

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: RUSSIAN THREADS: THE PRESENCE OF
RUSSIAN INFLUENCES IN TWENTIETH-
CENTURY ENGLISH CELLO MUSIC.

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Performance, 2012

Directed By: Professor Evelyn Elsing, School of Music

A cursory glance at cello works by English composers during the twentieth-century yields an unexpected relationship to Russian musicians, history, culture, and religion. One must wonder how this connection or “Russian thread” came to be. When considering the working relationship of Benjamin Britten and Mstislav Rostropovich, the likelihood of such a connection is tangible, since their deeply personal friendship influenced Britten’s music for cello. However, what is perhaps more interesting is the emergence of connections to Russia in the works of other English composers of the twentieth-century, featuring works from 1913–1996.

This project was conceived after close study and analysis of Benjamin Britten’s *Third Suite for Solo Cello*, Op. 87 (1971). Britten’s inclusion of Russian folk tunes and an Orthodox Church hymn signaled the penetrating presence of Russian elements in his works. Britten’s *First Suite for Solo Cello*, Op. 72, *Third Suite for Cello*, Op. 87, and *Sonata for Piano and Cello in C*, Op. 65 are presented in this

project. Further exploration of works for cello by English composers unveiled similar connections to Russia. The *Sonata for Cello and Piano* of Frank Bridge is likened to Russian romanticism and the *Cello Sonata* of Sergei Rachmaninoff. William Walton's *Cello Concerto* was written for the Russian-American cellist Gregor Piatigorsky. *Wake Up...and die* is John Tavener's deeply spiritual work, which is rooted in his Russian Orthodoxy. John Ireland, influenced by models of French and Russian Impressionism, contributed works colored with Russian folk influences, of which his *Piano Trio No. 2* is an example. Finally, Arnold Bax travelled to Russia as a young man and his *Folk Tale* and *Legend Sonata* are imbued with the spirit of Russian folk music and architecture.

This dissertation project is comprised of three recitals featuring English works for cello connected by a "Russian Thread." All events took place on the campus of University of Maryland, College Park: Recital #1 on December 4, 2011 in the Gildenhorn Recital Hall of the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, Recital #2 on February 11, 2012, and Recital #3 on April 15, 2012, both in the Ulrich Recital Hall.

RUSSIAN THREADS: THE PRESENCE OF RUSSIAN INFLUENCES IN
TWENTIETH-CENTURY ENGLISH CELLO MUSIC

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
2012

Advisory Committee:
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Acknowledgements

It is with much gratitude that I wish to thank the members of my dissertation committee: Evelyn Elsing, the committee chair and my teacher, who inspired both my cello playing and my project with her enthusiastic support and guidance. Also to my committee members and mentors Robert Provine, Katherine Murdock, David Teie, and Peter Beicken for the gift of their time and input.

I would like to thank Carlos Cesar Rodríguez for collaborating with me on all three recitals. His sensitivity as a pianist, musician, and dear friend made this project a possibility and a joyful success. I must also acknowledge the members of the University of Maryland cello studio who joined me for the Tavener: Jessica Albrecht, Jonathan Cain, Seth Castleton, Nneka Lyn, Chris Purdue, Arash Shahry, Daniel Shomper, and Gözde Yaşar.

I would also like to thank my family, especially my parents, for their never-ending encouragement and awe surrounding my endeavors, as well as my fiancé Jonathan for his loving patience, support, and talents.

It is worth noting that the performance of Arnold Bax's *Legend Sonata* was made possible by the generosity of my friend, Julia Loucks, who is a violinist studying at the Royal College of Music in London. With the gift of her time, scanning abilities, and careful handling of an old, frayed score, she was able to send me the complete score of the sonata via email. It is with much gratitude to Julia that I am able to share with you this rarely heard, beautiful, and profound work.

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PROGRAMS

Dissertation Recital #1
December 4, 2011 2:00pm
Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center
Gildenhorn Recital Hall

Elizabeth Meszaros, cello
Carlos Cesar Rodríguez, piano

Folk-Tale for Cello and Piano (1918)

Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

Sonata in C, Op. 65 (1961)

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Dialogo-Allegro
Scherzo-Pizzicato
Elegia-Lento
Marzo-Energico
Moto perpetuo-Presto

INTERMISSION

Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1955–6)

William Walton (1902–1983)

Moderato
Allegro appassionato
Theme and Improvisations

Dissertation Recital #2
February 11, 2012 2:00pm
Ulrich Recital Hall

Elizabeth Meszaros, cello
Carlos Cesar Rodríguez, piano

Assisted by the University of Maryland Cello Studio:
Jessica Albrecht, Jonathan Cain, Seth Castleton, Nneka Lyn, Chris Purdue, Arash
Shahry, Daniel Shomper, Gözde Yaşar

<i>Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello</i> , Op. 72 (1964)	Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)
Canto primo	
I. Fuga	
II. Lamento	
Canto secondo	
III. Serenata	
IV. Marcia	
Canto terzo	
V. Bordone	
VI. Moto perpetuo e Canto quarto	

PAUSE

<i>Wake Up...and Die</i> (1996)	John Tavener (b. 1944)
for Solo Cello and Orchestral Cello Section	

PAUSE

<i>Sonata for Cello and Piano</i> (1913–1917)	Frank Bridge (1879–1941)
Allegro ben moderato	
Adagio ma non troppo- Molto allegro e agitato	

Dissertation Recital #3
April 15, 2012 8:00pm
Ulrich Recital Hall

Elizabeth Meszaros, cello
Carlos Cesar Rodríguez, piano
Jonathan Richards, violin

Third Suite for Cello, Op. 87 (1971)

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

I. Lento
II. Allegro
III. Con moto
IV. Lento (barcarola)
V. Allegretto (dialogo)
VI. Andante espressivo (fuga)
VII. Fantastico (recitativo)
VIII. Presto (moto perpetuo)
IX. Lento solenne (passacaglia)
Mournful song (Under the little apple tree)
Autumn
Street Song (The grey eagle)
Grant repose together with the saints

Piano Trio No. 2 (1917)

John Ireland (1879–1962)

Poco lento-Allegro giusto

INTERMISSION

Legend Sonata for Cello and Piano (1943)

Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

Allegro risoluto
Lento espressivo
Allegro-Rondo

CHAPTER 1: Recital #1 Program Notes

Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

Folk Tale for Cello and Piano (1918)

Arnold Bax is one of the lesser-known English composers of the twentieth-century. Born into an affluent family in Streatham, England, Bax had the freedom to pursue his talents, among them music and poetry. Bax was a gifted pianist with little inclination to be a performer. From 1900-1905, he studied composition at the Royal Academy of Music. His brother Clifford, a playwright and writer, introduced him to what would become his greatest artistic influences; poetry and traveling.

