

15

Britten and His Fellow Composers:
Six Footnotes for a Seventieth Birthday

DAVID DREW

Not only for critical and scholarly purposes but also for those of concert planning, the study of Britten's links with other major composers – as with lesser ones – had proved its worth long before comparable pairings became a cliché of concert promotion on both sides of the Atlantic. Hans Keller's pioneering thesis on Britten and Mozart was written in 1946 and first published two years later, but was not to achieve fame and notoriety until its reappearance in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works From A Group of Specialists* (1952). By then, Donald Mitchell, Paul Hamburger and Keller himself had greatly extended the field of reference in their writings for *Music Survey* and the *Music Review*.

In its historical context – that is, in the context of a musical culture whose inborn insularity had become in the war years a necessary defence mechanism – the collocation of Britten and Mozart was provocative in the highest degree. The liberating force of Britten's cosmopolitanism had been resisted from the start by opponents of his similarly outward-listening teacher Frank Bridge. For them, the Mozartian parallel was so gross an impiety that they were ready to applaud Martin Cooper's brilliantly subversive suggestion that the true analogy was not with Mozart but with Saint-Saëns.

At a time when the reputation of that immensely accomplished and widely enjoyed composer was somewhat tarnished, comparisons with Britten had a polemical thrust that is almost unimaginable today. In *Phaëton*, in *Le Rouet d'Omphale*, even in the *Carnival of the Animals*, today's listeners may hear without embarrassment something of what Britten himself must once have heard. That it was not of signal importance to him, and could never have been, is self-evident. Mozart is quite another matter. Even Poulenc may be.

The 1994 October Festival at Aldeburgh and Snape featured the music of Britten and Poulenc, with a prolonged sideways glance at Milhaud, with whom Britten's connections may have seemed tenuous. Even more to the surprise of some ears, its predecessor of 1992 had featured Britten and Weill.

From the Aldeburgh Festival itself there has flowed in recent years a stream of performances and productions illustrative of Britten's manifold links with the composers of his day, whether purely musical, or personal as

well. Among many other voices, those of Stravinsky, Henze, and Lutoslawski have been representative of that polyphonic programme-planning which reflected Britten's creative dialogues with his contemporaries no less than with such mighty forebears as Purcell, Mozart, Schubert, and Mahler.

Invertible counterpoints in the art of creative programme-planning, all such juxtapositions are implicit in the critical and scholarly work of the present volume's dedicatee, and have become manifest in his entrepreneurial activities in England and abroad. In that context, the following notes are the merest embellishments – from which, however, a flourish of trumpets appropriate to the present celebrations could easily be extracted. If they have a further use, it will be as memoranda for future research.

1 *Britten and Weill*

The only encounters that are known of, and probably the only ones ever, were over a brief holiday period in August 1940, at the Owl's Head Inn in Maine. Britten refers to the meetings in his letter of 22 August to Elizabeth Mayer:

We came in to dinner the other evening & heard some pretty sophisticated talk going on & recognised Kurt Weil [*sic*]! He was spending a few days here with Mr. & Mrs. Maxwell Anderson (Key Largo fame – or infame!).¹ We saw quite alot of him & he really was awfully nice & sympathetic, and it was remarkable how many friends we had in common, both in Europe & here. He tells me that Werfel was not shot & may be coming here, & that Golaud [*sic*] Mann apparently has been contacted with – other news not so good.²

Without overt connection but also without paragraph break, Britten goes on to say 'I'm terribly relieved to be in contact with Wulff'. Whether or not Wulff's father Hermann Scherchen was one of the 'friends' or erstwhile friends Britten and Weill had spoken about, the continuity of Britten's paragraph is evident.

The question of precisely which friends or acquaintances he and Weill had in common merits scholarly investigation, at least to the extent that it may shed light on the life and work of either composer or both – limited though that extent is likely to be, especially in Britten's case. Guesswork alone could produce a long list of possibilities, beginning chronologically with those

1 Maxwell Anderson (1888–1959) was one of the leading American playwrights of his day, regarded by some as heir to the mantle of Eugene O'Neill. *Key Largo* (1939) is a typically Andersonian thesis-play whose notoriety derived from its political overtones (*vis à vis* Roosevelt and fascism) and some incidental but not gratuitous violence. It is remembered today in the classic film version (1948) directed by John Huston.

2 All quotations from Britten's letters and diaries are © 1995 the Trustees of the Britten-Pears Foundation and not to be further reproduced without written permission.

figures who had been members of, or tangential to, the Busoni circle, and were still prominent in the International Society for Contemporary Music in the 1930s: for instance, E. J. Dent, Edward Clark, and indeed Scherchen. From there it would have been a short step to the topic of Universal Edition, and Boosey & Hawkes's post-*Anschluss* absorption of such notable UE executives as Alfred Kalmus, Hans Heinsheimer, and Erwin Stein, all of whom had been closely associated with Weill in his European years.

A larger topic might have been the entire nexus of human and intellectual relationships arising from Germany's, and especially Berlin's, cultural influence on British musicians, writers and artists during the period from 1928 (and the première of *Die Dreigroschenoper*) to 1933 (and Hitler's seizure of power). There, the central importance of W. H. Auden is obvious, not because of any known contacts between him and Weill – circumstantial evidence suggests that there were none – but because the theatres of Brecht and Piscator, with which Weill was directly connected, and of Ernst Toller, to which in principle he remained sympathetic until the end of the 1930s, were crucial to the Auden–Isherwood collaboration. Long before his meeting with Britten, Weill had been actively interested in the fruits of that collaboration.

However cordial their discussions in the summer of 1940, the grounds for continuing them on some later occasion were clearly insufficient. Within days of their Owl's Head meeting, Weill was back in New York, immersed in the orchestration of *Lady in the Dark*, and in the practical preparations for its opening in Boston in December. The New York opening in January 1941 marks the crucial change in Weill's fortunes in America: on the one hand a Broadway hit of the first order, on the other, his final disgrace in the eyes of those musicians, writers, and intellectuals who had welcomed him to America primarily if not exclusively on the strength of two or three of his collaborations with Brecht.

Either in the columns of *Modern Music* – where Weill was famously attacked by the critic and theatre-composer Samuel Barlow³ – or in the corridors of 7 Middagh Street, Brooklyn (where Britten and Pears had settled in November, and where the landlord was Lotte Lenya's future husband, George Davis), Britten would surely have heard something of the *Lady in the Dark* controversy. How much and how little he would have cared about it may best be read in the score of *Paul Bunyan*, for which the first sketches were made towards the end of 1939.

