten was acquainted with Shostakovich's subsequent vocal music by 1965. The only score he appears to have possessed was *Moskva Cheryomushki* and both copies of *From Jewish Folk Poetry* in the Britten-Pears Library belonged to Pears.⁶⁵⁵

Although Britten had intended to accompany him in a performance of

⁶⁵⁵BPL: 2-1000840 and 2-9402131/2.

this work during the 1962 Edinburgh Festival, he was unable to do so owing to illness and it is unclear how far he had prepared the score, since the annotations are those of Pears⁶⁵⁶. Further, whereas Britten was certainly acquainted with *Five Romances on Texts from 'Krokodil' Magazine* this was only after the completion of *The Poet's Echo*.⁶⁵⁷

Although the influence of *Satires* (1960) has been detected on Britten's 'Epigram', as well as 'an imitation of Shostakovich's speech manner, with numerous, very persistent and sarcastic repetitions...of a word or phrase, characteristic of the composer's oral and (partly) written speech',⁶⁵⁸ the relationship between the two cycles is also less than straightforward. The work had been abortively programmed for Vishnevskaya and Rostropovich at the 1963 Aldeburgh Festival,⁶⁵⁹ but with the exception of the fifth setting the mood of *The Poet's Echo* is contemplative rather than satirical, suggesting that this was not a primary source of influence. On this occasion, Britten in fact made less use of the upper register of Vishnevskaya's voice, and it is unlikely that he would have wished to emulate the work's satirical references to Tchaikovsky, nor to represent Shostakovich's personality in this way. Vishnevskaya believes that it was

⁶⁵⁶*Letters from a Life* V, p337.

⁶⁵⁷Pears, p.133.

⁶⁵⁸Kovnatskaia, 'Angliiskoe ekho russkoi poezii', p.294.

⁶⁵⁹AFMA 1963, p.15, and BPL: 1-901101 for the Vishnevskaya/Britten recital which took place instead as a result of Rostropovich's illness.

only after the two composers met in September 1965 that they developed an intimate friendship, and neither Mirzoian nor Arutiunian detect the influence of Shostakovich on the cycle.⁶⁶⁰

Moreover, although Musorgsky and Dargomyzhsky can be viewed as the most important influences on the *Satires*, and the declamatory vocal line of Britten's 'Epigram' has also been seen as influenced by the former,⁶⁶¹ Britten's longer-term attitude towards Musorgsky and this setting's exceptional brevity would suggest that it is more accurate to view it as a transitional feature of Britten's musical language culminating in the 'epigrammatic virtuosity' of *Who are these Children?* in 1969.⁶⁶² One of the most striking features of 'Epigram' is its use of eight silences in twenty-eight bars, a feature of Britten's musical language Rostropovich had already highlighted as 'as significant and expressive as the notes'.⁶⁶³ This suggests that he primarily conceived the setting in terms of his own musical language and as an affectionate means of expressing the more histrionic side of Vishnevskaya's musical, and private, personality and

⁶⁶⁰Vishnevskaya, pp. 376-7, and interviews with the author, 8 April 2010.

⁶⁶¹J. Evans, CD note for *Britten Abroad* (Signum Classics: SIGCD122, 2008), p.5.

⁶⁶²Johnson, p.203.

⁶⁶³M. Rostropovich, 'Dear Ben...', Gishford, p.16.

employing her abilities as an actress to the full:⁶⁶⁴ it is in this sense – as ‘children of similar fathers’ - that the work can be related to the *Satires*.

Thus, if Shostakovich can be said to have influenced Britten in ‘The Poet’s Echo’ it was, as with the other sources of Russian influence, in terms of the wider features of his musical language, notably the demonstrative octave unisons and whole-tone chords built upon thirds which highlight the dramatically pivotal contrast between Angel and Demon in the third setting. However, given that Britten had already employed the striking device of *sf* to *pp* diminuendo in ‘Midnight on the Great Western’ in *Winter Words* twelve years earlier, a setting which similarly highlights the duality of heavenly vision and earthly sin, this may represent assimilated musical influence as opposed to conscious allusion.

One should add that with the exception of Shostakovich’s *Four Monologues on Verses by Pushkin* (1952) and his op. 128 setting of ‘Spring, Spring’ (1967), neither Shostakovich nor Prokofiev returned to Pushkin after their short cycles written for the 1936 anniversary, partly out of recognition that ‘In appropriating Pushkin musically, the challenge faced by each successive generation of composers stemmed more from their

⁶⁶⁴See Pears, pp. 103, 113 for this aspect of Vishnevskaya’s personality during the period of the work’s composition. Cf. Rostropovich’s opinion when he first heard the soprano part of *War Requiem* that it represented Vishnevskaya’s portrait in music, appendix XIII.

awareness of the work of their predecessors than from their direct “dialogue” with Pushkin’s poetry’.⁶⁶⁵ In other words, by 1965 the musical tradition represented by setting Pushkin had become restrictive and, in the Soviet-era settings of Vlasov and Khrennikov, for example, a clichéd vehicle for the reassertion of Russian nationalism under Stalin. In 1944, for example, the musicologist Grigory Bernandt claimed that ‘Shostakovich’s path is separate from the paths of Russian artistic culture’, citing that in the Four Romances on Verses by Pushkin ‘the gap between the poet and the composer proved to be incredibly great’, whereas, as has been observed, in these settings the composer had in fact intimately identified with the emotional essence of the poetry.⁶⁶⁶ Thus, although Shostakovich may have contemplated completing his 1936 Pushkin cycle thirty years later, during his final decade he seems increasingly to have identified instead with a wider range of poets, particularly those of the Silver Age; and in the ninth movement of the Fourteenth Symphony, which has commonly been viewed as addressed to Britten, Shostakovich instead employed Pushkin’s contemporary Küchelbecker as a means of articulating the position of the creative artist.

⁶⁶⁵B. Gasparov, ‘Pushkin in music’, pp.160, 170.

⁶⁶⁶Unpublished transcript of the plenary session of the Organisational Committee of the Composers’ Union, 28-31 March 1944, RGALI, fund 2077, list 1, folder 92, transl. in Frolova-Walker, p.347.

By the time Britten chose to set the poet, the Pushkin romance had in fact become an increasing rarity on the part of Russian composers: Gubaidulina, Shchedrin, Schnittke (with the exception of one unpublished song), and Tishchenko did not write in the genre, and when Sviridov set 'Echo' in 1980 he did so *a cappella*. This places Britten's decision to set Pushkin in 1965 in sharper relief and partly explains the exceptional interest generated by *The Poet's Echo* on the part of Shostakovich and the Armenian composers who first heard the songs in August 1965.

4.5 Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok (1967): a response to Britten's vocal music?

The relationship between Britten's and Shostakovich's post-1960 vocal compositions is therefore more complex than has hitherto been recognised. As has been observed, although Shostakovich can be regarded as one of a variety of Russian influences on *The Poet's Echo*, it is primarily in the sense of both composers' approach to the poetry and in a limited degree of musical influence on the third setting. It is conceivable that such influence would have been become more apparent in two-larger-scale vocal projects envisaged by Britten between 1964 and 1968: an unrealised Shakespeare setting for Pears and Rostropovich, and an

operatic version of *Anna Karenina* with Vishnevskaya in the title role and Pears as Karenin. However, by mid-1968 both projects had proved abortive and there is no evidence to suggest how Britten envisaged their musical language.⁶⁶⁷

Moreover, notwithstanding its dedication to Shostakovich, *The Prodigal Son* does little to illuminate the musical relationship between the two composers nor that of Britten to Russian music: there is no evidence, for example, to suggest that Britten was acquainted with Prokofiev's ballet on the same theme, the full score of which was not published during his lifetime, and although Prokofiev would almost certainly also have been aware of the Rembrandt picture in the Hermitage which inspired Britten in December 1966, his treatment is considerably different.⁶⁶⁸ Indeed, in terms of its highly stylised and economical form of dramatic expression, the genre of Church Parable which Britten adopted between 1964 and 1968 can to a degree be viewed as a reassertion - albeit in a more broadly

⁶⁶⁷See Britten's statement in 'Govorit Benjamin Britten' that he wished to compose 'a big work for voice and cello, and dedicate it to Mstislav Rostropovich', and letter from Britten to Paul Sacher, 14 September 1966: 'I am planning a work for Slava and Peter based on the Shakespeare sonnets - Voice, Cello & small orchestra', but on 6 January 1967 he reported to Sacher that 'my Sonnets have virtually not progressed at all', and there is no subsequent reference to the projected work (PS: microfilm 156.1-0326-8/-0333). William Plomer's letters to Colin Graham on 31 December 1967 and 10 January 1968 indicate that the *Anna Karenina* project was proving problematic *prior* to the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia eight months later (BPL: Colin Graham correspondence); cf. the commonly held view in *Letters from a Life V*, p.325.

⁶⁶⁸Pears, p.146, and D. Nice, *Prokofiev: From Russia to the West, 1891-1935* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), p.260.

eclectic form - of the impact of Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* in 1936, a work which Britten initially encountered at the same time as *Lady Macbeth*.⁶⁶⁹ It is also striking that Britten's correspondence for 1967 and 1968 does not refer to the dedication to Shostakovich, and, uncharacteristically, it is not written on the composition sketch or full score, which suggests that this decision was made at a late stage and did not influence its initial conception of the work; nor could Robert Tear, who played the part of the Younger Son in the first performance, shed any light on this subject.⁶⁷⁰ Moreover, in the light of his experience of the one-off English Opera Group visit to the Soviet Union four years earlier, and the work's religious content, Britten was surely aware that it was unlikely to be performed in the Soviet Union, notwithstanding Rostropovich's enthusiasm for performing it alongside Shostakovich's Fourteenth Symphony in commemoration of Britten's sixtieth birthday.⁶⁷¹ The significance of the dedication would therefore seem to lie primarily in Britten's choice of a parable with a universal appeal which, if uncharacteristically for Britten ends happily, in contrast to the previous

⁶⁶⁹See diary, 12 February 1936; and Britten's autograph draft of article for *World Film News* 1/1 (April 1936), in Kildea, p.18: 'The combination of set stylised sections in the music, the latin [sic] words, the masks worn by most of the actors, give the impression of an impersonal comment on Sophocles, rather than a re-enactment of the Drama'. In the Church Parables, on the other hand, the stylised re-enactment of the drama is the prerequisite for the final assertion of the moral.

⁶⁷⁰Microfilm of composition sketch and full score of *The Prodigal Son* (BPL: A8), and communication from Robert Tear, 15 August 2010.

⁶⁷¹Appendix VII, and letter from M.J. Llewellyn Smith, British Embassy, Moscow, to E.V. Vines, Cultural Exchange Department, FCO, 10 July 1973 (NA: FCO: 34/222).

two Church Parables does not conclude with a miracle as a sign of God's grace but focuses instead on human redemption, and an intuitive sense that this would have resonated with Shostakovich. Glikman, for example, recalls that although ostensibly an atheist, the composer was intimately acquainted with the Bible and particularly admired parables as well as 'rituals, traditions and symbols'.⁶⁷²

To assess how far Britten influenced Shostakovich's post-1960 vocal compositions is also less than straightforward. Eric Roseberry feels that 'It seems not unlikely that Shostakovich...was from their time of their first meeting fired by Britten's example to turn in these years to vocal composition, and the Blok Romances...are exceptionally Brittenish in a number of respects'.⁶⁷³ Isaak Glikman similarly regarded Britten's *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* as a stimulus to Shostakovich's *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo* (1974), which is also suggested by the fact that the composer heard 'with the greatest pleasure' Britten and Pears perform the work in Moscow in December 1966 and in December 1974 referred to the work as 'Eleven Sonnets of Michelangelo'.⁶⁷⁴ On the other hand, Shostakovich's selection of texts in this work differs in largely focusing on the theme of

⁶⁷²Glikman, pp.78, 268, 290, 292.

⁶⁷³'The composer at the piano', p.6.

⁶⁷⁴Letters from Shostakovich to Glikman, 26 December 1966 and footnote, Glikman, pp.136, 296, and from Shostakovich to Britten, 16 December 1974 (BPL: DDS).

creativity as opposed to romantic love. Moreover, although the Blok cycle has been seen as signifying the start of Shostakovich's 'late style' in the sense of 'art mirroring feelings from the autumn of the artist's life', one must consider the evidence for Britten's influence on this development critically.⁶⁷⁵ Shostakovich's reference to Britten's vocal works in his correspondence to the composer is selective and brief: *Peter Grimes* and *War Requiem* (December 1963), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (June 1965), *Curlew River* (March 1967), *The Prodigal Son* (August 1968, June and August 1970), and *Death in Venice* following his 'preliminary acquaintance' with the unfinished score (November 1972).⁶⁷⁶

The extant collection of Britten's vocal music possessed by Shostakovich provides a similarly incomplete picture. He was given the score of *War Requiem* by Britten in March 1963, and in the following year obtained a study score of *Peter Grimes*; at some point, probably during the visit of the English Opera Group in 1964, he obtained the vocal score of *Albert Herring*; in March 1967 he received a rehearsal score of *Curlew River* from Britten and he possessed a first edition (1967) of *The Poet's Echo*, although when he obtained this score is unclear; and in March 1974 was presented with a vocal score of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the BBC film crew

⁶⁷⁵F. Maes, 'Between reality and transcendence: Shostakovich's songs', CCDS, p.248.

⁶⁷⁶Letters from Shostakovich to Britten, 5 December 1963, 20 June 1965, 9 March 1967, 11 August 1968, 16 June and 14 August 1970, and 17 November 1972 (BPL: DDS).

responsible for the documentary *Music from the Flames*.⁶⁷⁷ There is therefore no evidence to suggest that Shostakovich was familiar with some of Britten's most important vocal works composed between 1965 and 1975: *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake*, *The Burning Fiery Furnace*, *Children's Crusade*, *Owen Wingrave*, *Canticle V 'The Death of Saint Narcissus'*, *Sacred and Profane*, and *Phaedra*.⁶⁷⁸ On the other hand, by 1966, as Britten himself was aware, his wider vocal output enjoyed a significant profile in the Soviet Union. Translated selections from *On This Island*, *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, *A Charm of Lullabies*, *Winter Words*, together with a variety of the composer's folk song and Purcell arrangements, had been published; and Rozhdestvensky was instrumental in promoting performances of *Spring Symphony* from 1963 onwards.⁶⁷⁹ Shostakovich's diary certainly indicates that he attended a variety of Britten concerts between 1961 and 1971, including performances by Britten and Pears of

⁶⁷⁷Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow. Shostakovich's copy of Peter Grimes is signed 'D. Shostakovich 1964', and that of *Curlew River* is inscribed: 'For Dmitri Shostakovich/with greatest/admiration & warm/affection – in happy/memory of our New Year's Eve/together/Benjamin Britten 1967'. Shostakovich acknowledged receipt of the latter in his letter to Britten of 9 March 1967 (BPL: DDS).

⁶⁷⁸See typewritten carbon copy of letter from M.J. Llewellyn Smith to John Amis, B.B.C. Music Department, London, 13 November 1973: 'I am anxious to get hold of a print of the television production of Owen Wingrave [sic] which I am sure would be of enormous interest to musicians out here' (NA: FCO 34/222).

⁶⁷⁹B. Britten, *Izbravannoe dla golosa s fortepiano*, vols. 1 & 2 (Moscow: GMI/Muzyka, 1963/6). For Britten's knowledge of the publication of vol. 1, see handwritten draft of his letter to E. Roth, 10 May 1964 (BPL: BH). For a vivid description of the first Moscow performance of *Spring Symphony*, which took place under Rozhdestvensky in the Great Hall of the Conservatory on 18 May 1963, in which the boys' choir were 'a group of Young Pioneers in white shirts and red neck scarves', see letter from Alan Brooke Turner to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 23 May 1963 (BPL: British Embassy, Moscow).

Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente in 1963 and the first performance of *War Requiem* in Moscow three years later.⁶⁸⁰ His correspondence also highlights that in the cases of *War Requiem* and *The Prodigal Son* the recordings of the work he obtained either via the British Council and subsequently from Britten himself via Rostropovich were equally instrumental in cementing his admiration,⁶⁸¹ although the extant collection of Britten recordings he possessed is incomplete.⁶⁸² How far Britten influenced Shostakovich through this medium is therefore difficult to assess fully, as is the possibility that Shostakovich also encountered Britten's music by means of radio broadcasts.⁶⁸³

⁶⁸⁰Shostakovich's diary indicates that he attended Britten concerts on 10 March 1963, 24 May and 21 November 1966 in the Tchaikovsky Hall, Moscow; and 12 March 1964, 25 December 1966, 21 January 1967, and 20 April 1971 in the Large Hall of the Moscow Conservatory. In each case, following his characteristic practice in his diary, Shostakovich only stated the time, location and Britten's name (information from Ol'ga Dombrovskaja, Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow). For the programme of the first and second concerts, see *Letters from a Life V*, p.469, and Sollertinsky, p.176.

⁶⁸¹For the impact of the recording of *The Prodigal Son* sent by Britten, see letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 14 August 1970, transl. M. Thorpe: 'I listened with great emotion and great delight to this wonderful work of yours, so remarkably performed and excellently recorded. I have all my life studied to listen silently to music. Sometimes it seems to me that I have succeeded well in this field. Having read *The Prodigal Son* to myself it seemed to me that I knew it very well and heard it very well. But when I heard it sound aloud, I then realised once again that sounding music is always much more powerful than reading it silently to oneself' (BPL: DDS).

⁶⁸²Shostakovich's records of *War Requiem*, *Curlew River* and *The Prodigal Son* are not held by the Archive of D.D. Shostakovich, Moscow.

⁶⁸³Cf. Sollertinsky, p.193: 'No interesting broadcast was missed [in August 1967]: the composer listened with unflagging attention to everything that could be heard on the air – the music of the past, concerts by visiting musicians from abroad, new recordings, concerts of the latest Soviet music'. Shostakovich may therefore have encountered Britten works by means of the recordings made of live performances such as that of *Spring Symphony* cited in fn. 679.

Although Roseberry considers Britten's music as 'a significant catalyst on Shostakovich's late music', in evaluating this phenomenon one must also pay scrupulous attention to chronology. Vishnevskaya recalls that for several months in the second half of 1963 the recording of *War Requiem* was constantly on Shostakovich's record player, which is supported by the composer's letters to Glikman in August and September of the same year.⁶⁸⁴ However, Shostakovich's renewed interest in vocal music in 1960-62 with the *Satires* and Thirteenth Symphony pre-dated his initial encounter with the work and suggests a wider creative reorientation. One can view the composer's orchestrations of *Khovanshchina* and *Songs and Dances of Death* as symptomatic of the same phenomenon. It is thus the influence of Musorgsky which is most apparent in the first vocal work composed after Shostakovich's encounter with *War Requiem*, *The Execution of Stepan Razin*. Similarly, although Shostakovich wrote to Britten in March 1967 that *Curlew River* had made 'an enormous impression' on him on receipt of the score, this was at least a month after the completion of the Blok cycle, and it is unclear whether he was acquainted with the work any earlier.⁶⁸⁵ Further whereas Boris

⁶⁸⁴Appendix XIII, and letters from Shostakovich to Glikman, Zhukovka, 1 and 27 August 1963 and Moscow 1 September 1963 in Glikman, pp.114-5.

⁶⁸⁵Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 9 March 1967, transl. M. Thorpe (BPL: DDS). It is possible that Shostakovich was already familiar with *Curlew River* from Imogen Holst's engraving of the piano vocal score, the autograph of which Britten had presented to Richter in 'as a memory of Aldeburgh 1964' (BPL: Richter correspondence, photocopy of autograph front page).

Tishchenko recalled that 'Once, when I was a guest in his house, Shostakovich put on the record of *Curlew River*. In this act shone a deep respect for Britten, whom he really loved, valued and regarded as one of the greatest contemporary composers', the date of this occurrence is uncertain and Britten only recorded the work in June 1965.⁶⁸⁶

It is therefore more plausible to view *War Requiem*, together with *Curlew River* and *The Prodigal Son*, as works which may have influenced the Fourteenth Symphony, with the Blok cycle occupying a more complex transitional role and possessing a greater affinity to *The Poet's Echo*. Thus, in January 1969, five months before Shostakovich began sketching the Fourteenth Symphony, he told Britten that 'I play "P.S." every day, & keep finding in it new beauties and profound deep thoughts', although one should add that he did not elaborate further his opinion of a work which has generally been regarded as the least effective of the three Church Parables and, as has been observed, not apparently linked in any way with Russian music.⁶⁸⁷

⁶⁸⁶Appendix XI.

⁶⁸⁷Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Repino, 11 August 1968, transl. M. Thorpe (BPL: DDS). Richter, for example, greatly admired *Curlew River*, but regarded the two following Church Parables as 'not as deep or original', Richter, p.154.

Such evidence would suggest that Britten's influence on Shostakovich's increasing preoccupation with vocal composition was on the one hand incremental, and particularly important from late 1965 onwards, but also served to stimulate an existing creative direction caused by a variety of factors, not least the composer's increasing ill health following his first heart attack in February 1967 and his increasing reflection on, and dissatisfaction with, his creative life and legacy in the context of the intensification of reactionary pressure in the Soviet Union following the invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁶⁸⁸ Thus, Vishnevskaya believes that Britten may well have stimulated Shostakovich's return to vocal composition in the 1960s, which would seem to be confirmed by his decision to dedicate the Fourteenth Symphony to Britten in the spring of 1969, but she sees this as symptomatic of the wider emotional range and concentration of his music during the last decade of his life: hence the context of Shostakovich's final communication with Britten, a copy of the first recording of the *Six Romances on Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva* inscribed during the composition of his Viola Sonata.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸⁸See letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 16 June 1970, transl. M. Thorpe: 'Look after your health. In the last years I have understood that this is the most important thing' (BPL: DDS).

⁶⁸⁹Appendix XIII, and Melodiya C10 05137-8, inscribed in Russian by Shostakovich 'Dear Ben/Britten/as a sign of love and great/ respect, /D. Shostakovich/13 VI 1975. Moscow' (BPL: photocopy of record sleeve in DDS).