With the help of his family's wealth, Bax enjoyed numerous trips during which he would leave for weeks at a time. One such trip was to Russia in 1910 as a young man in the throes of a passionate love affair. The object of his affection was a Ukrainian girl, Natalia Skarginska. While in Russia, the two visited St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Lubny. He was fascinated with Russian and Slavonic themes, as well as the grandeur of Russian architecture. When his relationship with Natalia ended, Bax experienced emotional turmoil from which he never recovered. The darkness of this time coupled with the memorable scenes and sounds of Russia can be heard in a number of Bax's works from this period, notably the First Piano Sonata in F sharp (1910, revised 1917–20), as well as two works for solo piano from 1912, *Nocturne–May Night in the Ukraine* and *Gopak (Russian dance)*. In 1915, Bax was one of four English composers to be commissioned to write orchestral music to serve as interludes for Sergei Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* in London, using the Russian themes

from the above-mentioned piano works in his *Russian Suite* for orchestra. The final work based on Russian themes was the incidental music to J.M. Barrie's play *The Truth About the Russian Dancers* in 1920.

It was during this decade from 1910–1920 that Bax wrote *Folk-Tale for Cello and Piano* of 1918. This charming yet brooding work encompasses all the elements that one would expect to hear from a young composer with a Russian obsession. *Folk-Tale* is a specimen of romantic musings and Russian folk elements. The melody, in the dark yet open key of G minor spans a narrow range, typical of simple folk tunes. The lonely cello line is supported by thickly written, richly spun harmonies in the piano. Two brief, lively sections ensue but are quickly curtailed to make way for the middle section, one of wandering harmonies and large soaring leaps, which contrasts the narrow folk tune from the beginning of the work. After what feels like a recitative-like section, in an almost recapitulatory fashion, the folk theme returns, this time in the lower range of the cello with darker emotional connotations.

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)
Sonata in C, Op. 65 (1961)

The name Benjamin Britten is a household name when discussing English composers of the twentieth-century. Britten was a resourceful musician who was determined to reinvent the idea of a leading national composer for England, and he was certainly one of the most prolific. The *New Grove Dictionary of Music* states that Britten sought to “imbue his works with his own personal concerns, some of them hidden...some more public, like his fiercely held pacifist beliefs, in ways that allowed people to sense the passion and conviction behind them even if unaware of their full

implication.”¹ It is at this junction that the “Russian thread” exposes itself. In 1960, at the London premier of his first cello concerto, Dmitri Shostakovich introduced Britten to his soloist, the Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. What followed was a close and quirky friendship between Britten and Slava, as he was affectionately known. Their relationship resulted in five works for cello written expressly for Slava, among them the *Sonata in C for Cello and Piano*, Op. 65.

Almost immediately upon meeting the composer, Rostropovich asked him if he would consider writing for cello. Britten assured Slava that “the matter needed serious discussion.” The new acquaintances communicated through an interpreter since they did not speak the same language. They later discovered that Britten spoke German and Slava, at the time, had a very limited, almost unrecognizable ability for the language. The two lovingly dubbed their incomprehensible language “Aldeburgh Deutsch” named after Britten’s festival in England.

While listening to the first movement of the Sonata, entitled *Dialogue*, a broken conversation between Ben and Slava in “Aldeburgh Deutsch” may come to mind as the cello utters sentence fragments in a manner that struggles to communicate. This movement is in the typical sonata form but includes a plethora of thematic material, as the opening theme is elongated and varied throughout the movement. As a reminder of the sonata’s “in C” designation, the movement concludes with the rising harmonic overtone series in C major. In fact, as you will hear, the C major designation should be taken with a grain of salt, as Britten wanders

¹ Brett, Philip, et al. “Benjamin Britten.” *Oxford Music Online*.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435>, Accessed November 2011.

far from this key signature throughout the sonata, only to return to C with an almost tongue-in-cheek-like playfulness.

The second movement, *Scherzo-pizzicato* is a prime example of one of Britten's studies in extended technique for the cello. He instructs the player to put down the bow in preparation for the plucked string pyrotechnics that are about to occur. Nevertheless, the *scherzo* is a playful, rhythmic number.

The third movement is a lyrical *Elegia* of haunting beauty. Repeated notes and a clear phrase structure typify this movement, which is an arch form, peaking with a climactic *largamente* at the top of the cello's register. Following this episode is music of a timeless nature, which Britten is so capable of doing, as the cello confirms C major while the piano tremolo meanders.

The *Marcia* is a satirical movement. Perhaps motivated by the mutual pacifistic beliefs of Britten and Rostropovich, this comical march may pay tribute to the musical satire of Shostakovich or Prokofiev. The march's flippant character is felt tangibly through the use of mumbled quintuplets, lopsided piano writing, punctuated grace notes, ponticello colors, and harmonic glissandi effects.

The final and fifth movement is incongruous with the typical four-movement sonata form. This movement strays as far away from C major as possible. The main rhythmic motive is introduced by ricochet or thrown bowing in the cello. While the cello accents different parts of the measure along the way in no particular pattern, the piano provides an unstable rhythmic foundation for the cello's controlled chaos. All the while, there is a particular elegance in the writing of this *moto-perpetuo*. Britten departs from the pointed, articulate rhythmic motive in favor of a more legato, lyrical

variation in the middle of the movement before returning to bouncing sequences of growing volume and suspense. The final passage is a long attempt at returning to the key of C and results in an abrupt, long overdue arrival.