With *Lady in the Dark* or its representative public, *Paul Bunyan* has no connections whatsoever. With its predecessor, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, it has a slender one, in the sense that there is some basis for arguing – though none as yet for demonstrating – that Auden had read the published version of Maxwell Anderson's 'book'.

Potentially more significant, however, and certainly more probable, would be some subterranean link between the Owl's Head discussions and Britten's

3 Samuel L. M. Barlow, 'In the theatre', *Modern Music* 18/3 (March–April 1941): 189–93.

next major work, *Paul Bunyan*. Britten says nothing of talks with Maxwell Anderson, who was old enough to be his father, and culturally from quite another world. Yet Anderson cared for music and respected composers and their craft. Weill, who was only twelve years his junior, seems to have liked and admired Anderson more than he liked or admired most of his work. But he valued his theatrical craftsmanship and Broadway know-how, appreciated his decency, his courage, and his political integrity, and was much indebted to his knowledge of American history, literature, and folklore.

Literature and folklore: Washington Irving's *The History of New York by Diedrich Knickerbocker* had been the basis of Weill's first successful collaboration with Anderson, *Knickerbocker Holiday*⁴ – half European operetta (with strong overtones of Gilbert and Sullivan) and half Broadway musical (in the satirical tradition of Gershwin's *Strike Up The Band*). The setting is seventeenth-century Manhattan, the hero a penniless knife-grinder, the villain, an historically authentic tyrant figure.

Anderson's gloss on Irving's spoof history and invented folklore was eminently suited to the late stages of the New Deal era, just as the eponymous hero of Weill's and Paul Green's *Johnny Johnson* had been appropriate to the purposes of a 'democratic' anti-war musical for New York's Group Theatre in 1937.

Nineteen thirty-seven had been the year of Weill's first formal step towards acquiring American citizenship – another possible topic for discussion with Britten. From then until the end of his life, his search for new and indigenous forms of musical theatre was often inseparable from his search for versions of American myth that would be adaptable to musical purposes. Immediately prior to *Knickerbocker Holiday*, he and H. R. Hays were working intensively on *The Ballad of Davy Crockett*. (Hoffmann Reynolds Hays was a left-wing author, playwright, and translator with whom Auden, together with Brecht, was to collaborate in 1943 on a version of *The Duchess of Malfi* which George Rylands directed three years later in Boston and New York, and furnished with recorded excerpts from Britten's *Serenade*).

Hays's original play had been produced in 1937 first by the Columbia University Players and then by the Federal Theatre. In that form it had attracted the attention of Burgess Meredith (the already celebrated actor), and the writer and dramaturge Charles Alan. (It was from Alan that Weill borrowed a copy of *The Ascent of F6* which was never to be returned.) Meredith was a close friend of Weill's, and was primarily responsible for recommending the Hays play to him and organizing the basis for a Federal Theatre production of his musical version. After Weill had composed twenty numbers in vocal score, he abandoned the project in favour of *Knickerbocker Holiday*.

'Most myths are poetical history – that is to say, they are not pure fantasy,

4 Maxwell Anderson, *Knickerbocker Holiday* (New York, 1939).

but have a basis in actual events.' The words with which Auden began his essay on *Paul Bunyan* apply equally to the figure of Davy Crockett (1786–1836), a real-life Congressman before his election to mythology's supreme chamber. Crockett was not the first and was by no means the last of the legendary American heroes investigated severally or together by Weill, Meredith, Charles Alan, and Maxwell Anderson (a friend and neighbour of Meredith as of Weill in Rockland County). As potential protagonists of musical plays or even operas, many of these mythic heroes are mentioned in Weill's correspondence or noted in his *aides mémoires*. Although the name of Paul Bunyan does not appear in any of the known documents, it would surely have cropped up during at least one of countless discussions between Weill and his friends in the years 1937–40. But the absence of any written reference to it virtually rules out the possibility that any such discussion was significant.

If, as seems likely, Britten mentioned to Weill the newly begun *Paul Bunyan*, Weill would surely not have hesitated to mention *The Ballad of Davy Crockett*, given that the project had long since been abandoned. Some reference to the ballad and vaudeville forms Weill had had in mind for *Crockett* would naturally have followed.

Even in the unlikely event that the sole topics of conversation were personal ones of the kind Britten identifies in his letter to Elizabeth Mayer, the tone of Britten's account is such that he would have been sure to tell Hans Heinsheimer of his surprise meeting. Now in charge of the newly established Boosey & Hawkes office in New York, Heinsheimer was an exact contemporary of Weill, and in Universal Edition had been his confidant and closest ally for the five critical years before the political events in Germany caused UE to 'release' their Jewish composers, Weill included.

Soon after his arrival in New York, Heinsheimer resumed his contacts with Weill. Although their relationship would never again be as close or as cordial as it had been in the UE days, it was amicable enough to ensure that he was always more or less up to date with Weill's thoughts, plans, and activities. Since no one was better placed than he to elaborate upon, and provide a background for, any impressions left upon Britten by his meeting with Weill, anything he would have said was likely to have some bearing upon the gestation of *Paul Bunyan* during the year that remained before its première.

Beyond that, any search in *Bunyan* itself for signs of Weill's musical influence is likely to prove unrewarding. Were there the slightest evidence that Britten might somehow have chanced to peruse a stray copy of the unpublished score of Weill's *Mahagonny* 'Songspiel' after its solitary but notorious London performance in 1933, there might be some excuse for suggesting that there is more than mere coincidence in what sounds like a fleeting and distant echo in *Paul Bunyan* of the Songspiel's mendaciously moonstruck conclusion. No such evidence having come to light, nor being at all likely to, further speculation seems pointless.

In the music of each composer, but more often and more especially in the case of Britten, the passages that most clearly, though always briefly, call the

other to mind are those where the source of the supposed reflection was either unobtainable or not yet in existence. As for the jazz, blues and cabaret idioms which Britten made his own in the Group Theatre and GPO Film Unit days (and their radio-music offshoots), the apparent 'influences' of Weill are often no more than loose generic affinities, though occasionally heightened by direct contacts with the music of composers such as Copland or even Virgil Thomson, who were themselves influenced, however marginally, by Weill's example.

Britten's diary entry of 8 February 1935 regarding that evening's concert performance of *Die Dreigroschenoper* – which Edward Clark had promoted and himself conducted as part of his exceptionally important Contemporary Music series for the BBC – is blankly negative about the music and the performance. (Most of the London music critics, including Ernest Newman, were vituperative.) Had Weill been free to supervise the rehearsals, the performance might have been better. But the very nature of the music would still have been alien to the Britten of 1935, leaning as he already did towards Vienna.

