

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT.

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This thesis contains two elements, a portfolio of creative work and a dissertation. The individual compositions in the portfolio are all intended to stand as independent works of music, just as the dissertation is intended to stand alone as a piece of musicological research. However, these elements are closely linked and the purpose of this statement is to demonstrate those links.

Table 1: Contents of Composition Portfolio.

Title	Year	Duration	Genre	Commissioned by	First performance
The Selfish Giant	2015	50 minutes	Poly-technical opera	The Pittwater House Schools	The Pittwater House Schools, Sydney 2016. Sepeher Irandoost bass-baritone, Adele Cosentino treble, Jim Coyle, conductor.
Ring Out, Wild Bells	2017	5 minutes	Young persons' choir, piano duet, organ	HICES Music Festival 2017	Massed Choir of the HICES Music Festival, Sydney Town Hall 2017. Michael Power, Fiona Fitzgerald, piano Jim Abraham, organ Jim Coyle, conductor
The Bright Seraphim	2016	8 minutes	Piccolo trumpet concerto	Anthony Heinrichs, Section Trumpet, Sydney Symphony Orchestra	Eugene Goosens Hall, Sydney 2017 Anthony Heinrichs, piccolo trumpet The Metropolitan Orchestra, Sarah-Grace Williams, conductor
Paradise of Birds	2017	19 minutes	Suite for flute and piano	Bridget Bolliger	Recorded by Bridget Bolliger, flute Andrew West, piano. Sydney Chamber Music Festival 2018.
The Golden Thread	2016	16 minutes	Horn concerto	Greg Stephens, Section Horn, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra	St George's Church, Hobart 2017 Greg Stephens, horn Hobart Chamber Orchestra, Gary Wain, conductor
Deep	2015	17 minutes	Tuba sonata	Tim Jones, Principal Tuba, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra	FOMA, MONA Hobart 2016. Tim Jones tuba, Jennifer Marten-Smith piano
A Bona Cottage Upright	2015	4 minutes	Four pianos	Prize winner 'Take Six' competition organised by Theme and Variations pianos to celebrate the centenary of Sydney Conservatorium, of Music	Theme and Variations Pianos Sydney 2016. Timothy Young, Gabriella Pusner, James Huntingford, Joshua Creek, pianos

Total duration 2 hours.

Professional quality recordings of all of these pieces are included in the portfolio.

The dissertation is of approximately 40,000 words and is entitled “An appraisal of the poly-technical works of Benjamin Britten.”

This introductory statement is somewhat exegetical in nature and links the creative and dissertation elements into a unified and purposeful thesis, by demonstrating two discrete but connected research responses to the same question, one using traditional musicological methods, the other a creative response.

The Selfish Giant is the major work in this portfolio and is the one most closely linked with the dissertation. The question facing the composer on receiving this commission was the same one facing Britten when he composed *Noye's Fludde* in 1957: how to compose an opera that involves professional musicians, large numbers of musically untrained children as performers, and the audience. The solutions were somewhat different because they are works composed nearly sixty years apart in different societies, yet *The Selfish Giant* is firmly a work in the spirit and genre of *Noye's Fludde*.

1950s rural Britain was an ethnically homogenous society with a shared religious and cultural experience. Church attendance (largely Church of England in East Anglia) and community singing were a normal part of life¹ and the hymns included in works like *Noye's Fludde* “were part of every Anglican church goer's experience at the time”² Therefore, the congregational hymns in *Noye's Fludde* would have been sung by a 1958 British audience far more readily than by today's Australian audience.

R. Morieux & K. Snell, “Parish and belonging: Community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950.” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 65, No. 5 (2010), 1273.

Graham Elliott. *Benjamin Britten: the spiritual dimension*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 66.

Sydney in 2016 is pluralist, multi-ethnic, and largely unchurched.³ This has particularly strong implications for the question of audience participation.