Sir William Walton (1902–1983)
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra (1955-6)

William Walton was perhaps the most important composer to emerge in England between Ralph Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten. Born to a modest family in Lancashire, England to musician parents, his father a choirmaster and mother a contralto, Walton's first musical experiences were as a young boy in his father's church choir. It was said that Walton received punishment from his father for each musical mistake he made as a choirboy, and may have resulted in the composer's painful process of seeking perfection in his compositions. From 1912-1920, Walton attended the Christ Church Cathedral School and Oxford University, where he spent a great deal of his time studying the scores of Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Prokofiev. Walton was largely self-taught as a composer. While his musical output was rather small, many of his pre-World War II works were well received. In 1954, following less than favorable reviews of his opera *Troilus and Cressida* and a failed performance at La Scala, Walton's composing slowed considerably as his confidence wavered and his perfectionism slowed any attempt at productivity.

Since settling on the island of Ischia with his wife in 1949, Walton was criticized for having produced no music of substantial quality. Nevertheless, in 1956, Walton was approached by the Russian-born cellist Gregor Piatigorsky to compose a cello concerto, following the commission of a violin concerto from his violinist friend

Jascha Heifetz. In an attempt to redeem himself from a supposed compositional draught, Walton poured himself into the work, motivated by the reputation of the great virtuosic cellist and the \$3,000 he was paid to write the concerto. Walton and Piatigorsky communicated frequently through letters regarding the concerto and they are another example of an English-Russian partnership.

The first performance of the concerto was to take place on December 7, 1956 with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, but was postponed when Piatigorsky suffered what appeared to be a nervous breakdown. The premier took place the following January of 1957 with the London premier following shortly after. Walton had planned to attend the London performance but a serious car accident left him listening to the concert through a meek radio speaker from his hospital bed. Letters to Piatigorsky express the composer's adoration for these first performances. Stylistically, the concerto was deemed "old-fashioned" as compared to his other post-war works. Reviews of the concerto were mixed. Peter Heyworth's review claimed that the concerto was "run down and enervating," while another critic, Colin Mason, found the concerto to be "entrancing, a work of a man refreshed in spirit." Walton favored the cello concerto over his violin and viola concerti.

Walton believed that when writing a concerto, the quality and characteristics of a particular instrument would reveal themselves. As a result, the cello concerto is melancholy in nature. The opening theme is presented over a delicately orchestrated, pulsing chord containing the same pitches as the melody. This melody returns throughout the movement and the overall effect is a subdued first movement for a

concerto, atypical when compared to the usual virtuosic displays of standard concerto writing.

The second movement is a perpetual motion of sorts, where Walton begins to exploit the technical demands of cello playing. Rapid passages of running notes are the norm for this movement. Quick harmonic flourishes, ascending rocket-like-gestures, and long running sequences challenge the performer and are contrastingly relieved by two slower sections of parallel music in the middle of the movement. The movement ends with seemingly comical tapping of the bow's wood on the strings and a glissando to the top of the cello.

The third movement boasts an innovative form for a concerto. Walton titles this movement *Tema ed improvvisazioni*. Walton found the writing of a cadenza to be quite troublesome and he avoided having to do so by presenting a languid, treble-voiced theme for the cello. What follows are a set of six variations in clearly distinctive sections, two of which are for solo cello alone in cadenza-like fashion. The impending end of the concerto is signaled by trilled figures in the cello amidst a glorious orchestral melody and the final utterance of the first movement theme, this time over a pulsing triplet accompaniment. Other melodic fragments taken from the entire piece make their way into the introspective end of the concerto, creating a quiet, cumulative effect for the listener and performer.

CHAPTER 2: Recital #2

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) Suite No. 1 for Solo Cello, Op. 72 (1964)

Following Britten's *Sonata for Cello and Piano* and the *Cello Symphony*, a set of three solo suites were coaxed out of Britten at Rostropovich's request, among them the *First Suite for Solo Cello*, Op. 72, written in 1964.² The suites were the result of a lighthearted contract. In 1964, Britten's *Cello Symphony* received its premier in England at the Aldeburgh Festival. The performers had scheduled a trip to the north of England and would spend one night at the Harewood House in Yorkshire, home of the Princess Royal. Rostropovich's biographer Elizabeth Wilson tells the charming and humorous story of how this meeting with a princess brought about the contract for Britten's Three Suites.

As a Soviet citizen, one did not get much opportunity for meeting a real princess. For Rostropovich, princesses came either from Hans Christian Andersen or from Tchaikovsky ballets—young and beautiful, fairy-tale stuff. During the intervals of their recording session, Rostropovich would be seen slipping out into the graveyard of Orford Church, where he seemed to perform some strange acrobatics. When Britten caught sight of this, he asked him what he was up to. Slava explained, “Ah Ben, you see I am practicing my *kliksen*, my curtsy, la *riverenza*.” “Whatever for?” “Well, when I meet the Princess I must behave in a most respectful manner.” Britten was perturbed, but initially took no notice. When he observed that Slava's gymnastics were becoming more and more elaborate, with the addition of flourishes and falling onto his knees, Britten was alarmed. He tackled the issue when they started their drive north...“Slava, you were of course only joking. You are not going to behave like that in front of the Princess Royal, are you?” “Oh no, I am completely serious.” “But you see the princess is rather old, and she might get a fright. If she had a fit or a heart attack, then you, a Soviet citizen, will be held responsible, and it could turn into an unpleasant diplomatic incident. Surely we don't want a scandal.” Rostropovich objected, “Well, I am

² For more complete biographical information on Benjamin Britten, please refer to the notes from Program #1 on the *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, in Chapter 1 above.

not going to give up my curtsy now, after practicing it for so many hours.” When they stopped in London for lunch, Britten asked Slava to abandon all thoughts of such behavior. “Alright,” Rostropovich said, “I’ll restrain myself, of course that is, if I manage to, but on one condition...Three new works for cello in exchange for me giving up my curtsy.”³

At that moment, a contract was drawn on a restaurant menu and the three suites were completed in 1964, 1967, and 1971 respectively.