More than a decade later, Weill's reaction to a preview of the New York première of *The Rape of Lucretia* (28 December 1948) – in a letter sent the next day to his lifelong friend Maurice Abravanel – was in essence equally negative, but in its implications much more complex. Having demeaned himself with a comment unbecoming to a composer whose trusted friends, colleagues and librettists included numerous homosexual or bisexual men and women, and whose European stageworks were by no means without conscious or unconscious homoerotic elements, he then told Abravanel that there was 'no music' in *Lucretia*, just 'orchestra effects'; and he ended by rejoicing that 'your friend' Virgil Thomson had 'roasted' *Lucretia* in his *Herald Tribune* review, and that the audience was 'bored stiff'.

Weill had fallen out with Virgil Thomson – an old admirer – after his negative review of *Lady in the Dark*, and, since that turning-point in his American career, had kept his distance from the *Modern Music* world on the East Coast (while preserving his old links with the erstwhile modernist George Antheil, now reborn as a Hollywood columnist, a successful film-music composer, and an occasional symphonist in the Soviet manner). On distant if amicable terms even with Copland, Weill had swiftly sensed the challenge represented by the young Leonard Bernstein. Bernstein had got to know a few of Weill's German works through Marc Blitzstein, who passionately admired them, but was highly ambivalent about Weill's American career. Some while after the première of *Lady in the Dark* Bernstein – or so the legend has it – encountered Weill at a fashionable New York party, and pointedly cut him dead.

The première of *Peter Grimes* under Bernstein at Tanglewood in August 1946 is unlikely to have passed unnoticed by Weill at a time when he was completing *Street Scene* and telling people abroad – presumably on Heinsheimer's authority – that Boosey & Hawkes might be publishing it. In *Street Scene* there are two brief passages which for Weill were stylistically

almost inconceivable without the example of Bernstein's *Fancy Free*, a ballet Weill had dismissed as 'phony' (*sic*) in a letter to Lenya of 12 August 1944. Though perhaps conditioned to some extent by the public snub from a much younger composer, Weill's repressed hostility is being bought off in the coinage of his unconscious recognition of Bernstein's talent.

A similar compensation process is discernible on a much larger scale with regard to *The Rape of Lucretia* and its composer. In the immediate post-war era, when Weill had deliberately and joyfully removed himself from all contact with classical modernism and the neoclassical reactions to it, the sudden emergence of a Menotti, let alone a Britten, represented a clear threat to his carefully planned future as a composer of 'opera in the vernacular', as he called it. The Britten of *Peter Grimes* was no longer the diffident-seeming figure he had met at Owl's Head.

It is not so much his gleeful response to the failure of *The Rape of Lucretia* in New York that reveals Weill's awareness of the challenge represented by such a composer, as the comparative ease with which he found a way of neutralizing the challenge by meeting it on his own terms in his own territory. In the spring or early summer of 1949 – just a few months after the New York première of *The Rape of Lucretia* – Weill quite suddenly broke with Broadway's long-established orchestral traditions. For *Lost in the Stars* – his and Maxwell Anderson's forthcoming version of Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* – he invented a Broadway version of Britten's English Opera Group chamber orchestra: a reed section of three players, plus trumpet, piano, harp, percussion, two violas, two cellos, and solo bass – twelve players in all. With thanks, perhaps, to Brahms's example, violins are omitted; with no thanks to Britten, a 'Greek' commenting chorus is introduced, for the first time in any work of Weill's since 1933. *Lost in the Stars* was to be Weill's last completed work.

In the *Saturday Review of Literature* of 31 December 1949 the distinguished theatre director and critic Harold Clurman – a close friend of Copland's since the early 1930s, but one who in 1937 had hailed Weill as 'the finest living theatre-composer' – published an essay entitled 'Lost in the Stars of Broadway'. Characterizing Weill as a chameleon-like figure, he views his American career as one of steady decline from the relatively high point of *Johnny Johnson* to the nadir of *Lost in the Stars*. With singular injustice, he writes of the latter that it is 'as slickly impressive and as basically void as the architecture of our giant movie emporia'.

Asked for his own view of the work, Weill's good friend Darius Milhaud replied with a benevolent inversion of Weill's judgement on *The Rape of Lucretia*, an inversion so precise that one can only wonder whether their mutual friend Abravanel had shown him Weill's letter. Too kind by far to say that there was 'no music' in *Lost in the Stars* (or rather, none or not much that suited his own taste), he avoids mentioning the music altogether, and turns, as Weill did in Britten's case, to the orchestration. So far from suggesting, as Weill did, that the orchestration is just a bundle of effects, he calls it a work of genius. Which indeed it is; though not without a small debt to the large genius of Britten.

2 *Britten and Milhaud*

The only documented meeting, and probably the only extended one, was in July 1964, on the occasion of Britten's visit to the Aspen Festival to receive the First Aspen Award in the Humanities, and to deliver his celebrated address. A photograph shows Britten standing in front of Milhaud's wheelchair, smiling affectionately at the seventy-two-year-old composer, who had been a much-loved teacher and guest-of-honour at Aspen since the early 1950s. At the performance of *Albert Herring* mounted by the Opera Department of the Aspen Music School, Britten sat next to Milhaud and his wife.

Milhaud's letter to Britten of October 1964 is warmly appreciative of his visit, and enquires with more than polite interest about *Curlew River*, telling him how often he has thought of what Britten had told him about it, and remembering that it is to be published by Faber. He requests a copy 'when it comes out'.

'I . . . ask myself', he remarks earlier in the same letter, 'how it is that for so many years we have hardly ever seen each other'.

Thanks to the initiatives of Edward Clark, Milhaud had often been invited to conduct his works for the BBC during the 1930s (a tradition that was to continue after the war). On 14 March 1932 the nineteen-year-old Britten noted in his diary that he had listened to a BBC concert conducted by Milhaud himself. Among the works were *La création du monde*, the First Violin Concerto, and the *Saudades do Brasil*. Britten thought the music 'poor'.

On 26 June 1935 Britten attended a Milhaud concert at the BBC, again conducted by the composer. There is no mention of their having met, though one of Britten's companions at the concert was Antonio Brosa, who had been the soloist in Milhaud's 1932 concert. Of the four works in the programme, Britten found 'the most striking' to be the Jewish Songs (presumably the *Poèmes juifs* of 1916). On 16 January 1937 he listened to *Christophe Colomb*, and was 'very interested' despite the distractions.