The instrumentation and seven-movement structure of the Seven Verses on Poems of Aleksandr Blok, in which the last three movements are played *attacca*, are certainly unprecedented in Shostakovich's output, and Roseberry sees Britten's *Nocturne*, his final orchestral song cycle composed in 1958, as a particular influence both on the work's structure and nocturnal preoccupations.⁶⁹⁰ On the other hand, although both the Blok cycle and *Nocturne* are similar in length and the latter seems to have been performed in Leningrad as early as November 1963, Rozhdestvensky did not conduct the work during Shostakovich's lifetime and there is no evidence to confirm whether the composer was acquainted with the work.⁶⁹¹ In any case, Britten made more sophisticated use of key structure, rhythm and instrumentation – particularly obligato - to illuminate his nine poetic extracts and to unify them into a dream sequence. It is more likely that Shostakovich was acquainted with the *Serenade* given the work's considerable popularity in the USSR from 1959 onwards and its high-profile association with the Soviet musicians Ivan Kozlovsky and Valery Polekh, and Britten and Pears also performed the work in Moscow in March 1963, although it is unclear whether

⁶⁹⁰CD note for 'Britten at Aldeburgh' (BBC 466 823-2 DM), p.6.

⁶⁹¹Letter from Alan Brooke Turner to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 20 June 1963 (BPL: British Embassy, Moscow) and interview with Gennady Rozhdestvensky, 16 November 2008. Shostakovich was not in Leningrad to attend the concerts of Britten's music held to mark the composer's fiftieth birthday; O. Dombrovskaja, 'Geokhronograf D.D. Shostakovicha (1945-1975)', *Issledovaniia i materialy*, vol. 1, p.200.

Shostakovich attended their performance.⁶⁹² On the other hand, the Blok cycle is notably different in not employing the framing device of prologue and epilogue and in treating all four instruments as expressive equals.

Shostakovich's unprecedented treatment of the human voice in a variety of instrumental combinations suggests that he primarily conceived the work instead as an unconventional form of chamber music able to express the particularly broad range of preoccupations represented in his selections of Blok, even within each poem, and what he saw as the highly musical quality of the words.⁶⁹³ Indeed, it is revealing that Shostakovich chose his own titles for three of the songs: in this sense, the emotional range of the work can be distinguished from earlier Blok cycles such as Weinberg's *Beyond the Border of Past Days*, which sets the same poem ('Posviashchenie') as the first of ten relatively short settings. It is also striking that Shostakovich employed each instrument, including the human voice, expressively, but also with a considerable degree of

⁶⁹²Typewritten letter from Rostropovich to Britten, Moscow Conservatory, n.d. [early 1962]: '...our famous tenor I. Koslovsky sang Serenades [sic] with horn and strings and...with great success' (BPL: MR). The Russian première of the work took place under Rozhdestvensky in the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 30 January 1959. The conductor does not recall that Shostakovich was present on this occasion; interview with the author, 16 November 2008. See also Britten's desk diary for 11 March 1963: 'PP BB Serenade' (BPL). Although Pears's travel diary indicates that Britten met Kozlovsky in 1966, one should note that the latter's mannered interpretation of the tenor part represents a considerable distortion of the original and Britten is unlikely to have heard it; Pears, p.137 and VISTA VERA VVCD-00215.

⁶⁹³See letter from Shostakovich to Boris Tishchenko, Moscow, 3 October 1968, in Tishchenko, p.32, and *D. Shostakovich NSS* vol. 91 (Moscow: DSCH, 2010), pp.172-3, for the composer's selection of Blok and his view of the texts.

refinement. Only the second and fifth songs fully exploited Vishnevskaya's distinctive upper range, and only the sixth setting her lower range, and repeated note pitches and semitonal movement lend a liturgical character to significant sections of the vocal line. 'Mysterious Signs' combines an expressive vocal line with a muted and largely *pp* cello part, and even the *espr.* cello part of 'The City Sleeps' is tempered by dynamics and double stopping. Although the piano part ranges from the serene passacaglia of 'The City Sleeps' to the savage depiction of the storm in the following song, as Shostakovich pointed out to Britten, 'In two [sic] the piano does not play. In two others the piano part is very easy. Only in one [? no. 5] is the piano part fairly difficult, but this is in the region of the 2nd or 3rd grade of difficulty, as the piano pedagogues would say'.⁶⁹⁴ Given the precedent of *Songs from the Chinese*, the Shakespeare setting for voice and cello Britten envisaged between 1964 and 1966 might have demonstrated a not dissimilar response to the compositional challenge of expressing a wide range of emotions and dramatic scenarios as economically, yet expressively, as possible.

In a survey of his musical opinions in 1968 Shostakovich highlighted 'the outward simplicity' of Britten's music and its 'deep emotional

⁶⁹⁴Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 25 April 1968, transl. M. Thorpe (BPL: DDS).

effectiveness', and the two specific works he cited were *War Requiem* and *The Poet's Echo*: one can therefore examine the interpretation that these two works represent the two most plausible Britten influences on the Blok cycle.⁶⁹⁵ An unpublished letter from Rostropovich to Britten in September 1965 also stated that 'Dimitri [sic] thinks very often about Ben's [Pushkin] romances', which suggests that *The Poet's Echo* was more important in this regard than hitherto recognised.⁶⁹⁶ Indeed, each of the three vocal settings which Shostakovich heard between 1963 and the end of 1966 - *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente*, *The Poet's Echo* and *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* – can be related to the work in their setting of texts by a single poet, their refined use of piano, especially in the ascetic texture of the first two cycles, and their lyrical beauty of tone: only the 'Epigram' from *The Poet's Echo* can be considered in any way satirical. This may, to a degree, account for one of the most striking features of the work in terms of Shostakovich's own output: the lack of parody and absence of the composer's characteristic juxtaposition of the tragic and grotesque, even in the more prophetic and apocalyptic second and fifth settings.

There are four further areas of similarity between the Blok cycle and Britten's *The Poet's Echo*: the subjective and passionate focus on the

⁶⁹⁵*Iunost*, 1968, no. 5, reproduced in *D. Shostakovich: O vremeni i o sebe*, p.309.

⁶⁹⁶Handwritten letter from Rostropovich to Britten and Pears, Moscow, 23 September 1965 (BPL: MR).

creative artist and the source of his inspiration in 'Music'; the inclusion of a compressed and warmly expressive love song ('My Heart.../'We were together'); an explicit link to a Russian artist of the Silver Age ('Demon'/'Gamaion the bird of prophecy'); and the use of a piano ground ostinato in the piano part to depict the inexorable passage of time ('Lines written during a sleepless night'/'The city sleeps'). It is also revealing that Britten programmed the cycle alongside the Blok cycle at its first English performance during the 1968 Aldeburgh Festival.⁶⁹⁷ On the other hand, the seven-movement structure of the Blok cycle, and the passionate declaration of the last setting, are more akin to *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, and the piano part of the second song (R4: bars 1 to 4, recalled in the cello line at R33) may recall the chromatic ascent of 'Die Linien des Lebens' from *Sechs Hölderlin-Fragmente*.

Britten's use of a chamber ensemble in the expressive vocal contexts of *War Requiem* and the chamber operas may also have been influential in the instrumentation of the Blok cycle, and may have subsequently influenced the orchestration of the Fourteenth Symphony, *Six Romances on Verses by English Poets*, *Six Songs on Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva* and *Suite on Verses of Michelangelo*. Indeed, in Shostakovich's final letter to Britten

⁶⁹⁷See letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 29 February 1968, photocopy of typewritten original: '...we want to make that programme with music by yourself and me, which I hope you do not mind!' (BPL: DDS), and AFMA 1968, pp.66-8.

he described the latter two works as 'chamber music' alongside his Fifteenth String Quartet.⁶⁹⁸ Britten may therefore have stimulated a hitherto undeveloped aspect of Shostakovich's late musical language evident a year before his first encounter with *War Requiem* in the use of thirty-six bar violin and viola solos in the last movement of the Thirteenth Symphony (R156 to R159), which add considerably to the expressive force both of the preceding text and the movement as a whole, a feature of the work which Britten appears to have recognised when he heard these pages in rehearsal in January 1967.⁶⁹⁹ Indeed, the final movement of the Blok cycle is clearly intended to form the expressive climax of the work both in terms of music and text, as is suggested by Shostakovich's choice of 'Music' as its title and, as with the final movement of the Thirteenth Symphony, the aesthetic-moral concerns it addresses.

The Blok cycle may also reflect Britten's influence in its selection of texts in that all but the first setting make some reference to the topic of night. Circumstantial evidence suggests that Britten's treatment of this theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Poet's Echo* was influential in this respect, given that Shostakovich's admiration for the Pushkin cycle in the autumn of 1965 coincided with the incorporation of the opera into the

⁶⁹⁸Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 16 December 1974 (BPL: DDS).

⁶⁹⁹Cf. Pears, p.150 [1 January 1967]: '[The Thirteenth Symphony] ended very simply, very beautifully, strings, solo string, a bell really the work of a master...'

repertory of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow and the fourth occasion on which Shostakovich saw the work.⁷⁰⁰ On the other hand, Shostakovich's decision to set 'Ophelia's song' as the first setting in the cycle suggests that the work also represented the reassertion of longer-term creative preoccupations, linked not only to 'Ophelia's Descent into Madness' from Shostakovich's music for the film of *Hamlet* (1964) but also to 'Ophelia's Song' from his 1932 incidental music to a stage production of the play. Given Shostakovich's preoccupation with the rehabilitation of the opera between 1963 and 1966, the representation of the topic of sleep in 'The City Sleeps' may further allude to *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* given its representation in each act of the opera: associated with Katerina in Act I (R315 to R316), with Katerina and Sergei in Act II (R327 to R329), and with the convicts in Act III (R474 to R475); and the depiction of sleep by means of violin and cello solos in the Andante of the fifth scene (R327 to R329) may in a sense be viewed as a precursor of the Blok setting.

4.6 Conclusion

The relationship between Britten's and Shostakovich's vocal compositions between 1960 and 1975 is therefore more complex than has hitherto been recognised. Britten's response to Pushkin in 1965 drew

⁷⁰⁰Letter from John Morgan to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 29 October 1965 (BPL: British Embassy, Moscow).

upon a selective range of Russian sources and a long-term interest in Russian music and literature, and Pears seems to have been particularly influential in this respect. However, it was also characteristic of the composer's increasingly ascetic musical language and existing creative preoccupations and not significantly influenced by Shostakovich. In contrast, Shostakovich's Blok cycle two years later may to a degree have been inspired by the example of the Britten vocal works with which he was acquainted, particularly *The Poet's Echo*, the chamber operas and *War Requiem*, and this is also supported by its lyricism, instrumentation and considerable expressive range; but it should also be viewed as development of the Thirteenth Symphony, composed prior to his first encounter with *War Requiem* in 1963, and a variety of long-term creative preoccupations. By the 1960s the interaction between Britten and Shostakovich therefore seems to have stimulated aspects of longer-term creative sensibility in both composers, as shall be seen in the re-emergence of a longer-term creative preoccupation with death.

Chapter 5: Britten and Shostakovich: Creative convergence and dialogues on death, 1969 to 1976

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will scrutinise both composers' creative responses to the topic of death during what appears to have been a compositional dialogue on this subject in both vocal and chamber contexts beginning with the Fourteenth Symphony, dedicated by Shostakovich to Britten in 1969, and anticipated in three works composed by Britten between the autumn of 1968 and February 1970, *Children's Crusade*; *Who are these Children?* and *Owen Wingrave*: a narrative hitherto unexplored by previous commentators on the Britten-Shostakovich relationship. Particular reference will be made to the correspondence between the two composers during this period, the testimony of Rita Thomson, Britten's nurse following his unsuccessful heart operation in May 1973, and each composer's treatment of the topic of death in their music.

5.2 The Fourteenth Symphony (1969)

At the time Shostakovich dedicated his Fourteenth Symphony to Britten in the spring of 1969⁷⁰¹ he does not appear to have been aware of *Children's Crusade*, the chief work Britten had composed since *The Prodigal Son*, whose depiction of death is graphic and unambiguously stark. Indeed, whereas Britten had explicitly addressed the topic of death in four identifiable periods of vocal and instrumental composition since 1928 (1936-40, 1945-7, 1951-4, and 1962-6), *Children's Crusade* arguably marks the beginning of the most sustained period of creative reference to the topic after 1936-40, taking place in the context of Britten's increasing pessimism and ill health. Britten's subsequent *Who are these Children?* is particularly indicative of Britten's attitude when compared to *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945): both cycles personify death (cf. 'The Children', bars 15 to 19), but whereas 'Death be not proud' represents an emphatic statement in B major of death vanquished, Britten saw 'The Auld Aik' as expressing 'the end of everything'.⁷⁰² It is also striking that *Who are these Children?* bears an affinity to a wider aspect of Shostakovich's musical language in its juxtaposition of the sardonic and

⁷⁰¹Britten's first indication of the dedication seems to have been a telegram from Rostropovich to Britten, New York, received 21 March 1969: 'You are waiting for a very big surprise...I am very happy that I predicted this' (BPL: MR).

⁷⁰²G. Johnson, quoted in Carpenter, p.470. Of the three works, only *Owen Wingrave* is briefly mentioned in L. Kovnatskaia's sixtieth-birthday tribute to Britten in *Sovetskaia muzyka* in November 1973 ('Vydaiushchiisia Master').

tragic, a feature it also shares with *Children's Crusade*, in its apocalyptic vision of a storm in 'Slaughter', and the disproportionate expressive burden placed upon the final two settings.⁷⁰³

Shostakovich's dedication of his Fourteenth Symphony to Britten in 1969 seems to have stimulated a creative dialogue on this theme in vocal and instrumental music at a time of both composers' closest convergence both musically and personally. In this sense, the work should not necessarily be seen as a 'farewell gesture' to Britten,⁷⁰⁴ since the composers met on at least four further occasions in 1971 and 1972 and continued to take a close interest in each other's music. One should, of course, acknowledge that this is only one way of interpreting their relationship at this late stage. Benjamin Luxon, for example, who created the role of Owen Wingrave in 1970, views the opera as fundamentally reflecting Britten's creative interest in 'the outsider who is too good or innocent to survive' as opposed to the topic of death per se.⁷⁰⁵ Stephen Walsh has also observed that 'notwithstanding [Britten's] chronic illness, few of us thought of his mid-seventies music as "valedictory" or "other-worldly" at the time'.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰³Cf. S. Walsh's review of the first performance of seven of the Soutar settings: 'Britten's music, frequently caustic or ironic, seldom permits itself the luxury of affection'; 'A chilly chamber', *The Observer*, 14 March 1971, p.34.

⁷⁰⁴Kovnatskaia, 'Shostakovich and Britten: Some Parallels', p.189.

⁷⁰⁵Interview with the author, 11 February 2011.

⁷⁰⁶S. Walsh, sleeve note to DECCA SXL 6847 (*Phaedra, Sacred and Profane* etc; 1977).

Shostakovich did not shed light on the dedication in his correspondence with Britten, but particularly desired him to attend the work's final rehearsals and first public performance.⁷⁰⁷ Although he claimed to Glikman that he had not hitherto addressed the theme of death in his music, and that 'the idea of addressing the question of death finally came to fruition in me' on listening to Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* prior to entering hospital at the beginning of 1969,⁷⁰⁸ he had already addressed the topic on a smaller scale in four vocal settings between 1932 (*Six Romances on Japanese Poets*, no. 6) and 1948 (*From Jewish Folk Poetry*, no. 1), suggesting that the 1960s witnessed the reassertion, partly under Britten's influence, of a longer-term interest in the subject.⁷⁰⁹ Shostakovich went on to describe the work at a closed dress rehearsal in the Small Hall of the Moscow Conservatory on 21 June 1969 in as a creative response to 'the great classics, who treated the theme of death in their work', but softened the depiction with 'a kind of brightening', beautiful serenity', and 'radiant music': he cited *War Requiem*, Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov*

⁷⁰⁷See letter from Sir Duncan Wilson to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 10 July 1969: '[Shostakovich] is very anxious (and Slava emphasised that this was a personal message from him – D.S. – to you) for you to come out in order to hear the final rehearsals and the first public performance' (BPL: DW). See also letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 16 September 1969, transl. M. Thorpe: 'I am so sorry that you cannot come to the première of my 14th Symphony. I hope that in the future I shall be able to make you acquainted with it and if it makes a good impression on you this will be a great joy to me' (BPL: DDS).

⁷⁰⁸Letter from Shostakovich to Glikman, Moscow, 19 March 1969, Glikman, pp.160.

⁷⁰⁹See P.R. Bullock, 'The poet's echo, the composer's voice: monologic verse or dialogic song?' in Fairclough, pp.218, 303 for death as central feature (in contrast to Britten) of the persona and mythology of the poets whom Shostakovich he chose to set and for certain of his songs as musical responses to the Russian tradition of necrological poems.

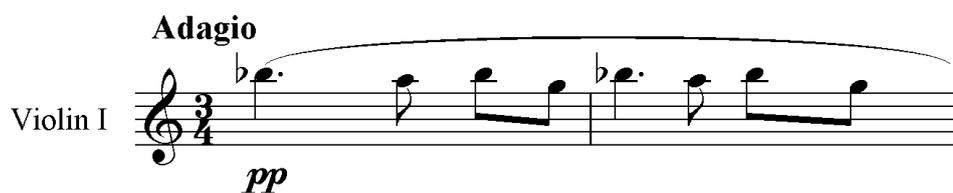
and Verdi's *Aida* and *Otello* as examples of works which reflected such a consolatory belief in an afterlife, which might account for his remark to Tishchenko that he considered *War Requiem* 'almost a great work' as well as his regret that he himself was unable to believe in God.⁷¹⁰ Of the Britten works with which he was familiar, Shostakovich may also have had in mind *The Rape of Lucretia*, the death of whose protagonist is mitigated by an explicitly Christian epilogue, and *Curlew River*, whose mystery culminates in a sign of God's grace. Were he acquainted the work, he could equally have cited the sleep-like framing Epilogue of *Billy Budd* in which 'The sea-fowl enshadowed [Billy] with their wings, their harsh cries were his requiem', and Billy's death apparently acquires a Christian symbolism.

Shostakovich's creative engagement with Britten in the Fourteenth Symphony seems particularly to have revolved around the identification of the topic of sleep with death in a similar light to three of the Owen texts – 'Voices,' 'Futility' and 'Strange Meeting' - Britten selected in *War Requiem*. Indeed, he may not fully have appreciated how uniquely in this work Britten employed a variety of means to undermine the assurances of the Christian liturgy, in which sense it constitutes a radically different

⁷¹⁰*Dmitrii Shostakovich Speaks*, Melodiya 33 M 40-41707. However, see appendix XI for Shostakovich's use of the qualification, and L. Lebedinsky, 'Iz bessistemnykh zapisey', *Muzykalnaia zhizn'* 21-2 (1993), p.27, quoted in Fay, p.263.

statement from the requiems of Mozart and Berlioz which Shostakovich also admired.⁷¹¹ Shostakovich's selection of Lorca in the first two movements is particularly striking: not only is it likely that he was aware of the poet's theory of the Duende highlighting the creative power of death, the imagery of crosses as symbols of remembrance in 'De Profundis' seems an explicit allusion to Britten's setting of 'At a Calvary near the Ancre' in the 'Agnus Dei'. The apparent quotation of the 'Dies irae' chant in the opening phrase of 'De Profundis' may also allude to the Western liturgical tradition of masses for the dead which Shostakovich primarily seems to have seen *War Requiem* as representing. The connection to Britten is also suggested by its similarity to bars 14 to 15 of 'Echo' from *The Poet's Echo*:

Example 38: Shostakovich: Symphony No. 14, I: 'De Profundis', bars 1-2



⁷¹¹Pyke, in Walker, pp.31-2.

Example 39: Britten: 'Echo', bars 14-15 (piano part)



However, whereas the double bass glissandi in the first movement seem a deliberate allusion to the topic of sleep in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in contrast to *War Requiem*, in which the topic recurs and the two male soloists are ultimately united in a serene sleep, in the 'Conclusion' of the symphony the two soloists instead proclaim the omnipresence and omnipotence of death. Britten's annotations to his conducting score of the work, and his recorded interpretation, suggest an awareness of this instructive contrast between the first and final movements: in 'De Profundis', the opening violin B flat in bar 1, the G flat of bar 4 and dotted crotchet D in bar 6 are marked *tenuto*, and his significantly slower 'Conclusion' is one of the few differences in tempo from Rostropovich, who recorded the work with the same soloists in 1973.⁷¹²

⁷¹²Britten's conducting score was produced by Muzfond ('2.X.-69') and is inscribed in Russian by Shostakovich 'To dear Benjamin Britten/as a token of profound respect from/a cordially devoted D. Shostakovich/1 XII 1969 Moscow (BPL: 2-9104464). See C. Pyke, 'Chetyrnadtsataia simfoniia Shostakovicha: partitura Brittena', transl. A. Khodorkovskii, in O. Digonskaia and L. Kovnatskaia, eds., *Dmitrii Shostakovich. Issledovaniia i materialy*, vol. 3 (Moscow: DSCH, 2010, forthcoming), for an analysis of Britten's conducting score and the light it sheds on his interpretation, and *Britten the Performer* 13 (BBCB8013-2; 1999) and Melodiya CM 04009-10 for the recordings of Britten and Rostropovich.

Britten was unable to attend the first performances of the work in the Soviet Union, choosing instead to conduct the work himself during the 1970 Aldeburgh Festival: a revealing gesture given that, as has been observed, by 1960s it was exceptional for him to conduct new compositions by contemporary composers. He received a score from Shostakovich in December 1969 and prepared the work for its first performance in the West six months later, the only occasion on which he conducted the symphony due to his considerable conducting and recording commitments in the second half of 1970, his subsequent preoccupation with *Death in Venice* and permanent incapacity as a performer from May 1973. Although Shostakovich never heard Britten's interpretation of the Fourteenth Symphony either in its performance or its recording, he was clearly aware of Britten's sensitive interpretation of a work of such importance to him and his gratitude is likely to have deepened the already profound creative and personal empathy between the two composers: *The Times*, for example, reported that 'Everybody in the Maltings could see and hear that Britten was conducting a work which had touched his heart profoundly and which he had prepared as a strenuous labour of intense love'.⁷¹³

⁷¹³Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 16 June 1970, transl. Marion Thorpe: 'I am so happy that you took such care of our 14th Symphony. The news reached me that the symphony was marvellously performed' (BPL: DDS), and William Mann, 'Shostakovich's new symphony', *The Times*, n.d [June ?16 1970] (BPL). The BBC

Britten's annotations to his conducting score are, characteristically, indicative of meticulous preparation and an intuitive sense of the overall 'shape' of the work; on the other hand, they are primarily practical and on the whole do not amplify his very brief references to the symphony in his correspondence, which do not go beyond general expressions of gratitude for the dedication – 'there can never have been a greater present from one composer to another' - and admiration for a 'truly a great and inspired work'.⁷¹⁴ Britten himself did not comment on its treatment of the death topic, whilst endorsing Donald Mitchell's programme note for the 14 June 1970 Aldeburgh performance, which described the work as 'an extended meditation on many kinds of death' and 'in a sense the most private of all Shostakovich's symphonies', and he was also aware of the content of the poems from the summaries he received from Sir Duncan Wilson in October 1969.⁷¹⁵

Nevertheless, four specific annotations are revealing of how Britten interpreted the work's treatment of death. At R14: bar 1 he marked the dance of death in 3/8 'with swing!!!', a characteristic marking for the

recording of Britten's performance was not released during his lifetime, and there is no evidence to suggest that Shostakovich had the opportunity to hear it.