Britten came to write his three suites after hearing Rostropovich perform the Cello Suites of J.S. Bach. Rostropovich was a commanding Bach player. The *First Suite for Solo Cello*, Op. 72, takes its six movement form from Bach’s cello suites, but the movements are presented as character pieces rather than dance movements. Like the first cello suite of Bach, Britten employs the central pitch “G.” Britten adds four chordal *Canto* movements to the standard six movement suite form. The *Canto Primo* opens the work with warmth and openness, and the subsequent cantos present themselves every two movements throughout, reminiscent of a Baroque ritornello.

The first movement proper of the suite is a *Fuga*, a form used more often by Bach in the sonatas and partitas for violin than in the cello suites. The fugue is athletic and witty, alternating between sections of quick, dotted rhythms and bariolage string patterns that disguise the fugue theme. It fades away with a series of pointed, sarcastic harmonics.

The *Lamento* is a mournful, unmetered sequence of ever-growing, arching phrases that center around the pitch “E.” At its peak, the movement turns itself over

³ Elizabeth Wilson, *Rostropovich: The Musical Life of the Great Cellist, Teacher and Legend* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 178.

and begins to descend towards E-flat, highlighting the semitone struggle between E and E-flat. This interval becomes the cornerstone of the suite. A short, dark *Canto Secondo* is heard before the entirely plucked *Serenata*. This movement is full of character, with twitch-evoking left hand pizzicato and driving rhythms evocative of the flamenco.

Harmonics that are reminiscent of trumpet revelry serve to signal the beginning of the *Marcia*. Rhythmic taps of the bow's wood on the string suggests the impending battle and the approaching fife and drum corps. The climactic battle is evident in the middle of the movement with strong, dramatic volume and flurrying runs. The tense *Canto Terzo* begins, which contrasts the earlier *Canto* movements, this time with increasing dissonances that fail to resolve to open, more comfortable intervals as they did before. As this *canto* comes to a close, the cello sustains an open-D string, which turns into an ever present, inescapable pedal-tone for the *Bordone*. Virtuoso figurations and left hand pizzicato challenge the cellist's coordination and control as they move precariously around the drone.

A quiet, murmuring semitone knocks at the door to begin the final movement, *Moto Perpetuo*. This energetic, scurrying movement presents every semitone imaginable before it gives way to the reintroduction of the memorable first pitches of the *Canto Primo*. As if in a struggle, the *Moto Perpetuo* and the *Canto quarto* alternate, leaving one to wonder which force will prevail; good or evil (consonance or dissonance). It seems that the *Canto* will be the last word, until one final semitone ends the piece in "slam-the-door" fashion.

John Tavener (b. 1944)
Wake Up...and Die (1996)

Knighthood for his service to music in 2000, Sir John Tavener is a living English composer who is associated with a school of composing known as holy minimalism. He was born in 1944 in Wembley, London and showed musical promise at an early age, improvising and composing at the piano. Feeling deeply disillusioned by his Presbyterian upbringing, Tavener converted to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1977, in search of a religion outside of scholasticism. Upon converting, Tavener immersed himself in all things Russian, including literature and folk music, and he strove to write music that was outside of the traditional Western aesthetic. Tavener was deeply moved by the unaccompanied Znamenny chant that he heard in the Orthodox services.

Wake Up...and Die was composed in 1996 and was posthumously dedicated to Tavener's dear friend Philip Sherrard. Scored for solo cello and the cello section of an orchestra, the composing of this piece was a mystical experience for Tavener. He had heard that Sherrard was quite ill and was being taken to a hospital in London. At the same time, Tavener was travelling back from Greece. The last time the two had met was less than cordial, as they were arguing over some personal matters, but Tavener very much loved his friend. As he was in flight, an intense feeling of joy came over him. In his autobiography *The Music of Silence*, Tavener explains "this extraordinary feeling, almost of ecstatic forgiveness, came over me. As I later learned, Philip had died at exactly this time. I started singing and I felt as if I was drunk without wine. A melody came to me, which became part of *Wake Up...and Die*... The death of people has very often produced music in me, but not in quite this extraordinary way." Death

became a central part of Tavener's music after 1980, when he was diagnosed with Marfan's Syndrome, a rare condition that causes cardiovascular abnormalities, and his works became increasingly introspective.

While contemplating a number of traditional dicta, Tavener more fully conceived of the work:

"The Kingdom of God is for none but the thoroughly dead." -Meister Eckart

"Die before you die." -Jalud-Dim Rumi

"Behold, the Bridegroom comes at midnight...Beware lest ye find yourself sleeping." -Bridegroom Services of Orthodox Holy Week

Below is Tavener's own explanation of his work, taken from the Chester score:

It was while pondering these traditional dicta that I began to write the opening solo melody for the cello. It is in fact a palindrome because waking and dying are like two sides of a piece of paper. If you wake up spiritually, then you will die to all that is not of God. In the middle section, which is also a palindrome, the orchestral cellos join in the paradoxical meditation, providing a platform, as it were, while the cello line takes on a much more melismatic and decorative character. In fact, the whole work is a series of intellectual contradictions, realized by the simplest of musical metaphysics. Dying life, life dying, waking up, in order to die, the solo cello always represents the individual mind dying, and the individual mind waking up. Then, of a sudden, just before the end, the solo chant begins again, only to be cut off by a distant sentimental memory, the memory of "the blues," reminding us of ordinary human emotion, and of our fallen state. The very end suggests a waking up into a kind of peace (not soul slumber, since after death the soul becomes more intensely alive); but we know nothing of that, so the music fades beyond our ears.⁴

The work begins with a lengthy, muted, and transparently haunting solo melody in the cello, reminiscent of the chant that Tavener was so moved by in the Russian Orthodox Church. Flippant grace notes are present throughout, which are

⁴ John Tavener, *Wake Up...And Die* (London: Chester Music, 1996), Preface.

intended to mimic the characteristic breaks in the voice of Byzantine chant. As the chanted section comes to a close by climbing to the top of the cello's register, a low held F signals the beginning of a rapid three octave octatonic scale, which will reoccur throughout the piece, both ascending and descending. The rich, beautiful sound of the choir of cellos enters at the peak of the scale, and is a stark contrast to the thinly textured opening chant. The first cello part often plays in beautiful homorhythm with the solo cello in tender thirds. It is interesting to note that the two main sections of the piece, the chant and the accompanied section, are both palindromes, the same forwards as it is backwards. The piece was premiered by Yo-Yo Ma.