'[It] has been suggested', wrote Scott Goddard in 1946, '[that] the immediate urge [to compose *Les Illuminations*] came from hearing Milhaud's cantata *Pan et Syrinx*'.⁵ The cantata (1934) is one of the gems in that unique set of works for vocal ensemble with chamber orchestra which Milhaud inaugurated with his sixth chamber symphony of 1923, it soon vanished, like so much else, into the growing mass of Milhaud's output. Goddard's allusion may therefore have struck all but a handful of his readers as absurdly arcane and far-fetched. But in fact *Pan et Syrinx* happens to have been one of the four works featured in the Milhaud concert of 1935 which Britten had attended; and the soprano soloist on that occasion was none other than Sophie Wyss, soloist five years later in the première of

5 Scott Goddard, 'Benjamin Britten', in A. L. Bacharach (ed.), *British Music of Our Time* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946): 213-14.

Les Illuminations.⁶ What more likely source for Goddard's allusion?

To consider the actual or coincidental relationship between *Pan et Syrinx* and *Les Illuminations* is a task beyond the scope of the present notes, for it would entail some detailed preliminary assessment of Britten's astonishing *Quatre chansons françaises* of 1928, coupled with at least a general survey of Milhaud's numerous accompanied cycles and cantatas for vocal ensemble since 1921. Meanwhile, the first British performance of *Pan et Syrinx* for (probably) sixty years would be a disservice to no one.

Specific influences between composers are likely to prove a didactic rather than a spontaneously musical basis for programme-making. Affinities, which call for less information and insight but more intuition and in-hearing, tend to be an altogether sounder guide. It is hard to imagine, for instance, that Milhaud could have failed to sense a deep affinity with *Albert Herring*, irrespective of Maupassant, though incidentally mindful of polytonal procedures akin to his own in principle, however different in practice.

Albert Herring epitomizes two long-term aims and long-range visions that were characteristic of both composers: on the one hand, the universalization of a lovingly defined local context (the Suffolk of Britten, the Provence of Milhaud); on the other, the localization of the universal – the Suffolk of *Grimes* and all its successors, the Provence of *Les Malheurs d'Orphée*, *Esther de Carpentras*, and all theirs.

As for *Curlew River*, which flows into the same North Sea as *Albert Herring* but now from the furthestmost point on Britten's globe, it is clear from Milhaud's letter of October 1964 that his insatiable interest in technical problems and their musical solution had been stimulated by whatever Britten had told him about it in Aspen that summer. One wonders what he for his part had had to say in Aspen about his own recent work: about, for instance, the 'Étude de hasard dirigé' which forms the second movement of the string septet he had finished in Paris three months earlier; about the choral symphony *Pacem in terris* which he had composed in Aspen the previous year (to an excerpt from the April 1963 Encyclical of Pope John XXIII); or about the *Cantate de la croix de charité*, composed in 1960 to a commission

6 Milhaud's *Pan et Syrinx* is scored for soprano and baritone soloists, vocal quartet (SATB), flute, oboe, alto saxophone, bassoon and piano. Three instrumental 'Nocturnes' (with wordless vocal quartet) frame two extended solo numbers; the final 'Danse de Pan' unites all the forces. Sixty-one years after the successful première, publication of the score is still awaited. (The author is grateful to Mme Milhaud and Editions Salabert for enabling him to examine an inspection copy.) At first sight, Milhaud's cantata has no connection with *Les Illuminations* apart from its occasional resort to a type of declamation which Britten, in his letters to Sophie Wyss about his Rimbaud cycle, was to describe as 'heraldic'. Otherwise, the Britten-oriented reader has no surprises in store until the second nocturnal interlude, and even there, the link – a harmonic one – is with the Britten of *Peter Grimes*, and surely coincidental. It is the finale which will astonish ears attuned to Britten – not because of any specific 'influence', but because the tritone relationships (tonal as well as harmonic) confirm the music's Pan's intuition of a path between the world of (say) Debussy's *Rondes de printemps* and that of Britten's vernal music for children.

from the International Red Cross which three years later received the *Cantata misericordium* from Britten.

No composer active in the second half of our century has been closer in spirit to the Britten of *Ballad of Heroes* and *War Requiem*, and their numerous tributaries, than the Milhaud of the *Cortège funèbre* (from Malraux's own film of his *Espoir*), the *Cantate de la Guerre*, the *Ode pour les morts*, and his late masterpiece *Le château de feu*, perhaps the only musical commentary on the Holocaust that speaks of the unspeakable in tones adequate to the task of complementing those of Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*.

There remain the children, as survivors or otherwise in the bad times, as friends and companions in the better times, and as beggars, alas, at all times (for they, we learn, are 'always with us' – just as Milhaud's highly characteristic 1937 version of *The Beggar's Opera* will be 'always with' Britten's of 1948, not because it is likely ever to stand beside it, but because Milhaud was the first modern composer of any note to use Gay's and Pepusch's original material).

With Milhaud as with Britten, the place reserved for children in his music is no nursery or kindergarten, but it is unusually well appointed, and generally sunlit. The darker side is revealed only when children appear as witnesses of the incomprehensible or victims of atrocity, as they do in *Le château de feu* and the Elie Wiesel cantata *Ani maamin*. In 1932, the year in which he also composed the prophetic *La Mort du Tyran*, Milhaud tried by his own example to encourage other French composers to establish a literature for children's music-theatre: first with the 'musical play' *A propos des Bottes*, then with the 'game' *Un petit peu de musique*, both accompanied by an ensemble of violins and cellos (or by piano).

His chosen model was *Wir bauen eine Stadt* by Hindemith, with whom the Milhauds had been friendly since the early 1920s.

3 Britten and Hindemith

The British première of *Wir bauen eine Stadt* – 'Let's make a town' rather than an opera, for it is in fact a play or 'game' – was given at the ISCM Festival at Oxford in July 1931, and was widely commented upon.

Thanks to his phenomenal all-round musicianship, Hindemith had long been a respected figure in the British musical world. His reputation as the *enfant terrible* of German music had preceded him, but Sir Donald Tovey's unequivocal endorsement of his music had unlocked many doors in the more enlightened wings of the British colleges and conservatories. No less important (in that respect) than the warmth of Tovey's enthusiasm was the bond between Hindemith and William Walton. Established in the 1920s, it was cemented when Hindemith was persuaded by Edward Clark to stand in for the indisposed William Primrose, as soloist in the première of Walton's *Viola Concerto*.

Frank Bridge, being a string-player as well as an eminently broad-minded

composer, would surely have been well disposed towards Hindemith and his music. Among Britten's closer contemporaries, Walter Leigh had begun his studies with Hindemith in Berlin in 1927, and Arnold Cooke had followed two years later.