⁷¹⁴Letters from Britten to Shostakovich, 1 June and 26 September 1970, photocopies of handwritten originals (BPL: DDS).

⁷¹⁵Mitchell, 'Shostakovich and his Symphonies', AFMA 1970, p.10, 'Private Pieces', CD note to *Britten the Performer* 13, and typewritten 'Summaries of Poems Used in the Symphony', sent with letter from Sir Duncan Wilson to Britten, British Embassy, Moscow, 9 October 1969 (BPL: DW), and reproduced in AFMA 1970, pp.38-9.

composer (cf. *Antiphon*, 1956), which emphasises the movement's parody of a Viennese waltz and its affinity with Britten's own virtuoso string writing in his *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* as opposed to Musorgsky's grotesque representation of this topic in *Songs and Dances of Death*, which continued to exert a powerful influence on Shostakovich in his Thirteenth String Quartet (R22 to R45) and the 'Serenade' of the Fifteenth String Quartet. In the third movement Britten has added 'flowing' over the celesta part at R42: bar 2 as it symbolically announces the imminence of Loreley's death, suggesting that he appreciated its Mahlerian 'accents of farewell', whilst her serene Liebestod at R48 is marked '(slow)' and at R50: bar 15 '(slower)'. Britten was similarly expressive in 'The Suicide', marking R59: bars 2 and 3 '(broad and heavy!)' and the divisi violins at R60 'express', which suggests that he primarily viewed these depictions of death in operatic terms and, in a similar way to Shostakovich, may have unconsciously identified with the female protagonists of these movements, both of whom can be related to Katerina Izmailova. Finally, in 'At the Santé Jail', Britten's 'expres' at R97: bar 7, the '*p dolce*' over the viola line at R104: bar 7, and his marking of the string fugato as a 'steady march' and 'still march like' at R96 likewise suggest that he was sensitive to the operatic tone of this movement, as well as to its musical allusions to a funeral march. In these respects,

Britten's interpretation may have been subconsciously influenced by his own pre-war and Mahler-inspired creative interest in funeral marches.

5.3 The Thirteenth String Quartet (1970) and Third Suite for Cello (1971)

Both documentary and circumstantial evidence suggest that this creative dialogue continued between 1970 and 1971 with Britten's Third Cello Suite as a response to the Fourteenth Symphony, and the Thirteenth String Quartet as a continuation of the latter's preoccupation with death. Although the works cannot solely be interpreted in this light, given Britten's predilection for variation form based upon material of composers he admired, and Shostakovich's reference to Weinberg in the central section of the String Quartet,⁷¹⁶ what is unprecedented about the Britten work is the *largamente* statement of the Russian Kontakion as the fragmented ground of the passacaglia in the final movement and as a subsequent epilogue, culminating in an eleven-bar crescendo to *ff* and final diminuendo to *ppp*, which throws the earlier Tchaikovsky quotations into sharper relief and accentuates their pathos (example 40).

⁷¹⁶Communication from David Fanning, 13 January 2011, for the influence of Weinberg's *The Passenger* (1968) (the onboard salon music in scene 7) on R21 to R45.

Example 40: Third Suite for Cello, IX: Lento solenne, bars 140-150

СО СВЯТЫМИ УПОКОЙ Grant repose together with the saints

Cello

p

ossia: The version of the Kontakion familiar to Shostakovich

p

cresc.

f

This gesture can be seen as embodying both the final statement of Britten's long-term romanticised interest in Russia and a strongly autobiographical significance, as is also suggested by Britten's 'parlando', 'canto' and 'dialogo' markings earlier in the score. The pessimistic effect of the final movement is further accentuated by what the composition sketch suggests was an afterthought to position a *moto perpetuo* between the seventh and final movement.⁷¹⁷ The compressed range of emotions and drama contained not only within the work as a whole but also within its individual movements also distinguishes its atmosphere from the two preceding Cello Suites: the 'Allegretto (*dialogo*)' for example, contains passages marked *grottesco*, *solenne*, and *grazioso*, whilst the 'Fantastico (*recitativo*)' juxtaposes a variety of innovative cello techniques such as *quasi glissando* with a sequence of sustained fermatas. Moreover, the work's unambiguously pessimistic ending and explicit connection with

⁷¹⁷BPL: microfilm of composition sketch of Third Suite for Cello, p.202.

death distinguish it from Britten's previous works for Rostropovich, and arguably link it to the next major project to which he returned from the Soviet Union in the early summer of 1971, a performance and recording of *The Dream of Gerontius*, Elgar's 'epic poem on Death'.⁷¹⁸

Britten was surely aware that these aspects of the work, and its explicit quotation of an Orthodox chant, would ensure that it was unlikely to be viewed favourably in the light of Socialist Realism, and would instead remain an essentially 'private' form of musical communication addressed to Rostropovich and Shostakovich. Although Rostropovich seems originally to have considered performing the work in Moscow to mark Britten's sixtieth birthday, by November 1973 he refused to do so, and it remained unperformed in public in the Soviet Union during Britten's lifetime, receiving no reference in Kovnatskaia's 1974 survey of the composer's life and works.⁷¹⁹ His choice of the Kontakion - which Vishnevskaya insists was entirely his own and not suggested by

⁷¹⁸W. Alwyn's note to Britten's recording in June 1971 (DECCA SET 525-6). On the other hand, see letter from Yvonne Minton to the author, 5 February 2011: 'I do remember the whole experience as being one of pure joy and very special in every way. I don't remember Ben commenting on either Elgar's music or Newman's text but he was in fine form and I feel sure allowing for the genius of the music and words the ultimate interpretation and performance was his and anything we may have achieved came from his guidance'.

⁷¹⁹See typewritten carbon copy of letter from M.J. Llewelyn Smith, British Embassy, Moscow, to Lady Wilson, 21 November 1975: 'Rostropovich said that in his present frame of mind he did not intend to play in Moscow in the foreseeable future. He was not in the mood...He said the first performance [of the Third Suite] would have to be later - perhaps in England, when and if he got there' (NA: FCO 34/220).

Rostropovich - can be viewed on several personal as well as musical levels. Britten may have been stimulated in the first instance by the handwritten copy of a Christmas *znamenny* chant he received from Bishop Pimen of Saratov and Volgograd when he first envisaged the Third Suite in early 1969.⁷²⁰ Pimen was a humanitarian and keen lover of music with whom Britten corresponded from 1964 to 1975; he also enjoyed a close friendship with Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya.⁷²¹ Indeed, it was Pimen whom Britten consulted on the authenticity of the version of the Kontakion he had employed after Shostakovich remarked that he had been brought up on a different version.⁷²² As with the *English Hymnal* version of the Kontakion Britten employed, Pimen's Christmas hymn is translated into modern notation, harmonised and provided with English words.⁷²³

⁷²⁰Letter from Bishop Pimen of Saratov and Volgograd to Britten, 2 December 1968: 'I send you the ancient russian church [sic] Christmas-Hymn newly harmonized [.] in ancient times it was unison. May this melody be interesting for you, because it is the Russian people's voice of ancient centuries X-XV'. Britten replied on 4 March 1969: 'I was delighted with the Russian hymn which of course is in a very different style from much early English music but it has great character and it is full of memorable phrases. The music of that time has marvellous strength!' (BPL: Bishop Pimen of Saratov and Volgograd correspondence).

⁷²¹Appendix XIII, and BPL. Cf. Corley, p.37: 'The internal Council for Religious Affairs assessment of the Russian Orthodox bishops, drawn up in the 1970s...placed [Pimen] in the third, least-loyal category. He retained contacts with many of the dissident artistic community, including Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya (he officiated at their wedding)...and Solzhenitsyn'.

⁷²²AFMA 1976, p.50, Wilson, pp.457-8 and example 33 (ossia).

⁷²³I am grateful for the comments of Evgenii Tugarinov, Choir Master at the Russian Orthodox Cathedral in London, on the chant sent by Bishop Pimen to Britten.

Christmas znamenny chant sent to Britten by Bishop Pimen of Saratov
and Volgograd in December 1968 (Britten-Pears Library)

Britten's contemporaneous use of repeated note pitches in the vocal line of *Children's Crusade* also suggests that he would have been susceptible to lending a depiction of death a liturgical character (cf. R16 to R17: bar 3),

and his decision to use the Kontakion probably came at some point in 1970 as Rostropovich's position inside the Soviet Union worsened and Britten prepared for the first performance in the West of the Fourteenth Symphony.

Example 41: Britten *Children's Crusade*: R16: bar 2

molto lento

Vel - vet Col - lar _____ it was whom they bu-ried.

Given that Britten employed the version of the tune in *The English Hymnal*, this may further constitute a personal allusion to the pre-1935 period during which he still regularly attended church and first came into contact with those elements of Russian culture which were to stimulate him throughout his creative life.⁷²⁴ The Kontakion also seems to allude to Tchaikovsky: Vishnevskaya links Britten's 'premonition of mortality' in 1971 with Tchaikovsky's 'gradual departure from life' and the quotation of the chant at the end of the first movement of the Sixth Symphony,⁷²⁵ and he may also have been recalling the inflections of Orthodox liturgy in the *Andante funebre e doloroso* of the Third String

⁷²⁴Given that Britten's diaries indicate that he employed *The Public School Hymn Book* at school from 1928, which does not include the chant, he may therefore have consulted Pears's copy of *The English Hymnal*, inscribed 'with love from mother, June 22 [19]30' (BPL).

⁷²⁵Appendix XIII.

Quartet (cf. R19: bar 7 to R20). How far Britten also intended to allude to Shostakovich's music is more speculative. Although two commentators have highlighted a resemblance between the intervals of the Kontakion and the DSCH motif,⁷²⁶ and it also echoes the liturgical character of the vocal lines of 'Та́йные знаки' ('Mysterious Signs') in the Blok cycle (R35 to R36, Example 42) and 'De Profundis' in the Fourteenth Symphony (Example 43), it is more likely that Britten employed it for its wider symbolic connection with death and the Russian cultural tradition.⁷²⁷

Example 42: Shostakovich: Seven Romances on Poems of Aleksandr Blok, 6: 'Та́йные знаки' ('Mysterious Signs'), R35 to R36

Largo $\text{♩} = 72$

Soprano *mf* *dim.* *p* *pp*

На - до мной не - бо свод у - же ни - зок, чер - ный сон тя - го - те - ет в гру - ди.

Example 43: Shostakovich: Symphony No. 14, I: 'De Profundis,' R2: bars 1-4

Adagio

Bass *pp ma maestoso*

Сто го-ря-чо влю-блен-ных сном ве-ко-вым ус-ну-ли

⁷²⁶Johnson, p.184; and Whittall, p.258.

⁷²⁷Johnson, p.184; and Whittall, p.258.

Although one should not read backwards the ‘unique atmosphere’ of Rostropovich’s first public performance in December 1974 following his departure from the Soviet Union and Britten’s unsuccessful heart surgery the previous year, circumstantial as well as musical evidence suggests that Britten viewed the Third Suite as an autobiographical response to death in the same light as the Fourteenth Symphony.⁷²⁸ The few photographs of the composer in the Soviet Union in April 1971 – the first occasion on which Britten and Shostakovich had met for over four years – suggest that he had visibly aged since the mid-1960s,⁷²⁹ and he seems to have undertaken the visit with some reluctance and for the primary purpose of demonstrating support for Rostropovich and seeing Shostakovich.⁷³⁰

A variety of evidence also suggests that when Britten and Shostakovich met in Moscow in April 1971 and heard each other’s new work for the first time they interpreted the Third Cello Suite and Thirteenth String Quartet as responses to mortality addressed to each other and recognised a particular affinity between the two works. Britten gave a ‘remarkable

⁷²⁸Steven Isserlis in AFMA 1999 p.155.

⁷²⁹See, for example, BPL: PH/4/473, probably taken at the British Embassy reception on 20 April 1971.

⁷³⁰See typewritten carbon copy of letter from Barrie Iliffe, British Council, London, to E.J. Field, 13 January 1971: ‘We know that Britten wants to keep his time in USSR to a minimum’ (NA: FCO 34/109), and letter from Britten to Ronan Magill, 28 April 1971: ‘Russia was exciting but very worrying. Still we did what we wanted to – see our friends’ (BPL: Ronan Magill correspondence)

performance on the piano' of the Suite in the presence of Shostakovich on 21 April 1971, following which Shostakovich invited him to hear a rehearsal performance of the Thirteenth String Quartet on the following day, and on 23 April he presented Britten with a copy of the limited first run of the score.⁷³¹ Britten considered the Shostakovich work 'fabulous'.⁷³² He also subsequently wrote to Shostakovich that 'It gave me a great thrill to know that the [Third Suite] gave you pleasure' and also sent the score immediately on its publication.⁷³³ At a meeting with the Prime Minister on 5 May 1971, Britten recalled that 'Shostakovich seemed to be pretty unwell, and had said goodbye to him in a manner which suggested that he did not expect to see Mr. Britten again', which is amplified by his further observation that '[Shostakovich] is very, very ill, & didn't want me to leave him at all'.⁷³⁴ It is certainly striking that the Thirteenth String Quartet includes a considerable part for the viola, an instrument with a connotation of death in the Russian tradition, and that whereas Britten's programme note for a subsequent performance of the work at the Aldeburgh festival was almost entirely based upon a Russian source, he

⁷³¹Letter marked 'Confidential' from Sir Duncan Wilson to J.L. Bullard, British Embassy, Moscow 20 May 197 (NA: FCO 34/110) for the correct sequence of events (cf. Wilson, pp.456-8); and BPL: 2-1000468 for the score, which Shostakovich has inscribed '23 April 1970, Moscow', which must be a mistake for 1971.

⁷³²Letter from Britten to Ronan Magill, April 28 1971 (BPL: Ronan Magill correspondence).

⁷³³Letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 19 July 1971 (BPL: DDS).

⁷³⁴Typewritten carbon copy of memorandum from R.T. Armstrong, Prime Minister's Office, to N.J. Barrington, 6 May 1971 (NA: PREM 15/2220), and letter from Britten to Ronan Magill, 28 April 1971 (BL: Ronan Magill correspondence).

himself added: 'One of the most striking features [of the work is that] there are no accents or rests & not one single pause to break its smooth surface, which nevertheless covers an intense passion', suggesting that he appreciated its strongly autobiographical significance.⁷³⁵ Indeed, Britten may have later recalled to the highly expressive string writing from R59: bar 11 to R62, mostly *pp* and in an increasingly high register, in the violin part of 'Solo' of his Third String Quartet, which has been viewed as athrenody for Shostakovich.⁷³⁶

Shostakovich, on the other hand, seems to have been particularly intrigued by Britten's use of an Orthodox chant.⁷³⁷ The link to the *Andante funebre e doloroso* of Tchaikovsky's Third String Quartet may have been particularly resonant given the *pp(p)* expressive writing in a high register with which this movement ends (from R24: bar 26) and its affinity in this respect with the ending of Shostakovich's own quartet, although the

⁷³⁵AFMA 1973, p. 27, reproduced in Kildea, p. 430, who has not noted that Britten's draft (BPL: 1-0105221, dated 1 March 1973) is otherwise an annotated translation of the attached sleeve note of the first recording by the Beethoven Quartet in 1971 (Melodiya CM 02545-6).

⁷³⁶P. Reed, AFMA 2011, p.184. On the other hand, Colin Matthews recalls that Britten said very little about the Third String Quartet during its composition, whilst mentioning how difficult the high register writing was in this section; letter from the author, 29 October 2010. This suggests that even if Britten intended 'Solo' as a tribute to Shostakovich, he may also have consulted Bartók's highly expressive writing for first violin in a very high register in, for example, the First and Second String Quartets.

⁷³⁷Wilson, pp.457-8.

latter is also characterised by a dynamic crudity which strongly contrasts to the Tchaikovsky work.

Example 44: Tchaikovsky, Third String Quartet, III, from R24: bar 16

Andante funebre e doloroso, ma con moto (♩ = 56)

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. Each part is marked with *con sord.* and *pp*. The second system continues with Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello, featuring *pp* dynamics and triplet markings. The third system also includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello, with *ppp* dynamics and triplet markings.

First system of musical notation for Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The first measure is marked *pp*. The second measure is marked *ppp*. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth measure is marked *ppp* and contains two triplets of eighth notes. The Vln. II part has a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure.

Second system of musical notation for Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The first measure is marked *pp*. The second measure is marked *ppp*. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The fourth measure is marked *ppp* and contains two triplets of eighth notes. The Vln. II part has a triplet of eighth notes in the second measure. The system concludes with a *più f* dynamic marking.

Third system of musical notation for Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., and Vc. The first measure is marked *pp*. The second measure is marked *pp morendo*. The third measure is marked *pp morendo*. The fourth measure is marked *pp morendo*. The fifth measure is marked *pp morendo*. The system concludes with a *pp morendo* dynamic marking.

Example 45: Shostakovich, Thirteenth String Quartet, from R61: bar 4

Adagio
♩ = 84

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

senza sord.
senza sord. arco
arco
pp cresc
p cresc
sfff
sfff
sfff
sfff

5.4 The Fifteenth Symphony (1971) and *Death in Venice* (1972)

Britten's compositional activity between April 1971 and December 1972 was dominated by *Death in Venice*. Although the Third Cello Suite may have served as a form of catharsis with regard to Rostropovich's position, Britten clearly had Shostakovich and the Fourteenth Symphony in mind

during the opera's composition: as has been observed, the melodic contour of the soprano Strawberry Seller resembles that of 'The Suicide' in the Fourteenth Symphony, and in November 1972 Britten wrote to Shostakovich that 'Nothing will stop me finishing the opera so that you can hear it', initially envisaging that Shostakovich would attend the first performance in June 1973.⁷³⁸ Shostakovich himself seems to have taken a close interest in the opera, writing to Britten in February: 'I am so glad that you are alive on this earth, that you are creating lovely music, which is so close and dear to me', and visiting Britten at the Red House for the first and only time on 14 July 1972.⁷³⁹ On this occasion Shostakovich spent two hours alone in the Red House Library looking at the composition sketches of the opera up to Act I: scene 7: an unprecedented gesture of creative intimacy on Britten's part, not least given his wider doubts about the length and pacing of this act, although there is no record of what, if anything, the two composers discussed on this occasion.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁸Photocopy of letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 15 November 1972 (BPL: DDS): 'We look forward to your coming to us in June, and pray for your health'.

⁷³⁹Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 21 February 1972, transl. Keith Grant; letter from A. Chikvaizde to Britten, Russian Embassy, London, 23 June 1972, which indicates that Shostakovich himself requested the visit; and Britten's pocket and desk diaries for 1972 (BPL:DDS/Russian Embassy).

⁷⁴⁰Red House visitors' book (BPL). The fullest account of the meeting is in R. Strode, 'A *Death in Venice* chronicle', in Mitchell, 'An introduction in the shape of a memoir', in comp. and ed., *Death in Venice*, pp. 34, 12. Cf. letter from Rosamund Strode to the author, 26 November 2007: 'Britten and Shostakovich got on well when they did meet (very rarely), but Britten did not, in my experience, ever discuss the pieces he was working on'.

Shostakovich's specific reaction to the score is not recorded, although in November 1972 – by which time he had begun to envisage an operatic treatment of Chekhov's *The Black Monk*⁷⁴¹ - he reported to Britten that his 'preliminary acquaintance made a very strong impression' on him.⁷⁴² He would certainly have recognised one of the most distinctive aspects of the work, which Britten had first articulated shortly after the composers last met April 1971: its concentration on only two principals, with the bass-baritone as a 'symbolic figure of death', singing the seven roles which progressively guide Aschenbach to his destruction.⁷⁴³ It is tempting to highlight a degree of similarity in this respect with the figure of the Black Monk, and to suggest that Britten's conception may have stimulated Shostakovich had the work been realised. On the other hand, the evidence suggests that Shostakovich did not view the Chekhov character as a supernatural messenger of death, and there is no evidence to indicate how he would have represented the figure on stage.⁷⁴⁴ Moreover, as with Britten's choice of Thomas Mann, the opera would have represented the culmination of a long-term creative interest in the story. On Britten's part, on the other hand, this may have reflected the influence of the Fourteenth

⁷⁴¹O. Digonskaia, 'Shostakovich and *The Black Monk*', p.24.

⁷⁴²Letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Royal Station Hotel, York, 17 November 1972, transl. Marion Thorpe (BPL: DDS).

⁷⁴³Donald Mitchell's notes of a conversation with Britten on 4 May 1971, 'An introduction in the shape of a memoir', p.4.

⁷⁴⁴Digonskaia, op. cit., pp.29-30.

Symphony, in which death is explicitly personified in the texts of Lorca and Rilke in second and final movements, and Myfanwy Piper also seems to have conceived the part in terms of medieval German representations of death.⁷⁴⁵ Britten himself may also have viewed the figure in the same light as the Tempter in *The Prodigal Son* or the depiction of death the reaper in the 'Dies irae' of his *War Requiem*, and the rapid assumption of contrasting personas which such a part demands also suggests the additional stimulus to Britten of an artist of the versatility of John Shirley-Quirk.⁷⁴⁶

On the other hand, given the progress of the composition sketch by July 1972, Shostakovich would have been unaware of Britten's treatment of the death of the opera's protagonist, which, in contrast to *Owen Wingrave*, takes place on stage. Indeed, given that Britten seems to have devoted considerable creative energy to this highly concentrated passage,⁷⁴⁷ and its similar length to the 'Conclusion' of the Fourteenth Symphony (24 bars from R324: bar 16), he may partly have conceived it as a response to the Shostakovich work. Thus, whereas on one level the opera ends 'tragically and unproductively', with Aschenbach's physical death at the

⁷⁴⁵M. Piper, 'The libretto', in Mitchell, *Death in Venice*, pp.47-8.

⁷⁴⁶A. Plant, *Serenissima: Exhibition Catalogue*, BPL June 2007 (Aldeburgh: BPL, 2007), p.10.