Oscar Wilde's short story *The Selfish Giant* appears in *The Happy Prince* collection (1888) and is a fable on redemption. Adapting Wilde's original story for such a modern Australian audience also requires alteration. In the original, the Child reveals his true nature to the Giant by manifesting stigmata before leading him to his reward. For today's Australian school, this demonstration is too gruesome for the congregation. In the opera, the Child's nature may be inferred by members of the audience according to their own beliefs. The Child is androgynous and in no way made to physically resemble Jesus; and so may be interpreted as an angel, an emissary, a good spirit, the Holy Spirit or, certainly, as a manifestation of Jesus Christ.

The large mass of children in *Noye's Fludde* portray animals. After they enter the Ark, they remain on stage for the rest of the piece. In *The Selfish Giant*, each class of children have a specific scene to learn, with all of them coming together for the finale. Thus, a Year Three class take the part of the birds, a Year Six class may take the part of the bricks that make the Giant's wall, all of Year Five form the band and Orff ensemble. This makes it easier to rehearse in their class music lessons, a necessary solution in a time-poor education world where school authorities are very reluctant to let children miss 'academic' classes to go to an opera rehearsal. The excerpt in Figure 1 is a typical passage in which the instrumental and vocal groups can learn their parts separately before coming together near the end of the rehearsal process.

³J. Bellamy, & K. Castle, "2001 church attendance estimates." *NCLS occasional paper*, 3. (2004), 1.

Figure 1: The Selfish Giant, p. 42.

4. Wall

Strict time
♩=110

287

Metallophone 1, 2
mp

Xylophone 1, 2
mp

Xylophone 3, 4
mp

Bass Xylophone/Metellophone
mp

Band

Band

Bricks

Strict time
♩=110

Piano
mp *mf*

Brick by brick and row on row, now



289

Met.
f

Xyl. 1, 2
f

Xyl. 3, 4
f

Bass Xyl./Met.
f

Band
f ww brass

Band
f

Bricks

look at us grow! Square and hard, held fast to - ge-ther high-er we go!

Pno.
mp *f*

Both works have a small number of professional singers/actors (*Noye's Fludde*, three; *The Selfish Giant*, one) and instrumentalists (nine in *Noye's Fludde*, eight in *The Selfish Giant*)⁴. Both works use children in the orchestra according to what children can play and the instruments that are likely to be available. Evans questions the unusual choice of instrumentation in *Noye's Fludde*, claiming that the only thing the instruments have in common is their availability to children.⁵ The same criterion applied to the orchestration of *The Selfish Giant*.

The children in the orchestra for *The Selfish Giant* either play Orff pitched percussion instruments or woodwind and brass instruments that are most commonly found in school bands (flutes, clarinets, alto saxophones, trumpets and trombones with additional material available for other instruments such as tenor saxophones and tubas). The band parts for *The Selfish Giant* were originally conceived at two levels of difficulty. However, during rehearsals, it became clear that there were some children for whom even more elementary parts would be necessary. Thus, third parts were added for alto saxophone and trombone with a total tessitura of a perfect fifth, similar to the “very elementary” third violins and second cellos in *Noye's Fludde*.⁶

Noye's Fludde has parts for a handbell choir (there are only 20 such groups allied to the Handbell Society of Australasia)⁷ and a boys' bugle band (there may be only one such left in Australia).⁸ *The Selfish Giant* has a very flexible concert band ensemble and an ensemble of at least seven Orff pitched percussion instruments. These are the instrumental ensembles that are most likely to be available in Australian primary schools today and in the foreseeable future (for example, 43 out of 51 primary schools

⁴ Extensive analysis of Britten's vocal and instrumental writing in *Noyes Fludde*, revealing exactly how he approached writing for his chosen forces, is included in chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis.

⁵ Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 273.

⁶ Benjamin Britten, *Noye's Fludde*. (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1958), iii.