Frank Bridge (1879–1941)
Sonata for Cello and Piano (1913–1917)

Frank Bridge was born in 1879 into a musical family and began learning the violin from his father at the age of six. The Bridge family quartet of musicians shaped Bridge's affinity for chamber music at a young age. From 1896–1903, he studied at the Royal Conservatory of Music, eventually switching to viola, which became his preferred instrumental voice while playing chamber music. An accomplished musician, Bridge played in London's premier orchestras as well as three string quartets. As late as 1973, the works of Bridge were in a state of shameful neglect as compared to the music of his contemporaries. While the music of Frank Bridge is not performed as often as some of his fellow Englishmen, his works are no less substantial. Bridge is perhaps more well-known as a composition teacher, tutoring the likes of Benjamin Britten, whose works are at the cornerstone of this dissertation

project. It was in fact Britten who worked honorably to expose the music of his teacher in order to preserve his teacher's legacy.

Bridge's music is classified in a manner similar to that of Beethoven, according to his early, middle, and late periods. It is the Edwardian and "English" late romantic, middle period that earned Bridge the most acclaim. During this period, Bridge wrote the Cello Sonata. The sprawling sonata confirms that Bridge was opening himself up to a wide range of stylistic references, as opposed to the employment of folk-song and organum of his earlier, more nationalistic works. Our Russian thread is evidenced by the notion that in his cello sonata, Bridge was responding to the "flexible melodic shapes of Rachmaninoff," indulging in long, voluptuous melodies over densely harmonized, actively moving piano lines. The accompaniment, as it does in Rachmaninoff's *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, fluctuates between support and motivic intrusion, adding richness and tension to the music, a sure element of Russian romanticism. An online CD review of a performance of Bridge's Cello Sonata claims, "If you like Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata, you will love Bridge," further drawing the likeness of the two works in terms of their melodic glory, spun out piano parts, and emotional impact.

Written between 1913 and 1917, Bridge's sonata connects the more pastoral pre-World War I times and the post war hauntings. The sonata is in two movements, *Allegro ben moderato* and *Adagio ma non troppo - Molto allegro e agitato*. The cello theme is earnest and noble as it unfolds over a twinkling piano accompaniment. The sonata was premiered by Felix Salmond and William Murdoch at London's Wigmore Hall. In David Apter's sleeve-note for the Marco Polo recording of the sonata, he

recounts a recollection of the cellist Antonia Butler (who gave the French premiere of the cello sonata in 1928).

During the period 1915 until the completion of the sonata, Bridge was “in utter despair over the futility of World War One and the state of the world and would walk round Kensington in the early hours of the morning unable to get any rest or sleep.” The rain-drop piano accompaniment about three minutes into the second movement is already hinting at the chilly accompanimental figures which were to come in *Oration* and *Phantasm*. The strange melodic turns of the cello also announces an emerging new direction concerned with disenchantment, and a tender, self-absorbed, uneasy crooning. The final movement is briefly vigorous but soon returns to the desolate mood of the middle movement. The piece ends conventionally and has a rather uncertain focus, perhaps because of its transitional nature. Bridge seems not to have had the compulsion to end the work in the resigned sorrowing spirit of the central movement and much of the finale.⁵

The sonata is concise in its form. The cello theme of the first movement is earnest and noble as it unfolds over a twinkling piano accompaniment. The second movement begins slowly, with heartfelt interjections from the cello and tenderly beautiful, long melodies. As the two-sectioned second movement begins to draw to a close, each theme that has been presented throughout the work returns for one final ovation, one interrupting the other with little notice in an attempt to be heard. The sonata ends triumphantly in D Major, a contrasting character to the dark and brooding first sounds of the work.

⁵ “Frank Bridge: Classical Music on the Wed,” accessed on February 7, 2012, <http://www.musicweb-international.com/bridge/chapt2.htm>.

CHAPTER 3: Recital #3

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) **Suite No. 3 for Solo Cello Op. 87 (1971)**

The final work that resulted from Britten and Slava's restaurant menu contract was *Third Suite for Solo Cello*, Op. 87 of 1971, written swiftly over the course of only eight days.⁶ The *Third Suite* held a very special place for both Britten and Slava. The work marks Britten's final dedication to his dear friend, written just five years before his impending death due to heart disease, and served as his deeply felt tribute to a "great Russian musician and patriot." Britten presented the suite during a private meeting at Rostropovich's apartment in London. The work was scheduled to receive its premier at the Aldeburgh Festival in June of 1972. Unfortunately, this date fell within the period of time where Soviet authorities had limited Rostropovich's traveling and performing engagements in response to his letter of 1970, which spoke out against the regime's control over cultural life. Eventually, the suite was premiered in December of 1974, only after Rostropovich had been effectively forced to leave Russia. Of all of Britten's works for cello, the *Third Suite* is a clear dedication to his Russian friend, with its inclusion of Russian folk melodies and a mournful church hymn.

There are many accounts of Rostropovich's close bond with the *Third Suite*. Slava was so deeply moved by Britten's use of Russian tunes that he was unable to play it without weeping, especially after Britten's death in 1976. The *Third Suite* is also the only one of Britten's five works for cello that Rostropovich did not record.