⁷⁴⁷Mitchell, 'An introduction in the shape of a memoir', pp.17-20, and R. Strode, 'A *Death in Venice* chronicle', p.38.

hands of Dionysus,⁷⁴⁸ the *molto tranquillo* epilogue is ambiguous, hinting at transfiguration in Tadzio's 'clear beckon' to the artist and leaving the fate of the writer's soul unclear by means of a highly refined and largely *pp* use of percussion and *dolce* strings and ascent to a high register. In this respect it bears a closer affinity to the depiction of the death of Billy Budd (R132: bars 1-4) and of the children in *Children's Crusade* (R26: bars 7-8). It therefore differs radically from the Fourteenth Symphony: both from the stark eight-bar cello solo and diminuendo to *pp* which conclude Lorelei's radiant Liebestod in the third movement, and from the accelerando and crescendo for strings (with no percussion) from *pp* to *fff* with which the work ends:

⁷⁴⁸Mitchell, *ibid.*, p.23. For more positive interpretations of the opera's ending, see C. Palmer, 'Britten's Venice orchestra,' in *Death in Venice*, p.143, and Whittall, p.262.

Example 46: Britten: *Death in Venice*, from R325: bar 14

Very quietly

The score is for a 4/4 time signature and is marked **Very quietly**. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Piccolo:** Rests throughout.
- Flute:** Rests in the first two measures, then plays a melodic line starting in the third measure.
- Oboe:** Rests throughout.
- Clarinet in B \flat :** Rests throughout.
- Clarinet in B \flat (2nd):** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *pp*.
- Bassoon (1st):** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *pp*.
- Bassoon (2nd):** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *pp*.
- Horn in F (1st):** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *pp*.
- Horn in F (2nd):** Rests throughout, marked *muted*.
- Trombone:** Rests throughout, marked *pp*.
- Timpani:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *slow dim.*
- Glockenspiel:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *slow dim.*
- Tamtam:** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *slow dim.*
- Harp:** Rests throughout.
- Piano:** Rests throughout, marked *tr \sim slow dim.*
- Violin I:** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *always pp*.
- Violin II:** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *always pp*.
- Viola:** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *always pp*.
- Violoncello:** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *always pp*.
- Contrabass:** Plays a melodic line starting in the first measure, marked *tr \sim always pp*.

Picc. *pp* *dolciss.*
 Fl. *pp*
 Ob. *ppp*
 Cl. *ppp*
 Cl. *ppp*
 Bsn. *ppp*
 Bsn. *ppp*
 Hn. *ppp*
 Hn. *ppp*
 Tbn. *ppp*
 Timp. *dying away*
 Glock. *slow dim.* *p* *trem. with gradual unmeasured rit.*
Tamtam *dying away*
 Hp. *(laissez vibrer) - - - - -*
 Pno. *tremolo*
 Vln. I *ppp*
 Vln. II *pp*
 Vla. *ppp*
 Vc. *ppp*
 Cb. *dying away*

END OF THE OPERA
score finished March 1973

Example 47: Shostakovich: Symphony No. 14, XI: 'Conclusion', from

R138

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is in 4/4 time and features a crescendo from *pp* to *p*. The Violin I and II parts include a *div.* marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The Viola parts include a *div.* marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts include a *div.* marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 3.

Musical score for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The score is in 4/4 time and features a crescendo from *mf* to *fff*. The Violin I and II parts include a *mf* marking and a crescendo. The Viola parts include a *mf* marking and a crescendo. The Violoncello and Double Bass parts include a *mf* marking and a crescendo. The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 6. The second system begins at measure 6 and continues to measure 10.

Whereas Tishchenko felt that in this respect Shostakovich was influenced by his *Requiem* (1966) in employing a crescendo and rhythmic accelerando of a series of notes to represent death, Britten did not emulate him: the closest parallel, the prominent repeated-note figure and unmeasured

ritardando (and diminuendo) of *Children's Crusade*, instead represents unmitigated violence.⁷⁴⁹ Britten's depiction of Aschenbach's death can instead be related to the radiant Andante of 'L'Enfance' from *Quatre chansons françaises* composed over forty years earlier, which concludes with a reference to the Act II love duet in *Tristan und Isolde*, and to the redemptive force which Billy's death ostensibly acquires in the epilogue of *Billy Budd*, suggesting that he drew upon a more long-term creative disposition. Moreover, whilst Britten himself may have identified with Aschenbach, the writer ultimately accepts his fate and, in contrast to Boris Tishchenko's and Rudolf Barshai's description of the Fourteenth Symphony, the work cannot be viewed as a 'protest against death'.⁷⁵⁰

The creative dialogue between the two composers, with the Fourteenth Symphony continuing to assume a pivotal role, seems to have continued for the rest of 1972. In August Shostakovich sent Britten a portrait of Delvig, Küchelbecker's addressee in the ninth movement of the symphony, identified with Britten himself at the time of the June 1970 Aldeburgh performance,⁷⁵¹ and a month later related the topic of 'The Death of the Poet' to his own fear of spiritual death in the light of his

⁷⁴⁹Appendix XI.

⁷⁵⁰*Ibid.*, and H. van der Groep, 'An interview with Rudolf Barshai' (21 April 2002) on www.dschejournal.com (consulted 1.2.08).

⁷⁵¹Letter from Lilian Hochhauser to Britten, 8 August 1972 (BPL: VH), and Mitchell, 'Shostakovich and his Symphonies', p.10.

pronounced lack of creativity since July 1971.⁷⁵² Britten received a copy of the first recording of the Fifteenth Symphony from Shostakovich at some point in the autumn, a work whose final coda has been viewed as an equally graphic representation of death. His response sheds light on the less than total convergence between the two composers, suggesting that he primarily admired its 'consummate control and workmanship' as opposed to its extra-musical references, and notwithstanding the increasingly evident symptoms of his heart condition in the second half of the year which prevented him from attending the United Kingdom première in November.⁷⁵³ This is also suggested by Graham Johnson's recollection of listening to the recording of the symphony with Britten in February 1973: 'Ben's reaction was rather amused: he chuckled at moments, and smiled at the work's enigma. What I think meant more to him was the fact that, somewhere else in the world, there existed another composer who admired him and was unconcerned to write like him – in a relatively traditional idiom'.⁷⁵⁴ Indeed, whereas Tishchenko viewed the use of percussion in the final coda of the Fifteenth Symphony as evoking 'the sound of falling bones', Britten did not at any stage employ

⁷⁵²O. Digonskaia, unpublished article and communication to the author (12.11.10) on the theme of a manuscript of 'The Death of the Poet' inscribed in Russian 'From the Fourteenth symphony. D. Shostakovich/25 IX 1972 Moscow', in the possession of the BPL but not possessed by Britten during his lifetime (BPL: 2-9100342).

⁷⁵³Letter from Britten to Shostakovich, 15 November 1972, photocopy of typewritten original (BPL: DDS).

⁷⁵⁴Interview with the author, 26 January 2010, and Britten's desk diary recording Johnson's visit on 27 February 1973 (BPL).

percussion to represent death: there is no percussion at the moment of Billy Budd's death nor those of the children in *Children's Crusade*, and the messengers of death in *Death in Venice* are instead represented by a similar melodic shape, just as the composer employed and developed a 'death' motif in *Johnson over Jordan* over thirty years earlier, a score which elsewhere makes imaginative use of percussion.⁷⁵⁵

5.5 Creative divergence, 1973-76

Although at least two contemporary Western commentators emphasised Britten's and Shostakovich's creative 'obsession' with death from 1969 onwards, the evidence suggests that from 1973 they in fact addressed the topic in ways which were both contrasting and fluid.⁷⁵⁶ Britten's compositional output after May 1973 indicates that death remained a creative preoccupation, but that his attitude towards it was more complex than recognised by Graham Elliott, who overemphasises Britten's 'remarkable sense of acceptance' and the Christian symbolism of late works such as *The Death of Saint Narcissus* (July 1974).⁷⁵⁷ Britten's attitude seems in fact to have developed by stages. Stuart Bedford, who

⁷⁵⁵B. Tishchenko, 'Remembering Shostakovich', *DSCH Journal* 23 (2005), p.9.

⁷⁵⁶M. Tippett, Obituary [for Britten], *The Listener*, 16 December 1976, reproduced Blyth, p.71, and A. George, 'Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-75) – The Memory of a lifetime', sleeve note to *L'Oiseau Lyre DSLO 11*, September 1976.

⁷⁵⁷G. Elliott, *Benjamin Britten: The Spiritual Dimension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.106.

conducted the first performance of *Suite on English Folk Tunes* (November 1974), feels that its final movement represents the serenity of autumnal shades as opposed to a pessimistic attitude towards mortality,⁷⁵⁸ in which case it can be related to the elegiac mood of the second movement of Shostakovich's Fourteenth String Quartet (1973). On the other hand, 'A death', the final setting of *Sacred and Profane* (January 1975), whose music Elliott does not assess, depicts the decay of the corpse after death, making no reference to an afterlife and concluding with a wry (and profane) gesture of disdain for the world. Rita Thomson recalls Britten's amused satisfaction with his setting of the skittish text, whose first section possesses a dynamic crudity more redolent of Shostakovich's Thirteenth String Quartet:

⁷⁵⁸Interview with the author, 22 May 2010.

Example 48: 'Sacred and Profane': 8: 'A death', bars 1-6

Slow, with character (♩ = c. 60)

SOPRANO 1
f *marked*
 Wanne mine eyh-nen mist - 5 en,

SOPRANO 2
f *p*
 Wanne

ALTO
f *p* *p*
 Wanne And mine her-en sis - - sen

Tenor
f *p*
 Wanne And

Bass
f *p*
 Wanne

S. 1
p

S. 2
And my tung - e fôld - et,

A.
p
 fôld - et,

T.
fp *p*
 my nose col - det, col-det

B.
p *smooth*
And my ru-de slak - et,

'Ae fond kiss', the discarded seventh setting of *A Birthday Hansel* (March 1975) further expresses a mood of stark depression, a reflection not only of Britten's increasing recognition that he would not recover from his operation, but also of Pears's absences, which he recorded meticulously

in his otherwise laconic pocket diaries for 1974 and 1975.⁷⁵⁹ The protagonist of *Phaedra* (August 1975) further regards 'death's dissolving shade' as a form of liberation, yet, unlike *Death in Venice*, its final depiction of the onset of death, culminating in a sustained *ppp* cello and double bass chord and final diminuendo, is graphic and disconcerting.

Although the Thirteenth String Quartet had clearly made a significant impact on Britten in April 1971, and he seems to have envisaged writing a third string quartet from at least two years earlier,⁷⁶⁰ by the time he came to compose the work in the autumn of 1975 in the immediate aftermath of Shostakovich's death, he was explicit that he wished it to end 'with a question' and this is reflected in the ambiguity of the final chord and *pp* cello semibreve marked 'dying away'.⁷⁶¹ In this respect the work differs not only from the *ff(f)* conclusions of Britten's first two string quartets, but, more importantly, from the unmuted *pp* to *sfff* crescendo of the final five bars of the Thirteenth String Quartet and the 'Conclusion' of the Fourteenth Symphony. Indeed, if Shostakovich can be said to have influenced the work's ending, it is more likely to have been by means of

⁷⁵⁹Interview with Rita Thomson, 4 August 2009, C. Matthews's note to the first performance of 'Ae fond kiss' on 24 June 2010 in AFMA 2010, p.167, and Britten's pocket diaries for 1974 and 1975 (BPL).

⁷⁶⁰See undated card [August 1969] from Britten to Hans Keller: 'Believe me I never stop thinking about string quartets' (BPL: Hans Keller correspondence).

⁷⁶¹Colin Matthews in Blyth, p.179.

the *morendo* endings of ten of his string quartets, including the Tenth, Eleventh, Fourteenth and Fifteenth composed over the previous decade:

Example 49: Britten: String Quartet No. 3, V: 'Recitative and Passacaglia (La Serenissima)' from bar 124

Slowly moving
♩ = c.50

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

pp *mf* *rf* *pp*
pp *mf* *rf* *pp*
pp *mf* *rf* *pp*
pp *mf* *rf* *pp* long
pp *mf* *rf* *pp* dying away

Suffolk - Venice
October/November 1975

Rita Thomson's testimony sheds particular light on Britten's temperament during this period. She recalls Britten's personal isolation and creative frustration in October and November 1974, but believes that his attitude subsequently developed into one of acceptance that he would not recover and that he evinced a belief in an afterlife in their discussions on the subject, in which she told him that death itself would be 'just like going to sleep'.⁷⁶² In this respect Thomson feels that in 1975 and 1976

⁷⁶²Interview with the author, 4 August 2009. See also Britten's [typewritten] final letter to Shostakovich, 2 December 1974: 'I have had a very sad two years of health and I have

Britten's strongly Anglican upbringing reasserted itself as 'part of his life-blood', which is also suggested by his consideration of texts for a Christmas Sequence during this period, by the fact that he received the Anglican prayers for the dying and Holy Communion during the last month of his life, and the low-church order of service at his funeral on 7 December 1976.⁷⁶³ Although Donald Mitchell questions whether Britten held a conventional religious belief beyond a firm conviction of the power of a work of art to live beyond its creator, and Pears was also sceptical whether the composer possessed a religious faith after the mid-1930s, it is nevertheless the case that by 1975 Britten's and Shostakovich's attitudes towards death do not appear identical.⁷⁶⁴ Whereas Shostakovich's attitude towards death appears to have developed from protest to acceptance by 1973, he had also gone on to develop the topic of sleep independently of Britten: in 'Hamlet's dialogue with his conscience' from *Six Songs on Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva* it is explicit that Ophelia does not find sleep, and in the ninth movement of the *Suite on Verses of*

been more or less immobile all the time - - a situation which does not seem likely to change. But I am happy to say that I have started writing a little music and I cannot say what pleasure it gives me to be of some little use again!' (BPL: DDS).

⁷⁶³Cf. Murray Perahia's testimony that in 1972 Britten said that he 'believed in a God and a destiny', Blyth, p.172, and order of service for Britten's funeral (author's collection), which Pears described as 'lovely [and] simple', letter to the Revd. Wilfred Derry, Lancing College, n.d. (Lancing College Archives: papers of the Revd. Wilfred R. Derry, LC/CHA/12/3).

⁷⁶⁴Appendix IX, and 'The Good Companions', interview by Gillian Widdicombe with Peter Pears, *The Observer, Review*, 30 March 1980, p.33. Rita Thomson disputes Pears's inference in this article that Britten accepted the prayers and Communion primarily to please his friend Bishop Leslie Brown, interview with the author, 4 August 2009.

Michelangelo sleep is related to liberation from worldly corruption. Shostakovich may also have become increasingly preoccupied with the attainability of a universal culture in common with poets of the Silver Age: a reflection of what appears to have been a deep dissatisfaction with his own creative legacy, particularly in the context of the Soviet Union of the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1973 he thus set Tsevetavaeva's poem addressed to Anna Akhmatova in which 'We are blessed, in that with you together we tread the same earth, above us the same sky! And he, who is mortally wounded by your fate goes, already immortal, to his deathbed'.⁷⁶⁵ Britten himself seems to have recognised this when he received a copy of Rostropovich's recording of the Fourteenth Symphony from Shostakovich in October 1973: '[Mark Reshetin] sings "Oh, Delvig" with such passion that one almost feels it is a personal message to once [sic] self and I think perhaps it is'.⁷⁶⁶

In this respect, the texts of Britten's realisations of Five songs from *Harmonia Sacra*, completed between September 1975 and mid-1976, which equate Music with Heaven and Eternal Peace, are ultimately more akin to those of the final setting of Shostakovich's Blok cycle in imbuing the transcendence of creativity with a universal and religious significance: in

⁷⁶⁵Translation by F. Ashbee.

⁷⁶⁶Typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Lilian Hochhauser, 30 October 1973 in response to her letter of 17 October accompanying the recording (BPL: DDS).

both cases, 'Muzyka'/'Musick' is equated the 'Empress of the Universe'/'the Divine'.⁷⁶⁷ The texts of Britten's realisations further suggest that during the last year of his life his attitude towards death and his life's creative work was one of acceptance and equanimity.

Example 50: Pelham Humphrey *Hymn to God the Father* (words by John Donne), no. 3 of Britten's realisations of *Five Songs from Harmonia Sacra* for high voice and harp

[Moderate]



mf

I have a Sin of Fear, that when I've spun my last Thread, I shall per-ish on the Shore; but swear by thy self that at my Death thy Sun shall shine, as he shines now and here - to - fore, and hav - ing done that thou hast done, I fear no more.

Whereas Shostakovich seems to have felt able to quote from his own music in his supplication to the Empress of the Universe in 1967 (in the piano part from R48: bars 2 to 3), by 1972 he seems to have possessed a more pessimistic attitude towards his own creative legacy.⁷⁶⁸ His

⁷⁶⁷Cf. Arnold Whittall's conclusion to 'Britten's Lament: The World of *Owen Wingrave*,' *Music Analysis*, 19/ii (2000), p.165: 'Even if Britten's music seems to focus so often on matters of sadness and sorrow, he was, I believe, far from sad about music itself'.

⁷⁶⁸Cf. Isaak Glikman's assessment of the Blok cycle: 'On 10 February [1967]...[Shostakovich] played me the songs...In them, it seemed to me, Shostakovich

repetitions of separate words and phrases in the final three vocal cycles also suggest an increasing preoccupation with the texts as they related to civic society and a critical assessment of how honourably he had discharged his responsibilities as a creative artist. In this respect Britten's religious opinions, and the radically different political and artistic contexts in which he and Shostakovich operated as composers, ultimately limited their creative as opposed to personal convergence. In 1963, for example, Hans Keller described Britten as 'religious...and even more consciously [so] beyond his music', and whilst Shostakovich's final letter to Britten in December 1974 suggests that he wished him to be aware of his three responses to the themes of creativity and death between July 1973 and November 1974, his recently completed *Four Verses of Captain Lebiadkin*, and the second movement of the Viola Sonata, represent instead a vigorous reassertion of his predilection for the grotesque: in contrast to the tender Adagio in F sharp major which concludes the Fourteenth String Quartet and the final bars of the Michelangelo Suite.⁷⁶⁹ Indeed, the Dostoevskii settings have been interpreted as 'a frank and daring riposte to the allure of lyric address' evident in the Blok,

had written his confession, maintaining hope and belief in the future despite his sufferings'; Glikman, p.298.

⁷⁶⁹Hans Keller in discussion with Michael Tippett and Huw Wheldon in *Britten at Fifty: A Birthday Tribute*, and letter from Shostakovich to Britten, Moscow, 16 December 1974 (BPL:DDS).

Tsvetaeva and Michelangelo vocal cycles, together with their 'confidence in art, posterity and immortality'.⁷⁷⁰

It is also striking that in contrast to the Fifteenth String Quartet and 'Death' in the Michelangelo Suite (R85: bar 9 to R87), Britten did not employ a funeral march in his own Third String Quartet, notwithstanding his predilection for the form between 1936 and 1941: its third movement is instead marked 'smooth and calm', and its final passacaglia *cantabile, dolce*, 'calmly' and *tranquillo*: indeed, in November 1976 he requested that the staccato dots and the direction *martellato* be removed from the cello part from bar 27.⁷⁷¹ Moreover, notwithstanding what may represent 'a transition to a different existential sphere' in the semitonal trill at the conclusion of the Fifteenth String Quartet,⁷⁷² its restatement of a funeral march rhythm at R76: bar 6 and conclusion in E flat minor ultimately suggest a more pessimistic and cynical attitude on Shostakovich's part. It is also revealing that whereas Britten quotes from *Death in Venice* in the Third String Quartet, it is the opening phrase of 'De Profundis' to which Shostakovich alludes in the first and final movements of the Viola Sonata composed four months earlier, and that, in spite of his assertion to the

⁷⁷⁰P.R. Bullock, 'The poet's echo, the composer's voice: monologic verse or dialogic song?' p.226.

⁷⁷¹C. Matthews, 'Introduction' to study score of the new edition (London: Faber, 2006).

⁷⁷²Wilson, p.498.

contrary, the final movement bears the overall character of a funeral march.⁷⁷³

5.6 Conclusion

Although Britten and Shostakovich had become personal friends as early as the summer of 1965, their closest convergence creatively was relatively short-lived: during the period following Britten's dedication of *The Prodigal Son* to Shostakovich in April 1968 and Britten's completion of the Third Suite for Cello in March 1971. Whereas the former work cannot be related to Shostakovich in musical terms, the latter's decision to dedicate the Fourteenth Symphony to Britten in the spring of 1969 seems to have inaugurated a period of creative reference between the two composers at a time when Britten's musical language had already begun to show a degree of convergence with that of Shostakovich. The creative relationship between Britten and Shostakovich during this final period can, to a degree, be interpreted as a dialogue on the topic of death in the context of each composer's increasing ill health.

On the other hand, there remained significant differences. Shostakovich's continued, and increased, reference to Musorgsky and to the dance of death topic from 1969 was not paralleled in Britten's music during this

⁷⁷³Testimony of Fyodor Druzhinin, in Wilson, p.531

period nor, with the exception of the final movement of the Third String Quartet, was his predilection for self-quotation and links between different works as a form of autobiographical reference. Further, although the two composers' use of percussion bears a greater degree of similarity in 1969-70 than hitherto, and this is most evident in *Children's Crusade* and *Owen Wingrave*, works with which Shostakovich does not seem to have been familiar, Britten's treatment in *Death in Venice* can be seen as a characteristic culmination of his long-term predilection for the medium, just as his depiction of Aschenbach's death is more ambiguous than Shostakovich's treatment of the topic in the Fourteenth Symphony and reflective of a longer-term creative trait: indeed, the opera represented the realisation of a project envisaged at least as early as 1965.⁷⁷⁴

Moreover, notwithstanding Britten's pronounced pessimism between May 1973 and the autumn of 1975, his Third String Quartet and creative activity between November 1975 and October 1976 ultimately suggest that his religious beliefs contributed towards a more optimistic and less cynical attitude towards his creative legacy, and to death, than on Shostakovich's part: in this sense, the testimony of Donald Mitchell and Rita Thomson is complementary. Indeed, whereas Britten's pre-1935

⁷⁷⁴R. Strode, 'A *Death in Venice* chronicle', p.26.

religious views may have reasserted themselves in 1975, as early as 1966 Mark Lubotsky feels that Shostakovich was composing 'as Shostakovich with memory of Shostakovich' and that this reflected a profound dissatisfaction with his creative legacy.⁷⁷⁵ Finally, one should add that Shostakovich does not appear to make any reference to Britten's music in his final Viola Sonata, suggesting that by the spring of 1975 he viewed his relationship with Britten as primarily personal as opposed to a source of creative reference: and by 1974 it is the personal rather than musical relationship between the composers that is conspicuous in their correspondence and the testimony of those who were present at the time.⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷⁵Interview with the author, 30 October 2010.