Leigh was to have many links with Britten in the film-music world – via Basil Wright and their work for the GPO Film Unit – and Cooke and Britten were to see a lot of each other at music festivals in the 1930s.

In the circumstances, it is remarkable how resistant to Hindemith's influence Britten remained. Although there are traces of it in some of the music left unpublished at his death, they are transient and superficial compared to the strong Hindemith influence in so much of Michael Tippett's music from 1939 until the completion of his Piano Concerto in 1955.

Hindemith for his part was fully aware of Britten. It was at his instigation that the *Cantata Academica* was commissioned for the quinquenary at Basle University; and the tributes he paid in public to Britten's operatic achievements were backed up by his practice in the classroom, where Britten was one of his chosen models, and held up to his students as exemplary with regard to word-setting, dramatic declamation, and clarity of voice-and-orchestra texture.

4 Britten and Markevich

Among the innumerable 'students' of Hindemith who never actually studied with him, by far the most celebrated in the 1930s was Igor Markevich. As the prodigious and much-admired pupil of Nadia Boulanger at the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris – from which he obtained his diploma in 1928 – Markevich had been perhaps the first in her analysis class to grasp the true significance of her (now generally forgotten) advocacy of Hindemith. While Stravinsky was always to remain her exemplar among the moderns, she found in Hindemith some necessary and complementary virtues, to which, perhaps, she could relate her experience of Fauré. For the young Markevich, Hindemith provided among other things a coherent means of circumventing the challenge of Stravinsky until by 1932 he was ready to take his own path.

In his diary entry of 31 March 1931, Britten records his first encounter with Markevich's music:

Go to Waterloo Studio (B.B.C.) to hear contemporary concert, with Bridges. He [i.e. Frank Bridge] conducts B.B.C. orch "Enter Spring" & "Willow aslant a Brook" (Bridge) rather badly played, but magnificent, inspired works. Brosa St. quart. plays with orch concerto by Conrad Beck. Interesting, but that's all, incredibly played. And to end up with an absurd Concerto Grosso by Igor Markievitch. Intolerably difficult, & consequently only mod. played by the orch. This *must* have been written with the composer's tongue in his cheek.

Hailed by Milhaud and others as a revelation when Roger Desormière

conducted the world première in Paris in 1930, the *Concerto Grosso* is by no means absurd, and certainly written in deadly earnest. The French critics were struck by the precocious originality of the piece, but failed to notice (as Milhaud can hardly have done) the Hindemith influence that would be immediately apparent to any informed listener today – the influence, indeed, of a specific work, namely the Concerto for Orchestra of 1925. Only in the slow movement, and in the Gogolesque episodes in the Finale, do Markevich's Russian origins betray themselves – in terms that the young Shostakovich might have recognized more readily than the young Britten.

Britten's next encounter with Markevich was at the 1934 ISCM Festival in Florence, where on 4 April he noted in his diary that Markevich's *Psaume* had caused 'a bit of a scene' (in fact an uproar, as Slonimsky notes in *Music since 1900*). Britten found the work 'interesting and original in spots', but 'not really so important'.

In his diary entries about contemporary music, the epithet 'interesting' is always the next-to-highest form of response, and never a word that is used lightly or academically. For Britten, its connotations may be objective in the sense of perceived quality, but are intensely subjective in the sense that the music must at some level speak to *him* (to 'interest' the critics and the cognoscenti was never his concern). Seldom if ever does the music so described fail to measure up to his minimum criteria; and *Psaume* is no exception. But the least rewarding, and certainly the least original, passage in the work is no mere 'spot', but a protracted recitative at the very centre of the structure. The rest of *Psaume* is anything but patchy; on the contrary, it is so stridently and obsessively single-minded that the furore it created in Florence is understandable to this day.

What Britten might have found especially 'interesting and original' in *Psaume* is the rejection of (neo)classical and European models in favour of South-east Asian ones – not in order to creat 'exotic' effects, but rather to explore purely technical and structural possibilities.

At the International Colonial Exhibition held in Paris in 1931, the so-called '*spectacles exotiques*' included theatre from Annam (Central Vietnam, as it became in 1946), and traditional music and dance from Cambodia, Thailand and, last but not least, Bali. In one sense the exhibition harked back to the historic World Exhibition of 1889, where the revelatory effect of the Annamite Theatre upon Claude Debussy had been typical of the long-term influences that stemmed from so many of its non-European exhibits. By definition more concentrated, the 1931 Exhibition offered a new range of resources for the performing and decorative arts, and creative artists in general. Now that Modernism had won its early battles, the re-appraisal of non-Western arts in all their forms was both possible and timely.

Stravinsky being fully preoccupied with his neoclassical adventures, it was too late for him to stand in for Debussy, but not too early for his devoted admirer Francis Poulenc. In the surreal *montage* of Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos and Orchestra of 1932, blocks of artificial Balinese temple music are brilliantly incorporated. Together with Jacques Février, Poulenc played

one of the two solo parts in the Concerto's première on 5 September 1932. Two or three months earlier, Markevich – whose work Poulenc continued vociferously to praise in his music reviews – had begun the composition of *L'Envol d'Icare*, while recovering in the South of France from the rigours of an unsupervised and unmedicated self-cure of a recent opium addiction.

Whereas the 'gamelan' episodes in the Poulenc Concerto were fugitive impressions even within the work itself, and as such, unlikely to recur once they had been captured, the impact upon Markevich of the Balinese orchestras is felt throughout *L'Envol d'Icare*, and far beyond it. On the polyrhythmic and modal levels, and to some extent on the textural ones, that impact can already be sensed from the recent CD recording⁷ of a version of *L'Envol d'Icare* for two pianos and four percussion; but it is through the heterophonies and the microtonal tunings of the original orchestral version that the non-Western orientations of the score are ultimately defined.

On 16 January 1955, and just a few weeks before he began work on *The Prince of the Pagodas*, Britten was co-soloist with Poulenc in a Royal Festival Hall performance of Poulenc's Concerto for Two Pianos. Had Markevich been in London at the time (he had a home there) and free to attend, he would surely have been delighted to do so, as an old friend of Poulenc and a more recent one of Britten and Pears. Only in such a context might Poulenc have been reminded of the sensation caused by the Paris première of *L'Envol d'Icare* – an event unprecedented, it was claimed, since the première of *The Rite of Spring*. On that evening, the now long-forgotten legend of 'the two Igors' was born. But *L'Envol* was not heard in England until 1938, when Constant Lambert conducted it in one of the BBC's Contemporary Music concerts. As far as is known, Britten was not present.