⁶ For more complete biographical information on Benjamin Britten, please refer to the notes from Program #1 on the *Sonata for Cello and Piano*, in Chapter 1 above.

According to his biographer Elizabeth Wilson, this was a topic of great sadness for Rostropovich. When asked why he did not record the *Third Suite*, he replied:

That was a mistake. I have three musical gods, Shostakovich, Prokofiev, and Britten, and I feel like I didn't pay sufficient homage to the last one by recording that piece. I was devastated when Britten died so I stayed away from the third suite for a while, but then I got too busy with other things and I simply never got around to recording it. This is one of my regrets in life.⁷

The form of the suite is a unique, 22-minute reversed Theme and Variations based on three Russian folk tunes and a funeral hymn from the Russian church. In the classical theme and variations model, the theme is traditionally heard at the very beginning of the work so that the listener can trace its development throughout the movement. The salient qualities of the themes are retained, fragmented, and hinted at throughout the nine movements, but are never fully realized until the final four minutes of the suite, when they appear as a coda to the entire suite. The three folk tunes were taken from *66 Russian Folk Tunes*, arranged for voice and piano by Tchaikovsky in 1872, and include the *Mournful Song (Under the Little Apple Tree)*, *Autumn*, and *Street Song (The Grey Eagle)*. The final hymn is the *Kontakion*, a sacred melody used in the Russian Orthodox Church as a song for the departed. The first movement is titled *Introduzione* and is an evocatively muted soliloquy based on the *Kontakion*. The lonely vocal nature of the melodic line is punctuated by left hand pizzicati, a low open C-string that suggests the tolling of church bells desperately trying to resolve the wandering chant. Growling unisons on the low strings provide a unique timbre towards the end of the movement, perhaps attempting to create the

⁷ Wilson, *Rostropovich: The Musical Life of the Great Cellist, Teacher and Legend*, 279.

sound of the accordion, which was a popular instrumental fixture in Russian folk music.

The second movement is a *Marcia* where Britten includes material from the *Street Song*, motives from the *Kontakion*, and dramatic insertions of the *Mournful Song*. This movement is more rhythmically driven than the first and employs thrown bow gestures, rapid oscillations between two strings, wandering diatonic arpeggios, and the return of the growling unisons. In the unison passage, today's interpreter feels the presence of Slava and his large hands, with the appearance of a low A-flat unison. Many of the suite's performers seem to accomplish these measures by playing A-flat octaves instead, since this unison is unreachable for most cellists. A former cello teacher of mine even suggested playing one of the A-flats with your chin and the other with your left hand!

The third movement is a *Canto*, or song, and returns to a lonely, singular voice that seems to wander. This movement is a variation on the *Mournful Song*. The movement climaxes around a series of rich double stops in contrast to the single voice heard before and a long open-G creates a gravitational pull toward the fourth movement.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful movements of the suite, the fourth, is the *Barcarola*, or boat song. This title suggests the gentle rocking nature of a boat on water and the effect is created by the use of full, open arpeggios spanning all four strings. Rhythms are borrowed from the tunes *Autumn* and *Street Song*. One striking feature of this movement is the direct relationship to Johann Sebastian Bach's G Major Suite for Unaccompanied cello. The arpeggiated figures are reminiscent of the

Prelude, while the chord progression mirrors the same one chosen by Bach in both the Prelude and Sarabande. The movement begins to move feverishly higher and a flurrying descent drives the *Barcarola* grotesquely into the fifth movement.

In the fifth movement, Britten creates a dialogue between an aggressive voice and solemn pizzicato chords. The *Street Song* and *Kontakion* are juxtaposed here and represent two of the most dramatically different sentiments proclaimed by the original tunes, happy versus mournful. This conversation continues through roughly three installments before a *grazioso* section. Here the performer is faced with the daunting task of accompanying oneself. The cellist must play a lilting, playful melody in 6/8 time while providing rhythmic support via an open C-string pizzicato in 2/4 meter. This pizzicato is a reminiscent return of the church bells we heard earlier.

Britten now turns to a *Fuga* or fugue, in homage to the form Bach mastered in the eighteenth-century. The subject of Britten's fugue is derived from a combination of material from the *Canto* movement and the *Mournful Song*, which creates a sense of melodic coherence throughout the piece. There are moments of intricate polyphony, which is a remarkable feat for the solitary string player, and demonstrates Britten's knowledge of the cello.

Britten now turns to a *Recitativo* for the seventh movement, giving a *fantastico* character indication. The title of the movement suggests an operatic recitative but what ensues is an imaginative exploration of cello effects based on material from *Autumn* and *Street Song*. In an almost multiple personality-like fashion, Britten includes glissandi, tremolo, slurs, non-vibrato, harmonics, flurrying arpeggiations, trills, ponticello, and most importantly, the use of fermatas for

dramatic silence.

The eighth movement is a *Moto Perpetuo*, and is a signature fast movement for Britten, one that ties up the fingers of the performer with its spritely tempo and chromatic motion. Fragments of the *Kontakion* are buried in the texture, but the listener will be hard pressed to recognize them as the notes progress more quickly than one can comprehend.

The final movement is a *Passacaglia* with the use of a repetitive ground bass. The movement is slow and solemn, with the alternating ground bass and higher melodic voice. It seems that the two voices grow weary of one another, as each voice becomes increasingly impatient and forceful. The upper voice dominates the dialogue for the first half of the movement, with lengthening interjections. To conclude the first half of the movement, a diaphanous ground bass responds sympathetically, eventually running out of energy. Suddenly through a progression of densely voiced, dissonant chords, the ground bass reasserts itself in a section marked *energico*. This character prevails through the end of the movement with long extensions of the ground bass spanning up to ten measures. Almost without warning, the *Mournful Song* cries out in a strong voice, interrupted by strong pizzicato statements of the final ground bass.