⁷⁷⁶See, for example, appendix VI, and letter from Lilian Hochhauser to Britten, Finchley Road, London, 17 October 1973: 'I did spend an evening with Dmitri...He looks ill & nervous, but he was very concerned about you...He asked me to give you the recording of his Fourteenth Symphony & said that Slava's interpretation was extraordinary. Irina & he send you their love & kisses for your complete recovery and hope that you will soon meet' (BPL: VH).

Conclusion

Several conclusions can therefore be made about Britten's creative relationship with Russia on the basis of the evidence consulted in this thesis. Britten's engagement with Russia can be seen as operating throughout his creative life, from his first acquisition of a Tchaikovsky score in 1926 to his unfinished work on *Praise We Great Men* for Rostropovich fifty years later. This phenomenon is also, in a sense, incomplete: the evidence suggests that Britten's interest in Russia would have continued to develop but for his premature illness and death, with Rostropovich acting as a powerful influence in exile in addition to Richter inside the Soviet Union. Moreover, Britten's unrealised works for Richter and Vishnevskaya might well have afforded a more revealing indication of the sources of Russian influence on the composer than *The Poet's Echo*, which constitutes a relatively small-scale project similar to Britten's earlier setting of Hölderlin and was inspired by the unique circumstances of Britten's visit to the Soviet Union in the summer of 1965.

In the first instance, Britten's interest in Russian music appears to have been stimulated by the melodic appeal and orchestral colour of Tchaikovsky, Borodin and Rimsky-Korsakov. His admiration for

Tchaikovsky, particularly when considered in the context of Britten's creative relationship with Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya in addition to the 1920s and 1930s, can be viewed as the most consistent element of his creative response to Russia, although the evidence for this phenomenon prior to 1928 is limited and the loss of Britten's correspondence to Bridge also limits a full appreciation of its early development. The scores in which Britten appears to allude to Tchaikovsky's music – notably *The Prince of the Pagodas* but also in smaller-scale works such as *The Poet's Echo* – indicate that this composer constituted the most assimilated Russian influence on Britten's music. On the other hand, from Britten's point of view, Tchaikovsky's 'Russianness' was always secondary to his melodic invention, refinement and creative temperament, and he seems to have responded to the composer's affinity to Mozart rather than his debt to Glinka.

Britten's relationship with Shostakovich represents a more complex phenomenon. The evidence suggests that the factors that contributed towards a personal friendship and limited musical convergence in the 1960s, not least Rostropovich's vigorous influence and Britten's acute self-perception as a composer, were not identical to those which had excited his initial interest in Shostakovich's music in 1934-6, nor by the 1960s

were they primarily related to 'Russia'. Britten's lack of enthusiasm for Musorgsky is particularly revealing in this regard. The evidence also suggests that although the creative relationship between Britten and Shostakovich in the 1960s may have stimulated a degree of musical convergence, both composers were independently moving closer from 1960 onwards and that by 1970 the relationship was fundamentally one of admiration, empathy and personal affection: assertions of direct musical influence, as opposed to not dissimilar responses to related preoccupations such as the topic of death, should therefore be viewed with some caution, and one must not discount other non-Russian sources of influence on both composers such as Bartók. Indeed, a comparison of both composers' treatment of the topic of death in their work from 1969 onwards suggest two highly distinctive creative personalities whose responses were to a degree shaped by upbringing and environment, and that their 'difference' in fact represented an aspect of mutual appeal.

Britten's attitude towards Stravinsky constitutes the most complex aspect of his engagement with Russian music. Whereas it clearly represented a potent source of influence for Britten during the 1930s, the allusions to Stravinsky's music in as late a work as the *Cantata misericordium* suggest a more problematic phenomenon which Britten was unable entirely to

assimilate. The evidence for Britten's engagement with Prokofiev suggests that the latter's influence was also significant in the 1930s, but that his appreciation of the composer's music deepened significantly in the 1960s. However, Britten does not appear to allude to Prokofiev after *The Prince of the Pagodas*, and it may be that the unrealised *Anna Karenina* would have demonstrated this musical influence in a more assimilated form.

Britten's notion of 'Russia' was ultimately subjective, a somewhat romanticised combination of elements of not only of music, but also of history, literature and landscape. The political division of East and West in 1945 may further have stimulated the 'exoticism' of its appeal prior to Britten's first opportunity to visit the Soviet Union in 1963. However, although Britten can be regarded as stimulated by Russia on a variety of levels – musical, personal, and, to a more qualified degree, political - the evidence suggests that the first two were by far the most important, tending to reinforce each other by the 1960s, especially in the context of the opportunity to enjoy a creative relationship with members of the Soviet artistic élite and the positive reception accorded to Britten's music in the Soviet Union. The significance of the Russian première of the Cello Symphony and of the English Opera Group tour in 1964 in shaping

Britten's perception should therefore not be underestimated. Moreover, Pears' own long-term interest in Russian vocal music, literature and art should be viewed as highly complementary to this aspect of Britten's creative sensibility from 1937.

One should add that Britten's response in these areas was also selective, excluding performers such as Oistrakh and Gilels, and that the evidence for his attitude towards Russian performance style of his own music is also ambivalent. Moreover, both in the pre-1938 diaries and subsequently, Britten's judgements on Russian music seem to have been shaped solely by musical considerations. Notwithstanding the particular impact of *Lady Macbeth* in 1935, he was by no means enthusiastic about all of Shostakovich's music, nor did he show any significant enthusiasm for the works of any other Soviet composer either in the 1930s or the 1960s. By the 1960s, and arguably even in the 1930s, Russian music in itself was insufficient to excite his interest and enthusiasm, and the affinity of the Tchaikovsky folksong arrangements he selected in 1971 to one of Percy Grainger's he had chosen to record two years earlier also suggests that Britten's artistic judgements were always fundamentally shaped by musical considerations.

Britten's creative relationship with Russia can therefore be viewed as an important, albeit secondary, aspect of his creative sensibility. It was less significant than, for example, his admiration for Schubert or Purcell or the influence of Balinese music on his musical language: indeed, the evidence suggests that by the 1960s it largely tended to stimulate existing characteristics of his musical language. In this sense it was ultimately most significant in Britten's composition of vocal and instrumental music for Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya between 1961 and 1971. On the other hand, if, as Rita Thomson recalls, it was the landscape of Horham and Venice rather than Russia which captured Britten's imagination during the final three years of his life, the evidence suggests that the empathy that he felt towards Shostakovich, Rostropovich and Tchaikovsky can be viewed as a profound and integral element of a personal and creative outlook which inspired the remarkable vitality, and courage, of his compositional output between 1973 and 1976.⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁷Interview with Rita Thomson, 4 August 2009. See also Rostropovich's account of his final visit to Britten on 28 November 1976: "Then [Britten] said, "Slava, I've got a present for you", and from the piano Peter brought the beginning of a cantata Ben was writing for me to conduct in Washington [*Praise We Great Men*]. You see, Shostakovich had started to write a piece for my first season in Washington, but then he died; so Ben had said, "Now I must write it twice – once for myself, and once for our Dimity [sic]"; M. Rostropovich, G. Widdicombe, 'Three friends', *The Observer*, 27 November 1977, p.25. The Red House visitors' book indicates that Rostropovich in fact visited Britten on four occasions in the last two years of his life: 11-12 January and 21 December 1974, 5-6 June 1975, and 28 November 1976 (BPL).

Appendix I: Letter from Lord Armstrong of Ilminster, 16 May 2010

[Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, 1970-75]

[See letter from Britten to Sir Duncan and Lady Wilson, 3 May 1971 in BPL: DW; and NA: PREM 15/2220, including a letter from Britten to Armstrong on 10 May 1971, for the immediate context and outcome of Britten's meeting with Sir Edward Heath on 10 May 1972]

[Extract]

Though there is no mention of it in Sir Edward Heath's autobiography, I have a clear recollection that Benjamin Britten came to see Mr. Heath at Downing Street [on 5 May 1971], to discuss the restrictions placed by the Soviet authorities upon Slava Rostropovich's visits to this country for the Aldeburgh Festival and the possibility of an approach to Madame Furtseva, the Culture Minister in Moscow. I was the Private Secretary in attendance at the meeting. Mr. Heath was much given to sitting in the garden of 10 Downing Street when the weather was fine, and memory tells me that they talked in the garden. I also remember that there was some discussion of the possibility of Heath writing to Furtseva.

Edward Heath admired Benjamin Britten and his music, and he recognised and respected Britten's views about the social role and

responsibilities of composers, and the way in which Britten fulfilled them. He saw Britten and William Walton as the foremost British composers of their generation.

He saw Britten's interest in Russia as primarily – I would think purely – musical: as a function of Britten's friendships with Rostropovich (whom Heath also counted as a friend) and his wife, with Richter, and with Shostakovich, whom Victor Hochhauser brought to see Heath at No. 10 on another occasion [in July 1972], and of Britten's intense pleasure in making music with them. Of course he was well aware of the political background to those relationships, in the context of British-Soviet relations at that time. He would have liked the musical relationships to be as close as the politics would permit; but he would not have expected the musical relationships to affect the political and diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union unless the Soviet authorities wanted them to.

Appendix II: Interview with Alan Brooke Turner CMG, London,

24 September 2009

[British Cultural Attaché, Moscow, 1962-5]

[Edited, and incorporating Brooke Turner's 'Western Cultural Links with the USSR', unpublished paper produced for the author in November 2009. See also H. Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart* (London: Macmillan, 1971), pp.249-56, 296)]

Can you explain the political and context of Britten's first visit to the Soviet Union in March 1963?

Much, but not everything, changed when Khrushchev came to power in the aftermath of Stalin's death. To people living in the Soviet Union this was perhaps the first moment when they could feel that, after the appalling privations and sacrifices of the Great Patriotic War, they could hope for a peaceful development of East-West relations. The arrival of foreign orchestras, musicians, actors and, rather rarely, foreign films in Moscow and Leningrad began to create the sense that the self-imposed isolation of the Soviet Union from the cultural life of the Western world was coming to an end. The guardians of Communist orthodoxy, by accepting in the Soviet Union the best of what Western culture had to

offer, had shown to the public, and especially the intelligentsia, that in these areas, contacts with the West were acceptable.

The range of cultural events which were brought to the theatres and concert halls of Moscow and Leningrad, and occasionally other cities, was of high quality and very diverse. Before I had arrived in the Soviet Union, the Royal Ballet had paid a triumphantly successful visit; and during my three-and-a-half years as Cultural Attaché there were visits by the Royal Shakespeare Theatre (with Paul Schofield playing King Lear) and the National Theatre (with Laurence Olivier playing Othello), as well as great companies from other countries, such as the Komische Oper from Berlin. All these performances were immensely popular; people not only stood for hours in hopes of obtaining a returned ticket, but even attempted to gain entry to concert halls and theatres by crawling up the ventilation shafts.

For me, the two most memorable events were a performance of Bach's Mass in B Minor in the Great Hall of the Conservatory in Moscow by the Robert Shaw Chorale from the United States. At the end of the performance I noticed that many people in the audience, especially the elderly, were weeping. It dawned on me that because of the campaign

against the Church, which was still being continued, this was the first occasion many would have had to hear this great work. The other event was the return of Stravinsky to Moscow in 1962. It was not the quality or even the authenticity of the performance which gripped the audience but the sense of being part of a unique historical occasion. I have seldom been so conscious of the surge of emotion in an audience.

This was the setting into which, in 1963, the British Council sent Britten and Pears as the stars in a distinguished group of British musicians participating in 'Days of British Music'.

How was Britten regarded by the Soviet establishment?

Britten's work was seen by the authorities as innovative while remaining accessible. This latter point is important. While I was working in Moscow, William Glock visited under a provision in the Cultural Agreement for an exchange of musicians. He was determined to track down any Russian composers working in the area of serialism or following composers such as Stockhausen and Nono. He received no support or encouragement whatsoever from the Soviet musical establishment.

I think Furtseva primarily viewed Britten as a trophy; a sort of expression of her policy. Here was the Soviet Union, though they disagreed profoundly on every aspect of our political policy, able to welcome to Moscow and warmly embrace the greatest in the West. She knew that Britten was acclaimed both in Britain and in other countries as one of the greatest composers living at the time. The *War Requiem* episode perhaps gave the clue to Soviet ambivalence towards Britten. Rejection of war was an ideal shared by the Soviet Union – but on Soviet terms. It was hardly surprising that, with West Germany a member of NATO, the Soviet Union would not accept the symbolism of Pears, Fischer-Dieskau and Vishnevskaya appearing together in Coventry Cathedral. It was equally to be expected that news about this work would spread and that choirs and audiences in the Soviet Union, prompted by curiosity about a work by a great British composer calling for an end to war, of which so many had had recent and bitter experience, would want to perform or hear it.

How far did Britten appreciate this ambivalence?

He was sensitive about being used and cautious about any sort of public statements. I remember a woman asked him in interview ‘Do you think that music should be for the masses or just for an élite?’ Britten’s reply showed that had he been a composer living in the USSR he would have

been as able as Shostakovich to deal with this sort of question. Britten also seemed to be a little uncertain about officialdom of any sort. He liked finding people he felt he could deal with. Initially, in 1963 and 1964, Britten saw the advantage of creating a new link between Britain and Russia under British Council auspices, but what he really wanted was the creative companionship of Slava and of course Shostakovich. His 1965 and 1966 visits were essentially private and we were not involved.

What was your experience of the Britten-Rostropovich relationship?

Ben was very different from Slava, yet they created a genuine friendship which didn't need any encouragement from either side. Slava loved practical jokes and was ebullient to the ultimate degree. I remember the first performance of *Katerina Izmailova* in Moscow in 1963. It was an electric occasion. Shostakovich sat in the box looking impassive and embarrassed. At the end there was a great commotion in the orchestra pit and as I was sitting at the front I got up and went and looked. There was a great clatter in the cello section where the cellos were led by Slava banging away and applauding. He insisted on being part of this historic occasion.

How was Britten's music received in the Soviet Union in 1963 and 1964 and had Britten anticipated this response?

The three chamber operas performed during the 1964 tour were on a far smaller scale than the Russians were used to, yet *Albert Herring* and *The Rape of Lucretia* were received very warmly. I don't think *The Turn of the Screw* got quite the same reception. At the Bach concert I mentioned we met a lady who had been a teacher of the harp at the Smolny Institute in St. Petersburg at the time of the last Tsar. After the Revolution her achievement was not only to get young talented musical girls to play but to organise them into a quartet of harps; she made arrangements for four harps as well as the classical harp repertoire and became a People's Artist of the USSR. We invited her to *The Turn of the Screw* and I heard her turn to her neighbour in front and say 'Oh dear, how boring'; but she was very out of date; there were a lot of people there who were much younger and were looking for something new in music.

I think Britten was apprehensive: not about how the works were going to go down, but about appearing before such an expectant and enthusiastic audience. Several other conductors like Malcolm Sargent said to me that after they had performed in the Soviet Union once it was much easier. Of course, Russian orchestras were wonderful to conduct; the Leningrad

Philharmonic was one of the greatest in the world. Britten certainly knew after his first performances that audiences were on his side, not just because he was a famous composer but because these were people coming from the other side of the divide: sharing something which everybody had in common and evoking something very profound in them.

How did the Foreign Office view Britten's interest in Russia, given his pacifism and homosexuality?

The people in the Music Committee of the British Council and in the British Council itself, who oversaw the arrangements for both visits, paid no attention to that sort of thing. It was the quality of the musicians and their enthusiasm to go which made all the difference; they all got briefings of course about the black market and not compromising themselves. One really wasn't conscious of the homosexuality issue with Britten, and in an age when people didn't really speak about it, it really didn't seem to be a matter that arose.

Can you say something about Britten's relationship with Shostakovich?

I met them relatively early in their relationship, at a dinner in March 1964 hosted by Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, and had the honour of interpreting

between them afterwards. They seemed to know each other a bit, although I was not aware at the time that they had met previously, and they had a conversation rather like two people in the same business talk. It was about the use of the native language of the audience in opera performances. Britten took the firm line that it should be done in the language of the audience wherever possible; Shostakovich strongly agreed. I particularly remember that Britten said that to insist on doing opera in the original language is 'pure snobbism'.

What do you recall of the Leningrad première of the Cello Symphony?

We - Britten, Rostropovich, Humphrey Trevelyan and I - travelled by overnight train from Moscow. We gathered in a compartment and Ben started complaining about Boosey and Hawkes. He was very aware of the passionate desire of the Russians to get hold of his scores and give performances and felt that Boosey and Hawkes were not being helpful. Slava then started complaining about his difficulties with Gosconcert. Humphrey Trevelyan said the only thing we could arrange was a boxing match between the two and the only possible outcome would be a knock out on both sides! The musical aura of the Leningrad Great Hall would certainly have meant a great deal to Ben. It also goes without saying that any concert in Russia in which Slava Rostropovich was performing,

under the baton of Britten as conductor, a work which Britten had written for him, was an historic occasion and a triumph. But it was, to the concert-going public, a dual or even triple triumph – a tribute to the great English composer, a tribute to a hugely admired Russian virtuoso and at the same time to the creative achievement of the two working and thinking together.

How do you recall Britten nearly fifty years later?

Looking back on these events nearly fifty years later, I would say that Britten performed a historic role, not only for the country of his birth but in the far wider cause of breaking down the barriers which divided West and East at that point in history. It is to his great credit that unlike some of his contemporaries he did this without compromise to his principles and without incurring the reproach of being a fellow-traveller. I am left with a vivid impression of Britten not only as a musical genius whom it was an honour to have known, but also as a truly warm and sincere person.

Appendix III: Letter from Osian Ellis CBE, 5 February 2010

[Extract]

Britten first heard my playing in the *Ceremony of Carols* in January 1959 at Westminster Cathedral. I was exhilarated on meeting Britten after the performance and he invited me to come and play at his Festival at Aldeburgh, and in the recording of his *Nocturne*. At the 1960 Festival he listened to my playing of a Handel Sonata and Hindemith's Harp Sonata, so he was quite familiar with my style of playing which reflected a more eighteenth-century style rather than the florid Victorian or nineteenth-century styles. This is certainly reflected in his Harp Suite, as he himself observed in his programme notes. Britten once observed that some of the lady harpists he had heard played as if they were knitting! There were male harpists also who sat next to me who showed no interest in his music – this I found amazing, but his music did not reveal itself immediately. Ben was always ahead of us.

Britten did not consult me on his harp writing; he had a great imagination, and he would pick up on any player's (or singer's) idiosyncrasies or sounds and techniques and expand them still further. He showed me the score of *Cantata misericordium* when we were

rehearsing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, just to make sure it was straightforward, but he did not consult me on the latter. In the event, my second harpist fell ill, and I suggested that it would be possible to play the two harp parts on one harp, and, indeed, we performed it in that way for the whole season in 1960. For the recording we used two harps. There was no consultation before *War Requiem*. I can only assume that Britten's lively imagination conjured up his own particular sonorities, but dare I think that my style and sounds may have helped? You are putting these curious thoughts into my head. During rehearsals I would suggest some particular sound from the harp – say, a thinner sound by touching the strings nearer the soundboard. Certainly, in *Curlew River* there was more time for consultation and I would play lower on the strings to create a more primitive sound (or so I thought), rather than the rich, voluptuous sound favoured by many players. I also recall some occasions during the other two Church Parables when we chatted about harp writing and adjusted one or two things; they were always his suggestions. Then, of course, he saw me playing my little Irish harp, and he immediately utilised it in the Procession in *The Burning Fiery Furnace*. I recall our warnings (in jest) to each other: 'Don't let Ben see you doing something odd; you'll be sorry – he's bound to use it later!'

In 1969 Britten invited me to plan a programme, *Artist's Choice*, for the Festival. He said, with a coy smile, 'You can, of course, commission a new work for the harp from any composer whom you care to mention'. He did not consult me on the Harp Suite; it just arrived one day in the post in Rosamund Strode's beautiful writing. I played it to him four days later at the Decca Studios where we were rehearsing *War Requiem* and he rewrote only one section at the bottom of the first page – left hand: 'That's piano writing!' he declared. After playing the Suite to him he appeared to be purring like a contented cat; it was not so much that I had learned the piece so quickly, but that the music WORKED! He was a craftsman to his fingertips! You will recall the florid harp section in his *Nocturne* – extremely beautiful, I think, and quite difficult - which he wrote before I met him. I recall Marie Goossens telling me that her sister Sidonie had to change bits, but I'm sure that all she had to change was the writing on the score. Ben had the habit of weaving that particular harp part across two staves – as in piano music – and it is much easier to read those passages just in one staff. I have no recollection of playing in Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto, but he certainly used the harp imaginatively in his other symphonic works. Just as Britten would seek new and original sounds, I am sure Shostakovich's ear would do likewise.

Appendix IV: Interview with Keith Grant, London, 25 September 2009

[Grant was General Manager of the Covent Garden Opera Company, later the Royal Opera, and the English Opera Group, from 1962 to 1973, accompanied Britten on the EOG tour to the Soviet Union in September-October 1964, and, as a fluent Russian speaker, was sometimes asked by the composer to translate Shostakovich's letters for him]

[Edited]

How did you first come to work with Britten?

In 1962 I was appointed to do the double job of looking after the Covent Garden Company and the English Opera Group. I was told by the then General Administrator of the Opera House, Sir David Webster, that my career in opera would very much depend on my ability to deal with Benjamin Britten. So I came into contact with Ben and had nearly twelve very rewarding years at his side. He was a complex person, and had a strange reputation of being on the one hand charming and civilised, having the persona of an English gentleman, but also being very ruthless. A lot of people in the profession thought that they'd been badly mauled by him, so he was actually rather feared as well as respected. You did have to watch your step with him because he was a perfectionist and like all perfectionists, he could be very demanding and not only in music making but in a more general way of requiring total

loyalty. He expected you to be available at all moments really; if he had a question that needed an answer he got on the telephone at 11.00pm on a Sunday night: too bad, you jolly well responded. He expected you to have the same zeal as he had. So that's the general picture of the relationship which I am happy to say in my case never went wrong – can't think why – but, anyway, it didn't.

How did the 1964 EOG to the Soviet Union come about?

I was aware in my first week that in 1961, the previous Aldeburgh Festival, Rostropovich and Vishnevskaya had not only won the hearts of the Festival audience but had already cemented a strong friendship with Ben and Peter. I have little doubt that the English Opera Group visit to the Soviet Union in 1964 was very much stimulated and encouraged, virtually insisted upon, by Rostropovich, who was a man of huge determination and negotiating skills. Because I was the only Russian speaker in that milieu I was often called into consultation and discussion, but they didn't need me too much because they were on kissing terms with other. It was only when they had to get down to brass tacks about practical details that they would use me.