In the final section of *L'Envol*, the 'Balinese' transfiguration of the fallen Icarus is already looking forward to the *tranquillo* coda of *Psaume*, which celebrates 'l'espoir de toutes les extrémités lointaines de la terre et de l'Océan'. That 'hope' is to be reborn in the gamelan-influenced passages of the oratorio *Le Paradis perdu*, before it finally dissolves in the tumults of *Le Nouvel âge*, a *sinfonia concertante* completed in January 1938 and performed in London at the ISCM Festival in June of that year.

If the experimental and unpublished *Hymnes* for orchestra (1933) is included in the list – which it should be – Markevich responded to the Balinese allurements of 1931 and the narcoses of early 1932 by composing one substantial score per year for five years, in each of which there are significant gamelan elements (though only in *L'Envol d'Icare* are they microtonal).

In his diary entry of 20 December 1935, Britten records his attendance (with Basil Wright among others) at the BBC Contemporary Music concert in the Queen's Hall. Substituting at the last moment for Hermann Scherchen, Markevich had conducted the world première of *Le Paradis perdu*. Given

7 Igor Markevich, *L'Envoi d'Icare* (with *Galop, Noces, and Serenade*) on LARGO 5127.

that the work is in every respect, including negative ones, a consolidation of *Psaume*, it is curious that Britten avoids commenting on the work itself, and instead comments on its composer, whom he appears to have met at the 'very nice' post-concert party:

very capable brilliant young man – but with rather a stereotyped and conventional mind – as strict as Cherubini and people.

Ten days later, in a letter to Marjorie Fass, Britten mentions the 'brilliant young man' again (Markevich – born in Kiev on 17 July 1912 – was Britten's senior by sixteen months):

The real musicians are so few & far between, arn't they? Apart from the Bergs, Stravinskys, Schönbergs & Bridges one is a bit stumped for names, isn't one? Markievitch may be – but personally I feel that he's not got there yet. Shostakovitch – perhaps – possibly.

In Britten's sense, Markevich's arrival might have been signalled by the *Cantique d'amour* of October–December 1936, a work inspired by Markevich's union with and marriage to Nijinsky's daughter Kyra. Its proposed London première under the auspices of the BBC was blocked after internal memos regarding the personality and morality of the composer had once again left Edward Clark in an isolated position. (The work had its world première in Rome, under Mario Rossi, in May 1937. It has yet to be heard in the UK.)

The *Cantique d'amour* heralded the 'late' Markevich of *La Taille de l'homme*, *Lorenzo il magnifico*, and the *Variations and Fugue on a theme of Handel*. Well below the surface of each of these works, small traces of sublimated gamelan can still be detected. There are none, however, in the final page of the Handel Variations – a coda to the Fugue which unforgettably distils what sounds like a lifetime's experience, though in fact the composer was still in his thirtieth year. Forty years later, that page was given the title '*Envoi*'; for it had in fact marked Markevich's unpremeditated withdrawal from composition, at the very point where his achievement promised most for the future.

Markevich spent most of the war years in Florence, where his wife Kyra was teaching dancing. After their separation and a prolonged and nearly fatal illness, he was befriended by Bernard Berenson, who gave him the use of a gardener's cottage. After a period in the Italian Resistance, Markevich began the conducting career which brought him international fame in the immediate aftermath of the war. By then he was married to Topazia Caetani.

It was from the Markevich's London home at 10 Netherton Grove, Chelsea, that Topazia's first extant letter to Britten was addressed – on 4 May 1955, just over three months after the Britten–Poulenc concerto performance. Apart from a passing reference to Dallapiccola – with whom Markevich had been on friendly terms since the time of the *Psaume* scandal – that letter and the subsequent correspondence with Britten

reveals Markevich in his sole and now all-exclusive role as conductor.

True, Boosey & Hawkes were now publishing a 1943 revision of *L'Envol d'Icare*, together with a version of *The Musical Offering*. But these were purely expedient transactions, without regard to future composition. Retitled *Icare*, the new version was typically the work of the nascent conductor, who for all his insights and expertise, is prepared to sacrifice the non-European character and much of the rough-and-ready originality of the original score, in the interests of producing an effective concert item. Having done so, he turned to other arrangements – Johann Strauss, Musorgsky, and so forth. Before long, he had safely lost sight of his own compositions, and so had the musical world.

On 6 December 1960, Markevich wrote to Britten from his native city of Kiev to report among other things that he had just seen Rostropovich:

He asked me to tell you his great joy for the concerto [*recte*: sonata] that you write for him.

It was Markevich's first visit to Russia since his parents took him to Switzerland in 1914. His music had never been heard there, but now that he was appearing exclusively in the guise of conductor and teacher, he was soon a celebrity. Until his eventual and inevitable clash with the authorities, he was an important influence on musical life in Moscow, where he stayed for several lengthy periods.

It was in Moscow that Britten and Pears visited Markevich during their tour in 1963. Markevich later recalled (in conversation with the author, 1980) taking them deep into the countryside to visit a remarkable painter who had fallen foul of the arbiters of Socialist Realism.

His correspondence with Britten ends in 1965. By then, his international career as a conductor had been crippled by the deafness that had struck him, without warning, while rehearsing in Weimar in 1960. For the one-time composer whose phenomenal powers of hearing had been legendary since his early days in the Boulanger class, such a blow might have been supportable; for the conductor whose fame was acquired at the expense of the composer's, it determined a prolonged involvement with Beethoven, and finally – just a year or so after the death of Britten – the rediscovery and acknowledgement of his own music.

As a conductor of his own music, Markevich had had extensive studies in the 1930s with one of his own principal advocates – Hermann Scherchen. As a full-time conductor, he remained indebted to Scherchen, but seldom followed in his footsteps with regard to twentieth-century music. If his choice of repertory reflected his origins as a composer, it was only in the negative sense that his commitment to congenial composers such as Dallapiccola, Messiaen, and Britten – whose international fame, in each case, post-dated the fame he himself had renounced – was strictly limited.

Moreover, and perhaps conclusively, he ignored as a conductor the exceptional insights which as a composer had led him to discover the genius of

Schoenberg in the mid-1930s. That discovery had been another bond with Britten, and it was all the stronger because it was equally foreign to the prevailing climate of opinion (but also, in his case though not in Britten's, to the passionate convictions of his teacher).

It was not in Schoenberg that the post-war Markevich found common ground with Britten, but in Berg – above all, the Icarian Berg (or so he imagined) of the Violin Concerto.