Finally, the listener is granted an opportunity to hear the Russian tunes, uninterrupted and undeveloped. Each tune is marked by a distinct character, and the progression of the tunes serves as a sort of “drive-by” viewing of the original music Britten had chosen. The especially dark *Kontakion* ends the suite. An immensely poignant *Largamente* section begins to bring the work to a close after a series of

chant-like melodies. One can imagine the text of this simple prayer being sung in Russian. An unexpected yet welcomed E-flat major chord enters confidently as a glimmer of hope that elicits a sense of darkness being lifted. The piece concludes almost inaudibly on a low C, just as it began.

John Ireland (1879–1962)
Piano Trio No. 2 in E (1917)

John Ireland is yet one more English composer whose works are not well known. The victim of a painful childhood, Ireland suffered the early death of both his parents. This resulted in the sensitive and introspective side of Ireland's personality. Plagued by feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, his creativity was influenced both positively and negatively. His music renders a distinct character of darkness and beauty as self-criticism, his yearning for a spiritual home, and a desire to escape to the past colored his work.

Ireland's musical training was thorough and extensive. Entering the Royal College of Music in 1893, he studied piano intensely as a pupil of Frederic Cliffe. During this time, he also became interested in composing and studied under Charles Stanford from 1897 to 1901. The harsh and sometimes cruel methods of Stanford caused Ireland to suffer more than most, but he later spoke quite highly of his teacher. Upon leaving the RCM, Ireland made his living as an organist and choirmaster, establishing himself as a top rate English composer. Ireland also taught composition at the RCM for nineteen years and among his pupils was Benjamin Britten. Following a painfully failed marriage, Ireland kept a close circle of friends. He sought refuge in a number of calming places, including Chelsea, Deal, Chancetonbury Ring, and the Channel Islands, all which had close associations with his music. Ireland retired to

Guernsey, but this hiatus was cut short by German occupation in 1940. He finally settled into a converted windmill home in West Sussex where, despite his failing health, he enjoyed the happiest time of his life. Although he was no longer composing, his music saw a revival with the support of the John Ireland Society in 1960.

Through his teacher Stanford, Ireland was exposed to the music of Beethoven, Brahms, and other German composers. As a young man, he was also influenced by the impressionistic music of Debussy and Ravel, as well as the early period works of Bartok and Stravinsky. These influences colored Ireland's style, from which he developed "his own brand of English Impressionism," related more closely to French and Russian models than to the English folk-song style. As Ireland became exposed to the works of Russian and impressionistic composers, they "were not influences in the sense of being models to be imitated, but beacons to illuminate the path along which his own true direction lay."⁸ Like his impressionistic counterparts, Ireland favored smaller forms. A large portion of his works were written for the piano, although he had a sizeable output of vocal songs and chamber music.

Of particular interest to this project is the idea that English music is once again connected to Russia. The Thomas Kearns McCarthy Gallery in Park City, Utah describes Russian Impressionism. "Impressionists in Russia celebrated the common people, depicting their lives, hopes, dreams and emotions in an intimate manner. Instead of incorporating twentieth century western artistic innovations, artists

⁸ Lewis Foreman, *The John Ireland Companion* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2011), 330.

focused deeply on land, people and the new social experiment founded in Mother Russia. Their art was meant to enrich the lives of all people.”⁹ This revival of artistic spirit was likely a result of the Communist regime being lifted. Ireland’s style is identified with Russian Impressionism. The period of Russian Impressionism in art occurred from 1930–1980.

This impressionistic style was unique to Ireland and enjoyed prevalence in his works. Ireland’s *Piano Trio No. 2* of 1917 is a prime example, infused by French and Russian styles. The trio was composed during World War I, when the horrors of the war were their strongest. This one movement work is an expression of Ireland’s feelings of tragedy and loss during the war. The composer allegedly told English cellist Florence Hooton, who premiered and performed many works for cello by English composers, that “the ‘allegro giusto’ section evoked the boys going over the top.” Whatever the trio’s programmatic inspirations, the work spans a range of styles and emotions, ranging from lamenting, lyrical, energetic, and tragic. As did many composers of this time period (recall Frank Bridge’s wartime sonata from my last program), Ireland sought to cling to “the beauty that remained on the earth amidst the carnage and inhumanity of the battle.” Despite wartime allusions much of this trio is hauntingly beautiful and the work concludes rather optimistically given the circumstances. The sleeve notes of a Naxos Recording of the trio quote Fiona Richards’ book *The Music of John Ireland*. She says of the trio, “This is a work of mixed emotions, contrasting passages of stark textures and caustic harmonies with

⁹ “Thomas Kearns McCarthey Gallery: Russian Impressionism,” last modified 2012, accessed April 13, 2012, <http://www.mccartheygallery.net/index.php?option=content&view=category&layout=blog&id=1&Itemid=2>.

effusive moments and grim marches. The structure of the work is a succession of episodes exploring different moods, all of which are melodic metamorphoses of the first eighteen bars of the piece.”¹⁰ The three piano trios of John Ireland are an important body of his works for chamber music and serve as an excellent platform to explore his music for cello.

Arnold Bax (1883–1953)

Legend Sonata for Cello and Piano in f-sharp minor (1943)

The *Legend-Sonata* for cello and piano is one of Bax’s late works, written in 1943.¹¹ This is a relaxed work in comparison to much that Bax wrote in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. The reason for Bax titling the work *Legend* is not known. Nevertheless, the sonata is successful as purely absolute music. Bax claims, “I wrote it with so much hope for a better world.”¹² Written the same year as Bax’s autobiographical *Farewell My Youth*, the work is surely retrospective in nature. One striking feature of the *Legend Sonata* is Bax’s use of unconventional harmonies. Modulations are rarely prepared and colorful non-chord tones appear persistently. My professor, Evelyn Elsing, put it most aptly when she exclaimed, “you never know what note you will hear next!”

¹⁰ “British Classical Music: The Land of Lost Content,” last modified December 22, 2009, accessed April 10, 2012, <http://landoflostcontent.blogspot.com/2009/12/john-ireland-piano-trios-on-naxos.html>.