Ben adored Vishnevskaya's voice; he said that type of voice, which he called a 'peasant voice', was unique. *War Requiem* was regarded by him as a great set

back. He was deeply sorry about the Soviet refusal to allow her to sing and if we had been trying to organise a Russian tour at that point I think it would have been cancelled he was so put out. It required quite a lot of spade work by various people to get him to forgive and forget. The run up itself was full of stops and starts. The Soviets were very difficult over the contract; John Tooley and I spent hours wrestling with the demands they made and at one point we were on the point of pulling out. Ben and Peter, the two Rostropovichs, John Tooley and I met for a council of war in Boulestin's restaurant. We were really there to tell the dear Rostropovichs that we were going to have to pull out but knew that they would be hurt by this as they had set great store on Ben appearing in Russia with his opera company. We talked about how it was impossible to contemplate coming to Russia with so few people, but all they would say was 'Keith, Keith he is so witty'. I had a face as long as a fiddle trying to explain why we were so distressed, but they wouldn't have it and we went away determined to keep trying. It was all to do with Rostropovich really. 1964 was also very demanding because we had the première of *Curlew River* and were really on edge about this. We had exceptionally long rehearsals and a matter of weeks after the Festival we were catapulted straight into preparation of the three operas to go to Russia.

Did Britten make any serious attempt to learn Russian?

The nearest he got to wrestling with it was doing *The Poet's Echo*. All the time that I was in Russia with him he relied on me for interpreting to a large extent. Of course Gosconcert provided interpreters for him but they weren't on duty all the time. Ben, as I say, was a morning, afternoon and night sort of person, so when their interpreters weren't available I had to be on hand.

What do you recall of the working relationship between Britten and Russian musicians?

Richter had the same sort of hair-raising last-minute method of work as Rostropovich, which sometimes caused Ben real anxiety. Ben was just not that sort of person. He felt that if you weren't properly prepared it was terribly unprofessional and hated it. I remember when Richter was going to play Ben's Piano Concerto in Aldeburgh [in 1967] he arrived not having looked at it. Ben, who was conducting, was absolutely terrified because he just didn't see how it could work. It worked because Richter worked through the night, which I know because Richter used to stay with some people I knew well in Aldeburgh and they were kept awake at night by his pounding on the piano. In the event, the performance was very exciting and went very well. Ben was very pleased with it.

What was Britten's attitude to ballet?

He was never very comfortable with it. He rarely referred to *The Prince of the Pagodas* but it rankled that it had not been a total success. When he came to do *Death in Venice* I remember him saying to me, absurdly really, 'Can you help me, I don't really understand how dancers work and how they do their counts', but I wasn't able to help. Ben nevertheless possessed lasting admiration for his leading lady Svetlana Beriosova [as Belle Rose], and he adored the three Tchaikovsky ballets. I remember him saying what a fantastic score *Swan Lake* is when he saw it at Covent Garden. My wife [Deanne Bergsma] danced Odette/Odile regularly between 1965 and 1973 and he saw a performance at some point during the gestation of *Death in Venice*; he subsequently invited her to take on the role of the Polish Mother.⁷⁷⁸

What light can you shed on the relationship between Britten and Shostakovich?

I got to know Shostakovich slightly when he came to Covent Garden for *Katerina Izmailova* [in December 1963]. I met him at the airport and quickly realised what a very different personality he was from Benjamin Britten: the impression I had was of a real worry guts. Yet the letters from Shostakovich to Britten are exceptionally warm. This copy of a letter from Shostakovich [on 21

⁷⁷⁸Britten's pocket diaries suggest that this took place on 9, 11 and 17 February 1971; on each date he has written 'Ballet Cov. Garden' (BPL).

February 1972] thanks Britten for the particular gift of a score. Giving somebody a full score at that time was a very nice present indeed, because the Soviets never signed up to the Berne Convention. Ben very much wanted his works to get performances behind the Iron Curtain. I was interpreting for him in Riga [in October 1964], when he was talking to opera directors who wanted to put on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ben had his score with him and when they said 'But of course this may take years to put on because there is no agreement with Boosey and Hawkes to get the full score', he just gave it to them.

I can't shed any light on what Ben truly felt about Shostakovich's music, because although we have evidence in this letter that Shostakovich was prepared to say very warm things about Ben, I never actually heard Ben speak with such warmth about Shostakovich. I'm not saying that in any tendentious way; he may have said warm things when I didn't happen to be around. But I think somehow that the atmosphere of a lot of Shostakovich's music would be foreign to Ben. A lot of it is quite noisy music and very up front in a way which Ben's isn't. If you think of all the fantastic percussion effects in *Pagodas* and in *Death in Venice*, it is amazingly inventive but rather discreet by comparison with the bang wallops in a lot of Shostakovich's music. I can't relate anything Ben directly said about Shostakovich but I can say that he

almost never came up in conversation whereas a lot of other composers did. I spent a lot of time just chatting with him; and as I was around a lot I got to know a lot about his tastes and who his heroes were: Mozart, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, and Purcell. Frank Bridge was a great hero but on a slightly different level. I never heard Ben talk about Stravinsky.

Was Britten concerned by the 1960s that he wrote in a relatively traditional musical idiom?

I doubt it very much. If he'd wanted to do more in the way of serial music I'm sure he would have done so. When Harry Birtwistle was commissioned to do *Punch and Judy* Ben and Peter saw the notes on which the commission was based and they were perfectly happy to go right ahead with it and were actually very encouraging. The fact that what came out of it wasn't entirely to their taste is another matter altogether.

How was Britten's music received within the Soviet Union during the 1964 EOG tour?

I think we were all, Ben included, very much on the *qui vive* during the tour to know exactly what people thought. We knew that Rostropovich and Shostakovich would support us, but what audiences were thinking was a bit of a puzzle and remains so. With *Albert Herring* we were packed out every night

and were cheered to the echo but it wasn't difficult in those days because the Soviet Union was so isolated from what was happening in the West. We didn't get the laughs which you would get in England, because it has to be a bit in your blood of how vicars and gushing school mistresses behave to get the joke. A representative of the Ministry of Culture came on stage after one of the performances and praised this opera for exposing the evils of capitalism – Albert's moral decline begins once he is crowned May king! But I used to talk a lot to the music staff of the theatres we went to and they really were enjoying it. *The Rape of Lucretia* also went over very well, because it's more like an opera-drama than the other two. About *The Turn of the Screw*, one or two people said to me 'What's all this about ghosts? Why would anyone want to be interested in ghosts, a very old-fashioned thing to be interested in!'

Was there any problem with 'The Rape of Lucretia', in terms of its theme and the Christian epilogue?

There was no problem I am aware of although the rape was handled in that production in a pretty dramatic way. Just before the rape happened Lucretia was lying terrified on her couch with Tarquinius above her with drawn sword. There was a candle and he just swiped out the candle with his sword and then the rape took place while the music continued. Our front cloth then came

down. This was by Tony Walton and actually depicted a bloodied woman's genitals.

What was Shostakovich's reaction to the performances?

He attended them but unfortunately I didn't see him to talk to. I saw far more of Rostropovich and his wife during that time. Rostropovich bought some aquariums in Harrods and asked me whether they could be brought with our scenery. I agreed. Nobody had realised how big they were going to be; and he also bought all the rocks, pebbles and gravel. When we got to Leningrad a very languid and effete colonel in the Russian custom service in full uniform smoking a cigarette in a long holder - very un-Soviet – looked with absolute amazement, and I said 'They are for Mr. Rostropovich'. He said 'What are all these stones and rocks? I could have got him some from the road!' The first few days of our arrival in Leningrad were very difficult because half of our costumes went on to Karachi instead of being off loaded in Moscow. For the first performance which was *Albert Herring* we had to borrow costumes from one of the theatre companies in Leningrad; the village policeman was actually a nineteenth-century Russian.

How demanding was the itinerary?

It was murder. The Soviets bargained terribly hard and we had to do twenty-six performances in the course of twenty-eight days in three different cities and we were only allowed to take thirty singers. Ben accompanied virtually the entire tour. The original negotiations with Gosconcert were that we would have a company more like sixty, which would have enabled us to do *Dido and Aeneas* and Ben's realisation of *The Beggar's Opera*. Then they suddenly decided that they were not prepared to afford that and said we could only have thirty singers. This meant that the only way we could do it was for everybody to be able to do at least two parts so that we were covered in the case of illness. In the event, everybody except Peter Pears and Sylvia Fisher at one time or another had 'flu symptoms. At one point, Ben actually asked me if I could sing Sid in *Albert Herring* if I worked on it with him. When we were in the Soviet Union Ben had bad stomach problems, partly because of the diet, and it was a very arduous tour for him as he had to conduct a good half of the performances. He used to take brandy as his sort of 'buck me up'; he had a flask at his elbow all the time. He was not a drunkard, not at all, but he did have to rely on brandy to keep him going.

When you presented the operas in Russia in September 1964 did you feel Britten had a wider musical profile which added to the appeal of your performances?

We took lot of presents to give to people, including masses of recordings of *War Requiem* which Ben dutifully signed. That's what people wanted most: *War Requiem* plus the Beatles. Ben was constantly asked in interviews what he thought of the Beatles. The other thing they wanted was a ball point pen.

When you were with him in the Soviet Union were you conscious of Britten's particular interest in Russia; and how far was he aware of the realities of the Soviet system?

He was a great admirer of Russian art as well as music. He and Peter were always going off to look at pictures and museums and things like that. Ben recognised that Russian bureaucracy was a nightmare and was well briefed about political realities. Remember the Soviets had insisted that the EOG go to Riga, where we would have no diplomatic protection as the West didn't recognise the Soviet occupation of Latvia. The city was full of soldiers and felt like a garrison town. But the Russians really did make a huge fuss of him. Madame Furtseva was a bit of a battleaxe but it was as if she took charm pills especially to keep Ben sweet. If anything it was rather a nuisance how much people did make a fuss of Ben, constantly asking for interviews, autographs

and to have their photographs taken with him. The Union of Composers were a load of pests, always asking him to come and play or talk to them. Rostropovich would say 'Just ignore them, they're all apparatchiks'. All sorts of people were wheeled out to be nice to Ben. They kept on bringing people onto the stage after performances. Nikolai Cherkasov came on and made a speech; after another performance, the cosmonaut German Titov appeared.

Why do you think Russians responded so enthusiastically to him?

Ben had an aura of charm around him: there was something very pleasing about him when you weren't frightened of his demands, which could be daunting. And he knew music better than anybody else around. If he said a violinist could play a tremolo in a certain way with a certain combination of fingers he bloody well could; and *he* knew that Ben knew he could. In this photograph, Ben is taking a bow after the last performance of *Albert Herring* at the Maly Theatre. He had made a speech from the stage and I had done a simultaneous interpretation to the audience. When he was presented with flowers he immediately gave the bouquet to me. It comes across that that's a genuinely nice man standing there.

Did Britten view the tour as a success and was a return visit ever contemplated?

I think he would have given it eight out of ten. Never a man to be easily satisfied, I can count on the fingers of one hand when he was absolutely one hundred per cent pleased with anything. He was disturbed that several of his favourite people were not there: Heather Harper, Osian Ellis and Emanuel Hurwitz. I was actually very proud of the company we took out: I thought it was a bloody good line up and they pulled their fingers out in the most marvellous way for him.

The tour was very much seen as a one-off. We were kept on being told by the Russians that they thought it was a very expensive project from their point of view and there was no feeling whatsoever that they would have the wherewithal or zeal to repeat the venture. Moreover, from the English Opera Group's point of view, the tour was only possible because the costs had been channelled through the British Council and the Foreign Office had made an extra grant for this purpose.

Appendix V: Interview with George, Earl of Harewood (1923-2011),

Harewood House, Leeds, 13 March 2009

[See *Letters from a Life*, vol. III, p.475, for a summary of Lord Harewood's association with Britten, which, it should be noted, ended in mid-1964; and *The Tongs and the Bones* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981) for his memoirs]

[Edited]

Britten's creative relationship with Russia is unusual for an English composer. How would you explain it?

Ben's initial feeling over Russia in the mid-1930s was instinctive, because he was instinctively a rebel, and at that time we were not on good terms with Russia. He also felt that the Russians treated musicians – particularly composers but probably other creative artists as well – rather better than we treated them over here, and I think that impressed him.

What can you say about Britten's admiration for Tchaikovsky?

I don't know when it started or how. I do remember taking him for the first time to see *Eugene Onegin* [in Zurich in 1952; *The Tongs and the Bones*, p.135] and his enthusiastic reaction to it. Ben admired Tchaikovsky because he thought the music marvellous. He was very particular in the

music he liked and didn't like. He didn't like Brahms and said, 'I need not be right, but I'm entitled to say it because I think I know every note that Brahms wrote'. The later relevance over *The Prince of the Pagodas* is a more specific one. Ben said that Tchaikovsky was so professional amongst other things that the actual lengths of Tchaikovsky's ballets for dancers would be accurate. It was very important for him to get an idea from a composer, as opposed to a choreographer, of these lengths.

Was Britten's aversion to Musorgsky primarily a reflection of a suspicion of musical nationalism?

He certainly knew Musorgsky's music, but wasn't enthusiastic about it and I don't think he was particularly interested. I don't think he ever made a judgement without having the knowledge to back it up. He knew an awful lot of music and had such a powerful musical personality himself that he could become familiar with a piece of music, and know more about it, as he was a great composer himself, than other people who had known it much longer. He thought music was above that kind of thing [nationalism]. He liked *Boris* much less than I would have guessed he would; in fact, he didn't love it at all. Yet *Boris* aims at expressing something much wider about Russia, about the Russian people, which is

why one argues so much about the correct version, and how the opera should end.

In spite of Britten's admiration for Stravinsky's music in the 1930s, the subsequent relationship between the two composers has been characterised as hostile.

Ben certainly liked Stravinsky's music early on and probably continually. But he was very disappointed with *The Rake's Progress*, which he saw as a step back for a composer who should be moving forward. There were also very odd things which I relate in my book [*The Tongs and the Bones*, pp.132-3], particularly a conversation between the two composers in which Stravinsky didn't seem to appreciate Britten's use of recitative in *The Rape of Lucretia*. He was aware of Stravinsky's later adoption of twelve-note music but I don't think he took any notice and I don't remember him commenting on it.

How would you define Britten's relationship with Shostakovich?

It was a combination of instinct, liking the music, and finding Shostakovich an attractive personality, which he was. I think they probably got on from the moment they met. Ben would have wanted to like him because he liked his music, of which he'd heard quite a lot in the

past - mostly the big pieces of Shostakovich when they were done in England before the war and into the war, and he used to mention *Lady Macbeth*, though never in any detail. Ben liked Shostakovich much better than Prokofiev, and we used to argue about that, because I also found Prokofiev highly sympathetic as a composer. He certainly didn't like *War and Peace* as much as I did.

Ben heard much of Shostakovich's music as it came out, although he wasn't able to attend the Edinburgh Festival in 1962 when we programmed a lot of his music, some of it unfamiliar. We were very proud of the first performance in the West of the Fourth Symphony. Ben had also agreed that he would play *From Jewish Folk Poetry*. When Shostakovich heard Ben's replacement [Geoffrey Parsons] in rehearsal he hated [emphasis] it: he said it was a perversion and mustn't happen. The work was clearly important to him: he said it was a very personal thing. I had to get Slava Rostropovich to intercede for the performance to take place. Apart from this episode, I found Shostakovich very easy to deal with.

In terms of symphonies and operas, the creative output of Shostakovich and Britten is very different.

Ben wrote things close to symphonies: he was very much inspired by words and after all the only one he called a symphony - *Spring Symphony*. - has words. He certainly thought of that as a symphony and was very indignant when people said he didn't write symphonies.

Why did Shostakovich particularly admire 'War Requiem'?

I wasn't aware of that. In any case, it's awfully difficult to describe the reason for liking something, rather like describing the reason for falling in love: so many of the reasons for either are so mundane and semi-relevant.

Did Shostakovich influence Britten's music in the 1960s?

I think that it's perfectly likely, but my instinct would be that it was likely rather than apparent: if you like a contemporary composer's music a lot, you are likely to some degree to be influenced by it, but in this case I wouldn't point to influence.

What would you say about Britten's religious beliefs?

Ben was partly a very religious man and partly not, but he wasn't a conventionally religious man. When I was an undergraduate [1947-8], I

recall E.M. Forster telling me - and he was, at best, an agnostic - that Ben was absolutely, besottedly, religious. I was interested in this and later found it wasn't true, but it's interesting that at that time Morgan believed it.

How do you recall Britten fifty years after your association?

I was extremely fond of him. To say about a homosexual that I loved him implies something else, but I did love him in a different way and his music means a great deal to me, more than that of almost any other composer. I literally watched *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana* and *The Turn of the Screw* being written. We used to go and stay with him, and he used to play a new scene each time one went. I still have a feeling of awe and reverence and deep affection for him.

Appendix VI: Interview with Lilian Hochhauser, London,

24 November 2011

[Edited]

You were present when Britten and Shostakovich first met in 1960 as well as on a number of subsequent occasions. What would you say about the dynamic between them at this point?

Shostakovich knew a few words of English, but more importantly Britten and Shostakovich already knew each other because they knew each other's music. No words were necessary for them to feel what the other was thinking or trying to say. That first meeting nearly didn't happen as Britten decided to come almost at the last minute, and really because they were playing his music. There hadn't been any connection between Britten and the Russians before then. On reflection, you realise how momentous it was. At the time, it was exciting to have them both there but now when I think back I should have seen the profundity of it all.

Their coming together now seems inevitable. They really thought on the same lines and both realised each other's greatness and genius. But at that first moment, I think each was somewhat overawed to be meeting the other.

Did Shostakovich ever refer to his admiration for Britten?

Shostakovich was not an easy person to talk to. He might have made one or two remarks but a conversation with him was quite difficult. But the enthusiasm he had when we told him that Britten was coming to meet him was obvious. He was clearly excited and pleased. There was no question that he was a great admirer of Britten. But it's difficult to discuss views and ideas with a very great person like that. You could with Rostropovich, but Shostakovich and Britten were on a different level. Ben didn't like Brahms, but you couldn't say to him: 'Why don't you like Brahms?' so I didn't have any detailed discussions. But from the way they reacted to each other it was very obvious that they revered each other.

Yet their music is by no means similar.

They were very different in their approach to composing. Much of Shostakovich's music arose from his situation and the drama of his life which was very different from Britten's. You couldn't expect the same kind of outpouring from them, but each certainly understood what the other was trying to say. But in time there certainly was a coming together. They began to influence each other with ideas and the way they composed. I'm sure that their admiration for each other would have done

that. Each knew that what he was listening to was something he also should consider, such as the psychological approach to music that Britten had. One can see the Fourteenth Symphony as leaning towards Britten's approach: it wasn't the Fifth or the Seventh Symphony. Yet they started off at two different ends of the world. It was a remarkable association.

Was Britten's attitude towards the Soviet Union influenced by a political sympathy?

He would have been quickly disabused of that by what he would have heard. I don't know what close conversations would have taken place between Slava and Britten but they wouldn't have been in total admiration for the system. If you knew anybody who was there and involved in it, the iniquities of the Soviet régime were all too plain to see – they would have the opposite effect and turn you to the right!

Would you see Britten's admiration in the 1960s for Shostakovich as a development of his earlier musical admiration for Tchaikovsky?

Absolutely, and also Shostakovich's links with Musorgsky and Rimsky Korsakov. I think this was a thread that Britten understood. But Shostakovich's music was shot with all the anger and fear and everything else that he had in his life and in that respect it was different. I am sure

that Britten's interest would have been there anyway, but I don't know how they would have got together had it not been for their almost chance meeting in 1960. Perhaps through Rostropovich or Richter, or at our Festival of British Music in Russia in 1971.

Do you think their own increasing ill health and intimations of mortality also brought them together?

Britten certainly had an enormous sympathy for Shostakovich and an understanding of his manner and psychology. Shostakovich was an amazing individual. He was just a beautiful man, a lovely man. Britten and he loved each other. They really loved each other at the end.

Both composers suffered in different ways. How aware were you of this at the time as something which might have enhanced their mutual understanding?

I don't know what personal barbs Britten suffered on account of his homosexuality. One accepted the situation that Britten and Pears lived together in Aldeburgh, but as it wasn't in the open and you didn't talk about it you didn't really think about it. Shostakovich's was a different kind of suffering. For him, it was not having his music performed and

being in fear of what Stalin thought of his latest work. He was in a terrified state all the time and you couldn't fail to recognise it.

What would you say about the Britten-Rostropovich relationship?

That relationship was also unique, but in a different way. Rostropovich was a totally different character from Shostakovich. He and Britten were completely and utterly wrapped up in each other. They became as close as one could possibly get, as though they were real brothers. After their deaths, Rostropovich said of both Britten and Shostakovich that he could hardly believe that had known these two great people. But at the time Britten and Rostropovich were very closely emotionally related to each other.

What inspired Britten about Rostropovich?

Rostropovich's ability to play anything and everything. But apart from his great musicianship he had the greatest charm in the world and the greatest personality – he was the biggest kisser in the world! He made people want to write for him. He really inspired composers both with his character and his musicianship.

Appendix VII: Interview with Victor Hochhauser CBE, London,

4 November 2009

[See *Letters from a Life V*, pp. 276-7 and 380 for amplification and biographical details]

[Edited]

How did Britten and Shostakovich meet in September 1960?

We brought the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra to this country for the 1960 Edinburgh Festival. This concert was repeated in the Royal Festival Hall. Shostakovich was present and I was asked by Rozhdestvensky to invite Britten to the concert, but was told by his assistant that he was too busy composing. However, the following day his assistant called to say that if Shostakovich was in London Britten wanted to meet him. I therefore arranged for Britten to sit in the ceremonial box with Shostakovich. I was there too, together with the Soviet Ambassador, and introduced them; and afterwards Britten met Rozhdestvensky and Rostropovich downstairs. After some discussion about the performance, Rostropovich said that he would like to come to the Aldeburgh Festival and asked me to make arrangements.

What was Britten's reaction to Rostropovich's performance of Shostakovich's First Cello Concerto?

I could see that Ben was genuinely impressed, but it was a different style of music which he called 'dramatic music'. I think he admired something different from his own music. Britten's music is not on the same wavelength as Shostakovich's, who was a great dramatic and tragic composer and this did not entirely appeal to him. He admired some, but not all of the symphonies, and their orchestration, but not as much as he loved Schubert. Very little Shostakovich was performed at the Aldeburgh Festival during his lifetime. However, in time Britten came to appreciate Shostakovich's tragic music which was not quite his world. The vast panorama of suffering in the some of the symphonies came to impress him.