5 *Britten and Gerhard*

The première of Berg's Violin Concerto, with Louis Krasner as soloist, was given at the ISCM Festival in Barcelona on 19 April 1936, with Hermann Scherchen conducting. The first half of the programme had opened with a *Prelude and Fugue* by Edmund von Borck, continued with the first (and to date the last) performance of Roberto Gerhard's *Ariel*, and ended with the three pieces from Krenek's first twelve-note opera, *Karl V*. All this, wrote Britten, was 'completely swamped' by the second half:

Berg's last work Violin Concerto (just shattering – very simple, & touching)
& the *Wozzeck* pieces – which always leave me like a wet rag.

Britten and Lennox Berkeley were the two British composers represented at the festival – Britten by his Suite, Op. 6, for violin and piano, in which the soloist was Antonio Brosa, with the composer at the piano. Three months to the day after the première of the Berg concerto, Franco's North African troops landed in Spain, and the Civil War began.

The prime mover of the Barcelona ISCM Festival had been Roberto Gerhard. Since his return in 1929 to his native Catalonia after four years of study with Schoenberg, Gerhard had thrown himself into the task of rescuing Barcelona's contemporary music movement from a provincialism wholly at odds with the cultural life of a city which otherwise vied with Paris, Berlin, and London as an international centre – the city of Gaudí, Picasso, Miró, and many other major figures in the modern movement. Schoenberg's acceptance of Gerhard's invitation to Barcelona in 1931 had at one stroke transformed the nature of Gerhard's campaign – and the six or seven months Schoenberg spent so happily and so creatively as a guest of Gerhard and his Viennese wife Poldi were more than merely symbolic of the regeneration and modernization of musical life in Catalonia.

At the ISCM Festival in Vienna in June 1932, the performance, conducted by Webern, of Gerhard's *Six Catalan Songs* had been one of the few notable successes – so notable, indeed, that Henry Wood included the work in his 1933 Promenade Season. His soloist was Sophie Wyss.⁸ With the outbreak

⁸ Part 1 of Henry Wood's Promenade Concert on 5 October 1933 began with the *Bartered Bride* Overture, continued with the Gerhard Folk Songs and the Elgar Violin Concerto

of Civil War, Gerhard became Adviser to the Catalan Ministry of Fine Arts, and a member of the Republican Government's Central Music Council.

Thanks to the success of the Prom performance of the *Catalan Songs*, the BBC – probably on the advice of Edward Dent and J. B. Trend – commissioned a short orchestral work from Gerhard for a series of programmes about the life and culture of embattled Spain. Entitled *Albada, Interludi i Dansa*, it was furnished with an anonymous programme note which – like the BBC series in general – was required to dissemble its pro-Republican sympathies, since any overt expression of them might have compromised the Corporation's Reithian impartiality. Gerhard himself conducted the première, with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, on 27 October 1937. Two months later, Britten and Berkeley completed *Mont Juic*, the orchestral suite they based on the Catalan folksongs they had collected in Barcelona the year before.

In 1939, shortly before Barcelona fell to Franco's troops, Gerhard and his wife fled to Paris. From there they moved to Cambridge, at the invitation of Professors Dent and Trend. Without either a teaching post or a publisher, let alone private means of support, Gerhard survived the war years and their aftermath chiefly by undertaking precisely the kind of radio and film work that remained one of Britten's mainstays until the success of *Grimes*.

Had Gerhard needed more moral support than his own strength of character afforded him, it would have been available from several quarters – first and foremost from his compatriot Antonio Brosa, who as early as 1940 asked him for a violin concerto, then from Sophie Wyss, who asked him for more and yet more folksong arrangements, and from Constant Lambert, who in 1942 took up the cause of his unperformed *Don Quixote* ballet. Through his zarzuela arrangements and fantasies for the Spanish service of the BBC, Gerhard also established a friendly professional relationship with the conductor Stanford Robinson, who in 1949 was to conduct a BBC studio broadcast and recording of the first performance of his three-act opera *The Duenna*, with the leading tenor role sung by Peter Pears.

There is strong but not incontrovertible evidence that after the broadcast of *The Duenna*, Gerhard received from Britten, via a third party, a request for a souvenir in the form of an autograph copy of the Act III Wedding March.

Among the many passages in *The Duenna* which might have struck the Britten of 1949 as 'interesting and original', perhaps even inspired, the Wedding March is prominent enough to lend credence to reports of such a request. If, however, Gerhard complied with it, the autograph has not come to light since Britten's death. If he did not, it was probably because of Gerhard's ill-health, which was soon to culminate in the first of his numerous cardiac crises.

(soloist: Albert Sammons), and ended with the 'Unfinished' Symphony. Part 2 began with Frank Bridge's *Dance Poem*, conducted by the composer.

Britten attended the morning rehearsal as well as the concert itself (at the Queen's Hall). In his diary that same evening he notes having heard '6 attractive, yet flimsy, Catalan Folk Songs', and also, *inter alia*, 'Elgar's Impossible Vln concerto'.

Not long after the *Duenna* broadcast, and certainly well within a year of it, Britten and Pears – with support from George Harewood on the one side and Erwin Stein on the other – readily agreed to invite Gerhard to write a work for the Aldeburgh Festival. The result was the Concerto for Piano and Strings, whose composition followed immediately upon that of the three *Impromptus* (written as a wedding present for George Harewood and Marion Stein). The Concerto was completed in good time for its appointed première at the 1951 Festival, but owing to some clerical oversight, it seems that Gerhard received no notification of the rehearsal schedule, nor any invitation to the performance itself. With the proudness of a Spaniard who knew his own worth at a time when the British musical world was largely ignorant of it and Franco's Spain was in effect closed to him, Gerhard was disinclined to attend the première, or in any way to solicit the invitation which materialized only at the last moment.

The rehearsals, with Noel Mewton-Wood as soloist and Norman Del Mar conducting, seem to have been more than usually fraught, not only because of the (at that time) considerable complexity of the string-writing – and consequent problems, perhaps, with regard to orchestral parts extracted without the editorial intermediacy of a publisher – but also because of the very nature of the idiom. Unfortunately, word reached the composer in Cambridge to the effect that at the first rehearsal a section leader had raised the usual questions about 'wrong notes', only for someone to call out, amidst general hilarity, 'Who knows, and who cares?'