¹¹ For more complete biographical information on Arnold Bax, please refer to the notes from Program #1 on the *Folk Tale for Cello and Piano*, in Chapter 1 above.

¹² “Legend Sonata for Piano and Cello in F-sharp Minor,” last modified 2012, accessed April 23, 2012, <http://www.allmusic.com/work/c217417>.

The first movement of the work gives the allusion of typical sonata form, but there is a great feeling of fantasy rather than organization. The opening is characterized by a driving, dotted rhythmic figure, which returns throughout the movement. This is juxtaposed with beautiful and lyrical melodies. The movement ends quietly as a seamless transition to the second movement.

Marked *Lento espressivo*, the second movement is one of “heart rendering beauty.” As one of the principal themes, Bax uses what sounds like a folk-tune. In this instance, Bax recycled one of his own themes, which caused him to weep while writing. The tune comes from Bax’s orchestral tone poem *The Garden of Fand*, which was a personal favorite among his works. It was also the last piece of his own music that he ever heard performed.

The final movement is a rondo, which swiftly puts an end to all of the retrospection that has come before. The tune of the movement is built on a flurried gesture of sixteenth notes. The movement is classically constructed rondo that follows the rules of form. Bax adds interest to an otherwise repetitive form by introducing new themes and episodes. It is also interesting to note the number of “flavors” presented in all three movements of the work, perhaps indicative of Bax’s travels to Russia, Ireland, and perhaps even Spain. The work ends rather optimistically with a heroic spinning out of the sixteenth note theme.

This sonata is surely regarded as one of Bax’s most pleasing chamber works. Surprisingly, the work is not well known among cellists, and it is nearly impossible to acquire the printed music. The work is no longer published and is not offered for sale. There are only three recordings of the sonata, given by Johannes Moser, a German-

Canadian cellist, Florence Hooton, the English cellist who premiered the work, and Bernard Gregor-Smith, another English cellist. The work is rarely performed outside of the UK.

CHAPTER 4: Conclusion

From the inception of this project through investigating, choosing, and performing works to include, Benjamin Britten and his friendship with Mstislav Rostropovich remained the focal point. This connection represented the heart of the “Russian thread.” The central questions were, “Why England and Russia? What about these two countries and cultures bounded them together?” Whatever the answers to these questions, this “Russian thread” was woven for a reason. It appears that there are two clues to the connection between Russia and England. Both countries share a history of music steeped in the folk tradition. The rise of nationalism in Russia during the nineteenth century spawned the emergence of the “Mighty Handful” comprised of composers Glinka, Balakirev, Cui, Mussorgsky, and Borodin. This movement brought an interest in folk elements to classical music and the belief that folk and religious music should represent the people and be the basis for composition.¹³ A distinctly Russian style of music was created.

The English also shared a penchant for nationalism and the folk medium, with a strong connection to their heritage that was incorporated into classical music. English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams is perhaps the most important when discussing nationalism in England. Vaughan Williams was certain that “it was English folk-song which had liberated music in England from the German tradition

¹³ Garden, Edward. “The Five.” *Oxford Music Online*.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/09765>.

and given it a voice of its own.”¹⁴ A shared interest in music that represented the people of Russia and England, rich in folk and nationalistic ideals, may have united the two countries with a sense of pride and devotion and serves to provide some insight into the strong influence of Russian music and culture on English composers of the twentieth century.

In the case of Britten and Rostropovich as artistic partners and close friends, the circumstances that brought them together were political and may serve to illustrate the likelihood of such a connection. In 1970 Rostropovich wrote an open letter (which remained unpublished) to leading Soviet newspapers and magazines in support of the proscribed author and Nobel prizewinner Aleksandr Solzhenitsin, and in protest at new Soviet restrictions on cultural freedom.¹⁵ Slava was forced to leave his country and his sentiments were shared by the leading Russian composers of the time, including Prokofiev and Shostakovich. It was in London during a performance of Shostakovich's *Cello Concerto No. 1* that Britten and Rostropovich were introduced. The lasting friendship that resulted from this meeting was probable, especially since Slava was oppressed and exiled and Britten was a fierce pacifist.¹⁶

The examples stated above serve to illustrate the commonalities between Russia and England. While these connections are not necessarily exclusive to these

¹⁴ “Songlight for Dawn: The English Nationalist School of Music,” <http://www.songlight-for-dawn.blogspot.com/2009/10/english-nationalist-school-of-music.html>.

¹⁵ Goodwin, N. “Rostropovich, Mstislav.” *Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/32918>.

¹⁶ Brett, Philip, et al. “Benjamin Britten.” *Oxford Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435>.

countries, they are surely unifying features for exploring the connection of English music to Russian culture and heritage. Through mutual interests and sentiments, elements of folk music, religion, architecture, art, and friendship give a distinct voice to English music for the cello in the twentieth-century.

APPENDIX: CDs AND TRACK LISTINGS

CD#1: December 4, 2011

Track 1	Arnold Bax <i>Folk Tale for Cello and Piano</i>
Tracks 2-6	Benjamin Britten <i>Sonata for Cello and Piano in C</i> , Op. 65
Tracks 7-9	William Walton <i>Concerto for Cello and Orchestra</i>

CD#2: February 11, 2012

Tracks 1-9	Benjamin Britten <i>First Solo Suite</i> , Op. 72
Track 10	John Tavener <i>Wake Up...and Die</i>
Tracks 11-12	Frank Bridge <i>Sonata for Cello and Piano</i>

CD#3: April 15, 2012

Tracks 1-9	Benjamin Britten <i>Third Solo Suite</i> , Op. 87
Track 10	John Ireland <i>Piano Trio No. 2 in e minor</i>
Tracks 11-13	Arnold Bax <i>Legend Sonata for Cello and Piano in f#-minor</i>
Track 14	Frank Bridge <i>Berceuse</i>

*All recital CDs were recorded and produced by Antonino d'Urzo of Opusrite™

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