How would you define Britten's attitude towards Russia?

Ben was a positive influence in opening up relations with Russia. He very much wanted his works to be performed in the Soviet Union. Our Embassy was also very keen for *Peter Grimes* to be staged in Moscow. However, Boosey and Hawkes wanted money for this and as Britten was not interested in this aspect they fell out. Madame Ampenoff [cf. *Letters from a Life*, vol. V, pp. 257-8] had a pre-

revolutionary attitude towards the Soviet government which was not conducive to an understanding. So somebody like me was necessary. Ben was not political and never went to the Soviet Embassy for official occasions. He wrote to Furtseva privately after the *War Requiem* incident in 1962. The Russians, on the other hand, were more interested in the political angle. They knew that Britten was a quasi-pacifist. He was certainly not a Communist, but did want better relations and a friendship with the Russians. Britten was probably an obvious choice from a Soviet point of view since they knew how to exploit any situation. They knew that he was close to the establishment and the Royal Family. Edward Heath liked him very much. Britten essentially responded to the Russians for more human reasons.

What would you say about the Britten-Shostakovich relationship?

Britten was a very unique and isolated figure and didn't mix much with other composers. His letters to me are very warm, yet he was a very withdrawn human being. To him the idea that Shostakovich was a great composer appealed, and he admired him, but the friendship came about more through Rostropovich. It was never difficult for Britten and Shostakovich to communicate. Shostakovich was not a

great raconteur nor wit, yet he could be very funny. One couldn't have a long conversation with him. There was always somebody on hand to interpret and Britten and Shostakovich were always able to discuss elements of music which they did when they met.

Shostakovich was a very remote figure. He was intensely private and one could never penetrate his thoughts. Britten was the kind of person you could really like if you got to know him, but it was very difficult to fathom Shostakovich; he was constantly nervous and not given to small talk. He was a very kind man in an unobtrusive way. He came to like Britten and his music very much. It was difficult to know whether Shostakovich would have liked to express himself more fully than he did. He never developed any statement.

How would you explain the relationship between Britten and Rostropovich?

Rostropovich was not an ordinary person. He was aware that he was a genius; he was also an outsize personality. When he loved, he loved more than anybody else, when he hated, he hated more than anyone else; he also understood how to exploit a situation. But his relationship with Britten was unique and a genuine friendship on both sides.

Appendix VIII: Letter from Sir Charles Mackerras CH (1925-2010)

[Extract]

At the time I was working with Britten [during the 1956-59 Aldeburgh Festivals] he had not yet met Shostakovich personally but he made no secret of the fact that he considered him an extremely dramatic composer and that he admired Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth* more than the local composers like Vaughan Williams.

As far as Tchaikovsky is concerned, Ben always said that he had composed *The Prince of the Pagodas* with a score of *The Sleeping Beauty* by his side.

I always had the impression that Ben's tastes in music were definitely anti-Germanic (look at his low opinion of Brahms and Richard Strauss) and that he was more inspired by the passionate nature of Tchaikovsky's music, apart from the fortuitous bond of homosexuality. That he was inspired also by Italian composers such as Verdi is very evident in the big ensembles in *Peter Grimes*.

Appendix IX: Interviews with Donald Mitchell CBE, London,

11 August 2008 and 8 July 2009

[For a summary of Mitchell's close association with Britten, see *Letters from a Life V*, pp.205-6]

[Edited text, combining the two interviews]

Britten's interest in Russia and Russian music is unusual for an English composer. How would you explain it?

It was long-standing, and formed during his childhood. It derived from the overwhelming impact of Russian works on him as a young man and student. It was also part of a wider cultural phenomenon: a passionate, and selective, interest in Russia as a result of the Russian Revolution.

Was Frank Bridge an additional factor?

I don't remember Ben mentioning this, but Russian music must have been a topic they discussed from time to time given Bridge's extraordinarily wide interests and knowledge.

Why did Britten admire Tchaikovsky in particular?

Ben was enormously impressed by Tchaikovsky; his attitude was one of total admiration. He learned so much from him, and he was a constant

presence in Ben's creative life. His enthusiasm for Tchaikovsky was quite amazing actually and very unusual for a young composer in this country in the 1930s. It was a passion that lived with him till his dying days. Ben was impressed by his orchestral sound and colour, and by the variety of orchestras involved in a big Tchaikovsky work. He felt that the endless challenges of Tchaikovsky's music – his originality of sound and form - were overlooked in performance, and this influenced how people listened to him: his popularity was therefore an invented one. Probably later in his life, when he was more aware of himself, Tchaikovsky's homosexuality also played a role.

How far did he admire other Russian composers?

He greatly admired Prokofiev: a vital, and often overlooked, creative influence. He never talked about Musorgsky. [As to Shostakovich] the Russian aspect was not the vital influence; the relationship might have happened anywhere. It derived from their mutual admiration for each other's music, and their philosophies of being a composer in the twentieth century. That mattered a great deal to Ben. He always had a very strong feeling that music should have a major role to play in the cultural life of a nation, which actually also meant in the politics of a

nation. I think that this was something that brought them very close together.

If one looks at Britten's relationships with other composers – I'm particularly thinking of Stravinsky, whose early music he greatly admired - there was never a comparable degree of intimacy.

I had some dealings with Stravinsky when I was working closely with Ben but that was never something that especially interested him or that he wanted to pursue in a personal way. But he never suggested that his admiration for the music was wiped out; he constantly learned from Stravinsky throughout his creative life.

How far was Britten aware of the political pressure on Shostakovich, for example, in 1960, when he was forced to join the Communist Party. He strikes me as being very sensitive to other people's positions.

You're absolutely right. But I don't ever remember Ben ever mentioning this to me, though I'm sure he would have much regretted it.

Britten seems ambivalent in his attitude towards symphonic form as it developed in the nineteenth century, yet he admired Shostakovich, whom many considered – certainly in 1960 – as a composer of symphonies.

What about Mahler, for whom Ben was no greater enthusiast. After all, Mahler represented the most incredible history of the symphony in his own culture, when there weren't political things obscuring the scene.

I was making a distinction between the symphonies of Mahler and those, for example, of Brahms, towards which Britten's diaries suggest that he was less enthusiastic.

I don't know that we ever talked a lot about individual symphonies but Britten had a high regard for composers and works of genius. I think that if he were sitting here now he would say that what mattered was that Brahms had something that not many composers have and that is a compositional genius. He would wish us to show appropriate respect for a man who has spoken to millions of people throughout the world in many different cultures.

When Britten wrote his tribute to Shostakovich in 1966 he compared his own works with those of Shostakovich as 'Children of similar fathers with many of the same aims'. What did he mean?

He was thinking of composers and other musicians and the very strong links between the two of them because of their own individual passions for Mahler – and of course there were many others as well.

In the draft of the tribute Britten has crossed out a reference to misunderstanding and coolness.

Ben would have been very unhappy about this sentence. He was very straightforward and realistic about human relationships and that's different from making public statements about them.

What do you feel Britten might have learned, musically speaking, from Shostakovich?

He didn't ever discuss any particular works with me, but I was aware of how impressive Ben found Shostakovich's chamber music in the 1960s, partly because Ben in those late decades was conscious of the extraordinary significance of chamber music. He shows that in his own compositional output. In his later years he became increasingly interested in Shostakovich's chamber music.

Is there any musical or personal allusion to Shostakovich in 'The Prodigal Son'?

A creative relationship between men of genius is impossible to pin down, but it's there in the music, isn't it? At the time there was a general feeling that there was an artistic relationship between the two. Here was Ben, as

it were, following in Shostakovich's footsteps a little bit, if you like, or that they were walking the same path together.

Some have detected the influence of Shostakovich in a relatively early work like 'Our Hunting Fathers'. Both composers certainly used percussion in a striking way but Britten already had a particular interest in percussion.

I'm sure it was because of this that when Ben suddenly discovered a composer who was also very passionate about it, whose music expressed it, that was another reason for their, musically speaking, getting together. But I think that was really very much there from the start with Ben. The xylophone was actually a major source of inspiration for him. Now all composers seem to write for everything, but that wasn't so in the 1930s. If one looks at English music at the time, there's nothing comparable. Ben always used to talk in this strange way: 'Why are you wasting your time looking at these pieces [such as *Our Hunting Fathers*] that I long ago abandoned in mind?' I don't know whether that was ever quite true.

Did Britten become increasingly pessimistic in the 1960s?

Ben was much more aware of the international situation than people generally realise. It was all the harder for him because there were many

periods in his life when he felt optimistic but as the end came the old horrors of the pre-war years seemed to be repeated endlessly.

Did he believe in an afterlife? Shostakovich criticised 'War Requiem' for offering consolation in this respect.

I don't think he did believe in the idea of an afterlife, and I was very close to him during those final weeks of his life and I can honestly say that I was never aware at any time of any concern about an afterlife. I don't think it ever really formed part of his thinking. And of course he died very peacefully. I don't know of any outward signs of anxiety. I think he certainly believed that the best of the afterlife was in all the marvellous compositions he admired so much by composers long dead. What more could one ask or want from an afterlife than that? And I think that what he wrote himself as a composer was written with that sort of thought in mind: how his music would represent to some people, if he were lucky, an afterlife of a very valuable kind. After all, it has proved to be, certainly for me and for you and for many others. I don't think that he really gave much thought to it except in that sort of way.

When you speak, it brings back so many memories of that last week of his life. I had to tell him that it wasn't possible for me to continue going

up every day. We knew that it would be the last time we actually saw each other. He understood that absolutely, so it wasn't in many ways a goodbye but nonetheless we knew that we were not going to meet again. Quite extraordinary, but it had to be. You bring so many memories back. He was a lovely guy. I miss him every day, still.

Rostropovich expressed regret that Britten died with so much music yet to write.

Ben was too early in his death, but his funeral was not sombre. It was very positive. Positive memories of a remarkable man as well as a remarkable musical genius. I think we all thought how wonderful it had been knowing him.

Appendix X: Interview with Irina Shostakovich,

Shostakovich Centre, Paris, 31 March 2009

[b. 1934; Russian literary scholar and the composer's third wife. They married in 1962]

[Translated from the Russian and edited]

How would you explain the development of a friendship and creative relationship between Britten and Shostakovich?

It seems to me that it began with a very friendly attitude on the part of Britten to Dmitrii Dmitrievich and to his music. This was followed by a mutual interest in their creative work, in each other's music.

At what point did Shostakovich first become aware of Britten's music?

I cannot say now but I know that in 1962 when we came for the rehearsals of *Katerina Ismailova* at Covent Garden we were informed that Britten had been very helpful in staging this opera and that he once attended a rehearsal. Maybe somehow via Lord Harewood he assisted in putting this opera on the stage.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁹This point is not documented in the Britten-Harewood correspondence in the BPL, nor is there any correspondence between Britten and its conductor Edward Downes, but see 'U nas v gostiakh Benjamin Britten', p.130, and *Letters from a Life V*, pp.543-4, for Britten's interest in this production.

Which Britten works did Shostakovich mention in conversation?

Dmitrii Dmitrievich knew many works by Britten. He was interested in them and listened to them as soon as they appeared. He would try to listen to every new work, as he was interested in Britten's musical ideas. Dmitrii Dmitrievich very much appreciated *War Requiem*. I also remember that the chamber opera from England came to Moscow and gave Britten's operas at the Stanislavsky Theatre and we attended all their performances.

Shostakovich clearly liked and respected Britten as a person.

Britten was very attractive in his modesty, kindness and full-heartedness.

How far was Shostakovich aware of the difficulties Britten faced in his life on account of his homosexuality?

I cannot answer that. I think that Dmitrii Dmitrievich was not interested in it. It was something obviously we did know but when people like each other and have a good attitude to each other they understand each other more easily.

What you do recall of Britten's visits to the Soviet Union and your visit to Aldeburgh in 1972?

I particularly remember his visit to us in Moscow just after their return from Armenia, and when Britten and Pears came to see in the New Year with us at Zhukovka [1966/7]. The visit to Aldeburgh wasn't for the Festival; Dmitrii Dmitrievich and he just wanted to see each other. Britten was writing *Death in Venice* and the first act of the score was ready. He showed this unfinished score to Dmitrii Dmitrievich and also showed us the surroundings of the house where he lived and around Aldeburgh. He had an open cabriolet car and everything was real in it. He also had a wonderful housekeeper⁷⁸⁰ who gave us a lot of treats. Peter Pears was present and also Rosamund Strode.

Did Britten and Shostakovich ever discuss other composers such as Tchaikovsky and Mahler, and did they use an interpreter when they met?

I don't remember that that they discussed anything about Tchaikovsky or Mahler. Britten did say that Stravinsky had a very negative attitude to him and apparently he also had a not very good attitude to him in return. We need to admit that Stravinsky in general persecuted Britten. Britten would say that Stravinsky is a composer without national roots.

⁷⁸⁰Elizabeth Hudson, until 1973.

During the meetings with Shostakovich and Britten there was never an interpreter. Britten did not speak Russian but he learned some words from Rostropovich and at the entrance to his house there was a sign 'Evil dog'. He had a small dachshund and Slava [Rostropovich] gave him this sign as a present, meaning 'Be careful it's a cruel dog'. Britten remembered it and he used to say to his dachshund 'zliaia, zliaia!'

Appendix XI: Letter from Boris Tishchenko (1939-2010), 21 May 2008

[Tishchenko was a postgraduate composition pupil of Shostakovich at the Leningrad Conservatory from 1961 to 1965]

[See also transl. A. Ardova, *Letters of Dmitri Dmitriyevich Shostakovich to Boris Tishchenko, with the addressee's commentaries and reminiscences* (Saint Petersburg: Kompozitor, 2001), and L. Hakobian, *Music of the Soviet Age*, pp.233-8]

[Extract translated from the Russian by the author]

In the Fourteenth Symphony Shostakovich used percussion in a different way from *The Nose* and the Fourth Symphony. In these works percussion is very important, but still holds the auxiliary character, whereas in the Fourteenth Symphony percussion has the front role.

I am not familiar with the thoughts of the musicologist Hakobian, but I have never found any 'canonical lines' in Shostakovich. I remember how he played the whole of the Fourteenth Symphony to me on the grand piano and then asked 'Is this a symphony? And if not, what should I call it?' I answered that I didn't think it was a symphony and that the first half should be called 'De Profundis'. Dmitri Dmitrievich listened and then still chose to do it his way, which proves the absence of a taste for

'canonical lines'. And in general, the Fourteenth Symphony is not a 'Shadowy Mass for the Dead', but rather a PROTEST AGAINST DEATH. These are the words of Dmitrii Dmitrievich Shostakovich.

By the way, I wouldn't be too far off the truth if I note that the theme of death in 'Malagueña' on the same note to the words 'Death entered and left the tavern' has something in common with the theme of death in my *Requiem*, also on the same note, to the words 'The stars of death stood above us'.

Shostakovich praised the *Requiem* of Britten. The modesty of his expression is connected with his not liking the perfect degrees, as he was a very great man, and very moderate in his emotions. I never heard from him the words 'greatest', 'genius', 'unsurpassed'. He always used more modest epithets according to his character, nor did he like it when his music was praised to an excessive degree. He wrote to me about *War Requiem* on 23.8.1963: 'I want to introduce all of you to this, which I think is almost a great work'. In his words this is already a perfect degree.

I knew about his great love for Britten from his words. He continually recommended to us that we hear *The Turn of the Screw*, *The Rape of Lucretia*

and *Albert Herring* when Covent Garden brought them to Leningrad. Once, when I was a guest in his house, he put on the record of *Curlew River*. In this act shone a deep respect to Britten, whom Shostakovich really loved, valued and regarded as one of the greatest contemporary composers.

I cannot explain in more detail the creative similarities between Britten and Shostakovich. I can only give an answer of the great musicologist Alexander Dolzhansky to a similar question: 'What is common between Shostakovich and Stravinsky?' He replied: 'Common between them is that as Shostakovich is unlike Stravinsky so is Stravinsky unlike Shostakovich'. This is, of course, a joke, but every great composer is different.

What is common for Britten and Shostakovich is their immense power of impact on the listener. The common element of these composers' spiritual essence is, most evidently, their thoughts about death and their anti-war stance.

Appendix XII: Interview with Oleg Vinogradov, 8 September 2010

[Vinogradov choreographed *The Prince of the Pagodas* for the 1972-3 season of the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad. For an outline of Vinogradov's revised scenario for this production, and Britten's enthusiastic and detailed response, see photocopy of letter from Dzhemal Dalgat to Britten, 15 December 1971, pp. 2-15, and typewritten carbon copy of letter from Britten to Dalgat, 7 January 1972, in BPL: DD. See also the photographs of this production in the BPL. The choreographer's contribution is not discussed in Plant, p.13, 18, nor in Cooke, *Britten and the Far East*, pp.97-8; and both misdate the season as 1971-2].

[By telephone; translated from the Russian and edited]

How do you regard Britten's music in 'The Prince of the Pagodas'? How explicitly do the work's music and scenario relate to the ballets of Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Stravinsky?

I am absolutely delighted with the ballet's music. I loved it then and I still love it today. It is simply beautiful. But the dramatic basis of the work, its scenario, did not correspond to the norms and forms of Classical ballet. The script is overburdened with plot lines, situations and characters. This is especially relevant in Act 1. But we could not shorten Britten's work. In choreography, however, there are specific rules. For example, variations

can last between one and three minutes, but by no means five. The same is true about corps de ballet parts. None of these rules were followed in the work. I do not know if Britten wrote the ballet together with a choreographer, but if he had, the choreographer would have advised him. If we take Tchaikovsky, for instance, the musical plans which he received from Marius Petipa contained detailed chronometric study of every number, specified by seconds, minutes and musical examples. The performances which they created together stand out by their absolute harmony.

As for Stravinsky, he composed short ballets, there's nothing to shorten there. Britten's is a huge ballet and the audience in England was not ready for such a massive stage work. In Russia, however, there exists a tradition of long ballets in three to four acts. But the tendency is to reduce the length. It started quite a while ago and continues today. Prokofiev was well aware of this tendency; he tended to take into account the peculiarities of the ballet genre. He would work with a choreographer and pay attention to time requirements. But today even Prokofiev's ballets, as well as those by Tchaikovsky and Glazunov, are reduced. Three acts is a long time today, the time in which one can fly to London.

How effective do you regard Britten as a ballet composer compared to Tchaikovsky?

Extremely effective. The music is wonderful, incredibly suitable for dance, diverse, and full of rhythm. It is extraordinary music. Britten is a first-class ballet composer. He is superb. Unfortunately, the faults of the work's dramaturgy hindered its success. However, the work's best musical moments were used with virtuosity by our dancers, especially by Mikhail Baryshnikov. It was fantastic! What Britten had in common with Tchaikovsky was his rich melodic foundation. And this is very rare! What is more, Britten's pioneering rhythmical elements, his experimental discoveries, and the colours in the score did not obstruct the choreography, but on the contrary assisted and greatly contributed to it.

How was the work received in Leningrad?

The work had a wonderful reception. It's a pity we could not make it shorter. Once again, the work suffered from its dramatic shortcomings: Act 2 is especially long, with the travels of the Belle Rose. It contains a bit of, so to say, superfluous music. No, it is beautiful, but a bit too much for the ballet. The action did not move. I was very young then and was not personally in contact with Britten. He corresponded with our conductor Dzhemal Dalgat. The conductor was firm in defending every note of

Britten's music. He preserved the score intact and would not give in. He would not allow us to reduce anything. He was right in terms of music but, from the scenario's point of view, wrong.

I say again: this is absolutely superb music. It is one of the best ballet scores. But the scenario does not correspond to the level of contemporary ballet theatre, and for this reason the work is not produced today. But the music is very up to date with modernity, it is great dance music. It is beautiful in every respect. It is a very modern score.

Appendix XIII: Interview with Galina Vishnevskaya,

Galina Vishnevskaya Opera Centre, Moscow, 11 June 2010

[See *Letters from a Life V*, p.325, for a summary of Vishnevskaya's association with Britten, and *Galina: A Russian Story* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1984) for her memoirs]

[Translated from the Russian and edited]

How acquainted were you with Britten's music before you first met him?

I did not know Britten's music at all before I met him. In 1961 I gave a recital at the Aldeburgh Festival accompanied by Rostropovich, and Ben Britten and Peter Pears were present. I sang Musorgsky's *Songs and Dances of Death* and Tchaikovsky's romances in the first half, then Schumann, Bellini, Verdi, and Richard Strauss [plus Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Puccini]. It was a crazy programme; I think I sang everything. After the concert Ben came to see me in the wings. He expressed his admiration and said that he was beginning to write *War Requiem*, and that he wanted to write a soprano part for me. 'Do you sing in English?' 'No'. 'Latin?' 'Yes, of course, I sing in Italian'. 'Then I'll write for you in Latin.'

If he had not heard me that night, perhaps there would have been a completely different structure to this work, and the female part would

not have been there. The influences of my concert are obvious: *Liber scriptus* [she sings], it's the image of the Commander in *Songs and Dances of Death*: very rough. The *Benedictus*, on the other hand, is like an Italian aria. And in general, my part stands out in his entire creative work; it is not like anything else he composed. My entire programme is there somewhere, and maybe it interfered with his work, and prevented him from composing differently.

Britten was clearly inspired by the unique characteristics of your voice.

Yes, of course, and the same with Shostakovich. When Ben sent me the *War Requiem* in separate instalments, Slava was on tour somewhere in America, and could not hear me rehearsing. So when he returned, I showed it to him. He immediately started to play it and said: 'If I did not know that this was written for you, by playing it I would understand – he's painted your portrait!' A composer probably perceives you not only by your voice – the timbre and range – but also your personality, and especially so when we'd become close friends. This opens up qualities which others cannot understand or access. I later asked him to write an opera for me - *Anna Karenina*. And he was eager to write it, with Peter singing Karenin, and me – Anna. These two parts were already in his head before he died.

How would you explain Britten's relationship with Rostropovich?

I believe that in the first place it was an unofficial mutual understanding and recognition. Maybe with Rostropovich he discussed other things [when I was not present], but when I was, a completely new stream of human relationship would flow in. Not to mention the fact that I don't really speak foreign languages, and could not understand most of what they were talking about. I could only perceive their, our, inter-relationship. And the links between us were mostly on the basis of friendship. They spoke German to each other - Aldeburgh Deutsch, it was called – they knew just a few words, but they could talk for hours. If someone overheard them, they could only grasp separate words and what it was roughly about. But Ben and Slava understood somehow.