In the name of musical and professional integrity, no one apart from the composer himself would have cared more than Britten. Even so, the Concerto was far removed from anything that might have been expected two years earlier from the composer of *The Duenna*. Strictly serial and dodeca-phonetic, though not in the old textbook sense, it excluded the entire range of expanded diatonic and bitonal harmony which Gerhard had first made his own in the *Catalan Songs* of 1929, and then continued to explore throughout the next two decades. Especially in such vocal works as the *Cantata* of 1931, the Spanish and French folksong cycles for Sophie Wyss (including the now famous *Cancionero de Pedrell*) and above all *The Duenna*, it was surely a harmony that Britten would have found congenial. From 1951 onwards, it was no longer to be heard, except in Gerhard's incidental music, and even then with decreasing frequency.

Perhaps at some level Gerhard felt that the death of Schoenberg in 1951 had finally released him from further self-affirmative obligations towards a highly distinctive harmonic idiom that owed much to his Viennese training, but little or nothing to the Schoenbergian principles he had already begun to discard in his final apprentice work, the Wind Quintet of 1928. Having respectfully recalled them, from a great distance, in the Violin Concerto he wrote for Antonio Brosa (completed in 1945, and first performed under Scherchen in Florence in 1950) he returned to them, or rather, to his own version of them, at precisely the point where he and Britten in effect parted company – in the Concerto for Piano and Strings.

6 *Britten and Leopold Spinner*

Throughout the last thirty-five years of Britten's life, and then for a further four years, the only composer active in the United Kingdom who stood in direct line of succession from Schoenberg, Webern and Berg, was the Austrian-born Leopold Spinner (1906–1980). Unrecognized to this day in his adopted country, and virtually unknown even in Austria, Spinner is one of the very few twentieth-century composers who has fulfilled an historic role without finding even the humblest of places in the histories and guidebooks.

As for the music itself, it would be hard to conceive of something so remote from the representative needs and requirements of cyberspace and the weekend culture supplements – not the obscurest of fifteenth-century Flemish contrapuntists, not the driest of Mannheim symphonists, not the palest of *fin-de-siècle* operetta hacks; and certainly not the magic pipings of some endangered tribe from the Guyanan rainforest.

Yet Spinner was a master – more than a *petit maître*, and in the moral dimensions of his craft and calling, as exigent and incorruptible as the greatest of the classical masters who were his gods. Arriving almost penniless in England in 1939, he spent most of the war years in the Midlands – where he worked for a while in a locomotive factory – but settled in London when the war was over. Through Erwin Stein he was introduced to Boosey & Hawkes as a freelance copyist and editor, and before long he joined the editorial department on a full-time basis, with particular responsibility for Stravinsky, but also (via Stein) for Britten.

On 5 April 1934 the chamber music concert at the Florence ISCM Festival began with Britten's Phantasy Quartet:

Goossens and the Grillers really play my Phant. very beautifully & it's quite well received. Other works – Trio by Neugeboren (apparently v. conventional – I didn't hear it) – Sturznegger a Cantata for various instruments rather colourless – an interesting quartet by Spinner . . .

Spinner's *Kleines Quartett* – or *Quartettino* as it was called in Florence – was played by the Kolisch Quartet, three of whom had given the exceptionally well-received première of his String Trio at the 1932 ISCM Festival. Neither score has come to light, though Louis Krasner stated in 1987 that the manuscript of the *Kleines Quartett* was in his possession, but temporarily mislaid – unlike his other Spinner manuscript of 1934, the Two Pieces for violin and piano.⁹ Copies of the Two Pieces are in the Spinner Archives (Music Division of the National Library in Vienna) and confirm the impressions which Spinner's 'sehr persönliches' (Paul Stefan) 'in Schönberg-

9 See Regina Busch, *Leopold Spinner* (Bonn: Boosey & Hawkes, 1987): 55.

Bahnen' (E. Steinhard) *Kleines Quartett* had left on two influential and discerning critics.

'Interesting' as the two violin pieces should likewise have been to the Britten of 1934, two of the large-scale Spinner works from exactly the same period would by their very nature have made an even stronger impression. One of them, the *Passacaglia* for wind ensemble, violin, cello, and piano, might indeed have registered (consciously or otherwise) as 'fascinating'; for the twelve-note passacaglia theme is saturated with fourths and quartal implications whose harmonic and formal consequences are such that the future composer of *The Turn of the Screw* would unerringly have grasped their significance. (Awarded the Henri-Le-Boeuf prize and performed in Brussels on 29 April 1936 by an ensemble under the direction of Hermann Scherchen, the *Passacaglia* was not heard again until the spring of 1992, when the Ensemble Modern under Friedrich Cerha performed it in the Queen Elizabeth Hall.)

While the *Passacaglia* suggests affinities with Alban Berg and in particular with his Chamber Concerto of 1925, Spinner's four-movement String Quartet of 1934–5 is, after his own fashion, as Schoenbergian as the violin pieces, but still, like the *Passacaglia*, governed by a tone row rich in quartal implications. To the best of our knowledge, this masterly work was the last that Spinner composed before clairvoyantly taking the unique step (for a mature composer at that time) of aligning himself with, and apprenticing himself to, Anton von Webern.

'Interesting & very beautiful in parts': thus Britten again, reacting to a performance of Webern's *Five Pieces*, Op. 5, for string quartet, played by the Kolisch Quartet on 1 December 1933.

Unlike Schoenberg, Webern composed no mature tonal music. Unlike Webern, Spinner made one solitary exception, subdivided into three phases: the first two date from 1960–61, when he turned to the same Herbert Hughes collection of *Irish Country Songs* that Britten had drawn upon in the late 1950s, and composed *Six Canons on Irish Folksongs* for mixed chorus *a cappella*, followed by four more (but only two new ones) for mixed orchestra and string orchestra; and finally in 1964 came another set of *a cappella* canons. Even for a composer whose art, like Webern's, was now rooted in canonic procedures, these were no exercises. Nor was Ireland an escapade, or folksong a commercially determined choice. The canons were a family matter, in a tradition that Bach would have recognized.

From time to time – when the need arose or when the production department had nothing better or more urgent to do – the Managing Director of Boosey & Hawkes, Dr Ernst Roth (another arrival from Universal Edition after the Nazi annexation of Austria) would authorize production and limited publication of a Spinner score. Aware as he was that his music was being published out of kindness and collegial respect rather than out any belief in its future, Spinner must also have recognized that the very acceptance of such kindness was, by his own uncompromising standards, a kind of compromise.

ON BRITTEN

If among those who knew Spinner there was anyone who would have grasped what such a compromise might have cost him, it was surely Benjamin Britten, a composer and musician who in his own very different way was as intransigent as he.

for Donald
London, 9-15 January 1995