Was a shared love for Tchaikovsky also important?

Yes, Ben loved Tchaikovsky very much. Ben accompanied me in the final scene from *Onegin* [in 1963]; and when Slava and I recorded *The Poet's Echo* at Snape [in 1968], he asked us to put Tchaikovsky on the other side of the record. He really loved this composer. On another occasion, I sang Tchaikovsky's romances, including *The Fearful Moment* [op. 28, no. 6], with Ben at Snape. He was a phenomenal pianist. He played in such a way that I forgot about the singing. And this happened a second time on

the Snape stage, when Britten accompanied Peter and me in the duet from Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* [in 1968]. There is quite a long introduction; Ben was playing the piano, and I stood there, closed my eyes and thought 'How beautiful!' All of a sudden, I stood there thinking 'Why is nobody playing?' I looked at him and he had to repeat a few last bars. I also remember that Peter had a long sheet of paper with the Russian words in huge letters, as he was singing for the first time in Russian.

How would you compare Britten and Rostropovich as accompanists in Tchaikovsky?

It was very similar. Simple, very simple. One should never bring one's individuality into Tchaikovsky. One should not try to exhibit oneself; Tchaikovsky rejects it. One needs to play simply as it is written. Ben and Rostropovich were very close to each other in spirit as musicians. It was especially obvious when they performed together. It was an incredible understanding, as if one continued the other. When I listened to Peter and Ben was playing, it was also extraordinary, like breathing together. I don't know any other chamber singer like Peter Pears. Such subtlety and simplicity at the same time. Simplicity is the most difficult thing in art.

What was Britten's attitude towards the Soviet Union?

When Ben and Peter spent a month with us in 1965, we were trying our best to create for them an illusion of a wonderfully good life. We tried to hide the bad things: we had problems with food and always lacked one thing or another. All the other composers who were there on holiday also went out of their way to get the best things for us: food, cognac, anything you wanted. But Ben and Peter were very unassuming in everyday life. I remember we took them to our dacha directly from the airport. We arrived and, as usual, running water was very scarce, things didn't work, and there was no light. I was eating breakfast downstairs, and Slava came and said: 'I don't know what to do. They went to the bathroom; Ben turned on the water and it was brown! But he just filled the bath and started washing'. I nearly fainted.

Ben was not so naive as not to notice the reality. Especially when he had come into direct contact with Soviet power after he had written *War Requiem* and I was not allowed to sing it. What is more, I was in London! I sang *Aida* in Covent Garden and in two weeks I was supposed to be at Coventry Cathedral for the première. I remember that Ben came to a performance, and said, 'I do not understand why they do not allow you to sing. You are already here'. I gave my last performance, and the

Embassy instructed me to say that I had to leave, that I was to take part in the shooting of a film. When Ben was here in 1971, we already had the whole situation upon us. We did not hide anything from him then. Ben also made his opinion known in a very open way, without hiding it from anybody. And certainly he hated Soviet power. He remembered what had happened over *War Requiem* for his entire life.

What can you say about Britten's relationship with Shostakovich?

They had enormous respect for each other. Very special respect. Because inside, each of them was very well aware of his significance in music. Britten and Shostakovich were both great figures. And from this height they treated each other with great, great respect. When the recording of *War Requiem* came out, I brought it to Dmitrii Dmitrievich, and he kept it for several months on his record player. Slava and I once came to visit him again and said: 'You are listening to *War Requiem*?' He replied: 'I listen to it every day. This is the greatest work of the twentieth century'. He was completely overwhelmed by this work. And after that he went on to write the Fourteenth Symphony.

So in this respect Britten influenced Shostakovich?

Possibly; and not only in a tendency towards vocal works, but to big works, with emotions on a grand scale. This can be felt in the Blok cycle. It is an incredibly profound work, like a life revelation – as if he had seen something inside his own self that he needed to write about. Yes, I believe the influence was there, because it is very personal.

What do you recall of Britten's composition of 'The Poet's Echo'?

Ben had a small book with him: the poems in Russian, accompanied by a literal translation of every line in English. He told me there that he wanted to compose for me. For me it was a great feast! He also said which poems. He had chosen them himself. It was a completely prepared programme. Just like Shostakovich, who never asked which poems I would like. He would choose himself and compose, and never showed anything until he finished. And Britten neither.

In Dilizhan we were living in separate cottages, so everything was secluded, and it was only when Slava and I would go for a walk that we could overhear a little. When we took walks with Ben, he would sometimes stop and one could see that creative work was going on inside him, as if he were listening to something. At the time I was rehearsing for

filming *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*. I would 'aaaaaaaaaaaaa' every day; and Slava would say: 'Quiet, you will disturb him'. But I had to prepare for this huge part. Ben told me: 'Be careful - it's for very high notes. Please don't damage your voice'. I replied: 'Look what you've written for me - you've put the same high C in *War Requiem*!' When we were recording it, he said: 'Yes, I'm a bad person, I've put in that high C'. 'Then correct it!' But no, he kept it the way it was.

Was Britten inspired by the Russian landscape?

The nature in Dilizhan is wonderful. But when we came there, the first thing we saw was a big swimming pool, without water of course. On the bottom lay a huge dead rat. Our Armenian hosts went out of their way to get everything we wanted. They could get us the moon from the sky. There were so many funny episodes there. When we arrived back in Moscow, we had a Mercedes, which at that time was quite incredible. We were probably the only ones with a Mercedes in Moscow; now they even take potatoes to the market in their Mercedeses. So we drove all the way from Moscow, via Novgorod, where we stopped for the night. And the next day we arrived at Mikhailovskoe by nightfall. Director Geichenko wanted us to see Pushkin's house before it got completely dark. And we took a tour around the house with candles in our hands, and when we

came back to the director's home, Ben sat at the piano, and played the whole cycle [cf. Pears, p.132]. And in 'Lines written during a sleepless night', the piano is like a metronome, and when Ben started to play, the old clock outside struck midnight. I'm telling you this now and I still feel it. The night, the darkness, the candlelight, Ben is playing, Peter is singing, and we all held our breath until the end. Ben did not stop, he played until the end in this silence. It was as if Pushkin himself had come in and listened. And later Geichenko said: 'My God! This clock has never struck since the war!' That's why Ben called the cycle *The Poet's Echo*.

How would you assess Britten's setting of Pushkin?

The setting has a wonderful feeling of the words. There is not a single wrong stress. The intonation is absolutely correct. Russian composers sometimes write in such a way that the stresses fall on wrong syllables. But here there is absolute precision. Britten penetrated the emotional heart of Pushkin. It's always easier to sing it than to explain. It is written in such a way that it can't be any different. You remember, Glinka in the nineteenth century *Ia pomniu chudnoe mgnoven'e*, and here – *Ia dumal, serdtse pozabylo...* - how can it be any different? As if it were born together with the verse. This is the mystery of genius. In terms of Pushkin's settings, I'd put Britten next to Glinka. He lived and created at a time

historically close to Pushkin's; he composed a Pushkin opera as well as the romances. Many composers set Pushkin, but not in such a way. Other pieces may be very melodic and easy to remember but the music dominates the verse, they are not next to each other, one is above the other. With Britten, Pushkin is always in the foreground and the rest is next to him.

What do you recall of your professional relationship with Shostakovich?

Shostakovich never consulted Slava or me during a work's composition. You could guess from certain hints that he was composing a piece for you. With me he simply invited us to dinner. We arrived, he sat down at the piano, and played and sang the whole cycle. His singing was awful; he got all the notes wrong. But Slava told me: 'You did not hear Prokofiev sing – he was even worse!' He would ask: 'Do you like it?...Then I would like to dedicate it to you, if you don't mind'. Always the same phrase: 'If you don't mind'. Shostakovich was such a closed person that it would not even cross your mind simply to have a chat with him. With Ben you could. Peter and Ben were totally open with us. With Dmitrii Dimitrievich, maybe because we all knew about his torment, about the bans on his work, we were afraid to touch him. It was as if he was wearing armour, or had put a wall in front of him.

Why did Britten quote Russian Kontakion in his Third Suite for Cello; and what do you recall of Bishop Pimen?

It wasn't Rostropovich's suggestion. Maybe it has something to do with Ben's premonition of his own death. If we link this to Tchaikovsky, his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies already reveal a gradual departure from life, and maybe Britten heard this theme there. When Britten came to the USSR [in 1964] we went to Zagorsk, the Troitsko-Sergiev Monastery. Pimen was the archbishop there at the time, and we introduced them to each other. We were friends with Pimen, back in the Lavra years, and then when he was sent to Saratov. He was very fond of music, and he corresponded with Ben, who used to send him records of his music.

You sang the soprano part of the Fourteenth Symphony under Barshai, Britten and Rostropovich. How would you compare their interpretations?

I don't remember anything of Barshai's interpretation. I do remember the sixty rehearsals we'd had. With Ben there were three rehearsals, four at most. With him you could do everything you wanted; he never overwhelmed the singer. He would simply tune into you immediately. Very simple. I would compare Ben's interpretation with Slava's. They were very close as musicians; they shared a common musical thinking, as

if they had one head for the two of them. Maybe this is the reason why they had such a collaboration in music, because they could not sit there for ages and chat their time away. They thought about music instead, one would compose, the other perform: this is how they communicated.

What did Britten make of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' at the Bolshoi Theatre in 1971?

The production was very solid, like everything at the Bolshoi. There were good singers, and the opera was directed by Boris Pokrovsky, our best director. When Ben saw a woman in the part of Oberon he was surprised. We simply did not find the right male alto. I don't think Ben particularly liked the production, but being a polite Englishman, he did not openly express his final opinion.⁷⁸¹

How do you recall your association with Britten nearly fifty years after you first met him?

I have so many memories about Aldeburgh. It's a huge chunk of my life. Slava loved the place so much. After Ben died we bought a house there. On my first visit, without going inside, I came to the garden, and from under a camellia I picked up small anemones, and went to his grave. I

⁷⁸¹Cf. J. Egan, 'The Bolshoi's Britten', *Opera*, 17, January 1966.

brought him the flowers and said: 'Here we are, living in Aldeburgh now'. This is how the circle ends. One may have a lot of business relations, but to be together is rare in life. The higher one gets in art, the stronger one guards one's privacy. Shostakovich was like this. Different composers were often among his guests, and there was a reverence towards him, but as a human being he was very lonely. That's why Britten cherished Slava for his spontaneousness, which disregarded his high status as a composer. He was all kisses.

APPENDIX XIV: Britten's volumes of *Tchaikovsky: Polnoe Sobranie*

Sochinenii (Moscow: Musgiz/Muzyka, 1940-71; vols 2 and 43 also

published in Leningrad).

(BPL, currently uncatalogued)

For the contents of individual volumes, see 'Pyotr Tchaikovsky: Complete Collected Works' on International Music Score Library Project website:

imslp.org/.../Pyotr_Ilyich_Tchaikovsky_-_Complete_Works_Edition

Key

(a) * = inscribed with a Musica Rara [25 Newport Court, London W2]

or English price marking, i.e. probably obtained by Britten between 1955 and his first visit to the USSR in 1963; see fn. 5.

(b) In bold = volume listed at the rear of Britten's 1963 pocket diary as one he did not hitherto possess ('Tschaikov. Ed vols not got (last one got in 62').

Operas

1A (1953)

1B (1953)

1C (1953)

1 (additional volume) (1953) [two copies; one *]

2 (1950)

3A (1959)*

3B (1959)*

4 (1948) [*Eugene Onegin*: full score; signed 'Benjamin Britten' with corrections by Britten on pp.152 and 160]

5A (1964)

5B (1964)

6A (1969)

6B (1969)

7A (1951)*

7B(1951)

8A (1948)*

8B (1949)

9A (1950)*

9B (1950)*

9C (1950)*

Ballets

11A (1957)

11B (1957)

12A (1952)*

12B (1952)*

12C (1952)*

12D (1952)*

13A (1955)

13B (1955) [minor annotations, possibly by Britten, on p.81]

Music for dramatic productions

14 (1962)*

Full scores of works for orchestra

15A (1957)

15B (1954)*

16A (1949)*

16B (1949)*

17A (1963)*

17B (1963)*

18 (1949)*

19A (1948)*

19B (1948)* [signed 'Benjamin Britten'; pp. 144-75: 'Rêves d'enfant' from Suite No. 2, annotated for performance by Britten]

20 (1946) [signed 'Benjamin Britten'; pp. 224-98: Suite No. 4, *Mozartiana*, annotated for performance by Britten]

21 (1952)

22 (1960)

23 (1950) [pp.89-195: *Romeo and Juliet*, 1880 version, annotated for performance by Britten]

24 (1961)*

25 (1961)*

26 (1961)

Vocal works with orchestra

27 (1960)* [contains an invoice from Musica Rara dated 9.1.62 for a subscription to Pears]

Works for piano with orchestra

28 (1955)*

29 (1954)

Works for violin with orchestra

30A (1949)

Works for cello with orchestra

30B (1956) [pp. 47-69, 81-9: *Pezzo Capriccioso* and *Nocturne* annotated for performance by Britten; Rosamund Strode appears to have checked this edition against the orchestral parts]

Chamber ensembles

31 (1955)* [instrumental parts signed 'B.B.']

32A (1951)

32B (1952)

Arrangements for voices with piano

34 (1959)

35 (1956)*

37 (1963)

38 (1968) [two copies]

39 (1951)

40A (1949)

40B (1949)

42 (1952)* [vocal score of *Iolanta*; dramatis personae annotated by Pears]

Choruses and ensembles

43 (1941) [signed by Pears; see fn. 419: possibly a gift from Dzhemal Dalgat; pp. 85-99: 6 Duets, op. 46, probably used by Britten as accompanist during 1971 AFMA]

Romances and songs

45 (1940)* [inscribed in Russian: 'Peter to Peter! From fans of your great art Galya Slava 30/xii'. Probably presented to Pears at Rostropovich's dacha in Moscow, 30 December 1966, see Pears, 145-8 and fn. 419. Some songs are annotated in Russian; Pears has translated the vocal lines of op. 57 nos. 3, 4; op. 60 no. 1; op.73 no.6]

Arrangements for piano

46A (1954)* [contains an invoice to Pears from Musica Rara dated 15.7.55]

47 (1956)

48 (1964)

49 (1956)*

50A (1965) [two copies]

Works for piano

51A (1945)

51B (1946)

52 (1948) [contains Russian annotations]

53 (1949) [contains a note by Pears: 'Slava Richter Jubilee Hall 16 vi 75/op.

51 no 5; op. 72 nos. 15, 12; op. 19 no. 1; op. 40 no. 2; op. 51 nos. 3 and 1']

Ballet transcriptions for solo piano

54 (1956) [see fn. 134 for enclosed synopsis of *The Nutcracker*]

56 (1958)*

57 (1954)

Works for violin with piano

55A (1946)*

Works for cello with piano

55B (1956)

Versions of works by other authors

61 (1949) [folk song arrangements; see fn. 195]

Works completed by Sergey Taneev

62 (1948) [pp.267-92: vocal score of *Romeo and Juliet* duet annotated for performance by Britten, including a three-bar insert on p.273]

The collection also includes the following supplementary volumes of Tchaikovsky letters: IIIB (1961), VI (1961) [contains an invoice from Musica Rara to Pears dated 21.9.61], VII (1962), VIII (1963), X (1966), XI (1966).

Britten did not possess the following volumes:

10 (1953) [*Iolanta*: full score]

33 (1965), 36 (1946), 41 (1950) [arrangements for voices with piano]

44 (1940) [romances and songs, the first of two volumes]

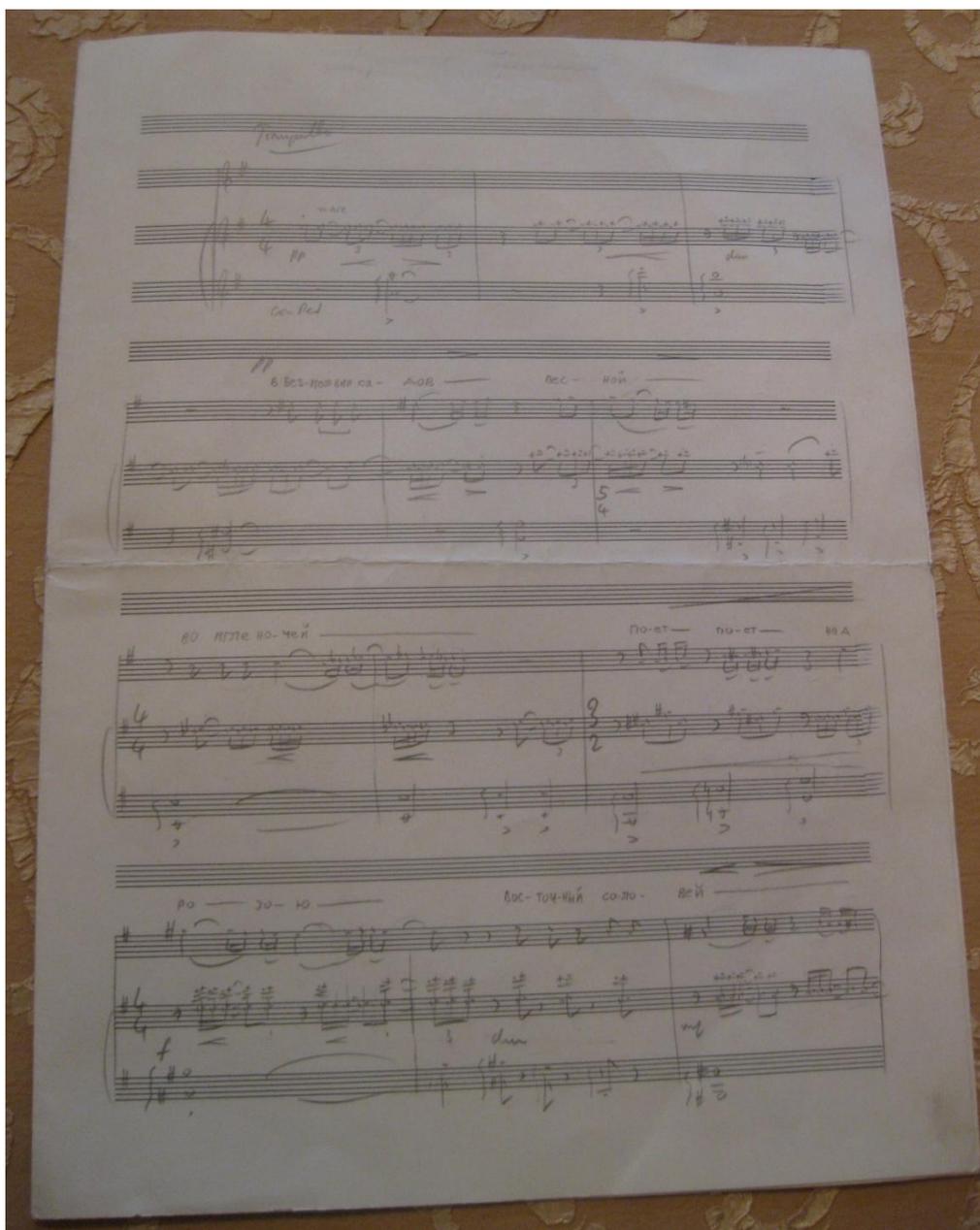
46B (1954), 50B (1965) [arrangements for piano]

58 (1967) [student works]

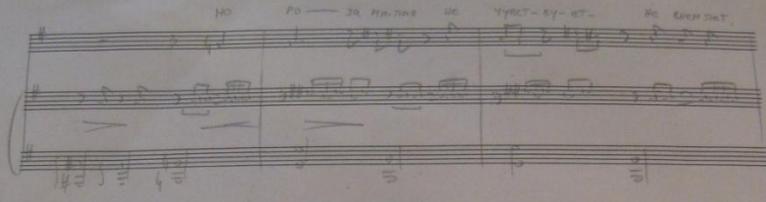
59 (1959), 60 (1971) [versions of works by other authors]

Volume 63 [Sacred Choral Works] was not published until 1990.

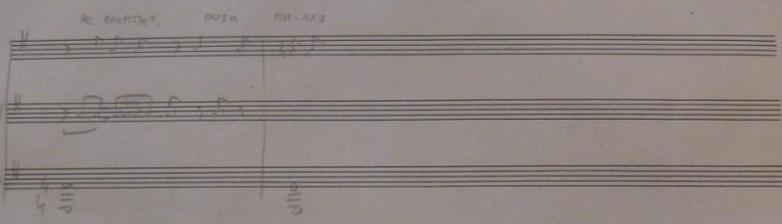
APPENDIX XV: (i) Unfinished composition sketch of
'The Nightingale and the Rose' from *The Poet's Echo*,
in the possession of Alexander Arutiunian [two images]



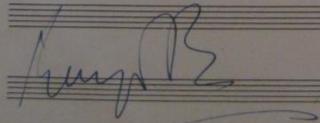
MO PO — ZA NA-TINE US YVET-SY-ET- MO KREN-TAT



MO SAKHNET, PUSA MI-SAS



For Alexan
with every good wish
& warmest thanks.



(ii) the equivalent passage in the autograph score, in the possession of Edward Mirzoian [three images]

IV
СОЛОВЕЙ И ПОЗА
Tranquillo

4

4 *marcato*

pp *dim* *pp*

con ped

pp

В без-мол-ви-и —

mf *dim* *pp*

са-лов, — вес-ной —

pp

Во мгле но-чей, —

stacc. по-ет, по-ет³

(pp)

на А —

espress. ро — *dim.* зо — но

вос-точ-ный со-по-

f — *dim.*

p — *dim.* 3

-вей

p но ро — за

pp

ми-ла-я не чув-ству-ет, — не внемлет, ро-за ми-ла-я, и — лю-блю

-блен — ный гимн

ко-ле-блет-ся и — аре-млет, и аре-млет, ро-за

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- (iii) Arthur Bliss
- (iv) Frank Bridge; Frank Bridge to Marjorie Fass
- (v) Boosey and Hawkes [BH]
- (vi) Alan Bush
- (vii) John Cranko
- (viii) Dzhemal Dalgat
- (ix) Roger Duncan
- (x) Faber Music
- (xi) Maurice Gendron
- (xii) Colin Graham
- (xiii) Keith Grant

- (xiv) George, Earl of Harewood
- (xv) Edward Heath
- (xvi) Victor Hochhauser, Lilian Hochhauser [VH]
- (xvii) Hans Keller
- (xviii) Mark Lubotsky
- (xix) Ronan Magill
- (xx) Edward Mirzoian
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- (xxii) Francis Poulenc
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- (xxv) Henri Temianka
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