⁷ <https://www.handbells.org.au/>

⁸ Ross Kay, “Regional Queensland Primary School Bugle Band May be Only One of Its Kind in Australia,” *ABC News*, June 22, 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-06-22/regional-queensland-primary-school-bugle-band-may-be-only-one/7533498>.

in the Australian Capital Territory have concert bands of at least a rudimentary nature).⁹

Britten was not a teacher, but he understood the capabilities of young musicians at various stages in their learning. The simplest string parts in *Noye's Fludde* can be played by children who have only been learning the violin for a few weeks, even though there is some degree of rhythmic complexity (this is discussed in detail in Chapter 4). For many children playing in *Noye's Fludde*, the hardest part is counting the long rests. Britten seems to have gone some way to solving that problem by having professional (or at least far more advanced) players in each section whose positive lead helps with entries after long rests.

In *The Selfish Giant*, band and Orff percussion parts have the letter-names of each note written as well as the music notation. The children understood this notation more easily because the letter names are written on the bars of the percussion instrument and letter-names are the means by which they first learned their woodwind and brass instruments. The problem of the long rests in *The Selfish Giant* was solved in rehearsal when it was decided to ask the child instrumentalists to sing when they were not playing; a strategy that led to more reliable entries and added valuable tone-weight to the chorus.

In *The Selfish Giant* the audience do not sing communal hymns because hymns and community singing are outside the experience of so many Australians that the idea simply would not work. However, use of their smartphones and other digital devices at school concerts is a fundamental part of the lifestyle of the Australian primary school parent, so *The Selfish Giant* involves the devices as a form of audience participation.

⁹ ACT Instrumental Music Program "Primary School Concert Bands"
http://www.imp.act.edu.au/system_bands/primary_concert_bands2 (retrieved 22nd September 2016)

On three occasions during the opera, the audience are invited (by a message on a screen which also doubles as the scenery) to use their devices as part of the performance. First, they are asked to take a portrait photo of any child performing and send it to a closed Instagram page. These photos are sorted and some of them are projected onto the screen during the instrumental section of the Giant's Soliloquy.

Some time later, the audience are invited to record a short musical phrase, then replay it over and over but not in time with their neighbours. Thus, they are making a musical contribution and adding to an extremely thick texture which is partly a homage to Benjamin Britten's great canon at the end of *Noye's Fludde*. This use of complex polyphony made from simple materials is one of the compelling qualities of Britten's poly-technical music.¹⁰

Finally, right at the end of *The Selfish Giant*, the Child leads the Giant off through the auditorium and the audience use their devices as flashlights to spotlight the two characters leaving.

This final involvement is an attempt to generate emotional affect. The singing of Tallis' canon at the end of *Noye's Fludde* "shake(s) normally impervious men to their foundations."¹¹ So how to move an audience to tears without them singing a hymn? The flashlight solution works – it is simple enough that the audience can concentrate on the emotion of the music and drama; and, by shining their lights, the audience illuminate the faces of the Giant and Child, thus focussing on the most affecting sight in the drama.

There is nothing in the music or libretto of *The Selfish Giant* that is a deliberate pastiche of anything in Britten. However, *Noye's Fludde* is not only a masterpiece, but also the paradigm for successful intergenerational, poly-technical opera. As such, it deserves to be considered the foundation work in this genre. *The Selfish Giant* is an

¹⁰ Christopher Fox, "After the Fludde: Ambitious Music for all-comers." In *Beyond Britten: The Composer and the Community*. Wiegold, Peter, and Kenyon, Ghislaine eds, (Woodbridge: Brewer and Boydell, 2015), 37.

¹¹ Critic John Culshaw quoted in Michael Kennedy, *Britten*. (London: JM Dent, 1993), 266.

attempt to add a work to that genre, with full consideration of the work that founded it.

The other poly-technical work in this portfolio is *Ring Out, Wild Bells*, commissioned for the HICES¹² music festival as a finale for their concert in Sydney Town Hall. 350 students aged from nine to thirteen participated in various ensembles for the three-day camp. Singers and instrumentalists were all asked to sing in the finale. The instrumental accompaniment was provided by professional adults and consisted of a piano duet and optional organ. The organ part was made optional in the hope that it would make future performances of the piece more likely, but having the organ of Sydney Town Hall available was an irresistible opportunity. The piano duet was a favourite of Britten in compositions of this type; he uses it in all three of the core poly-technical works: *St Nicholas*, *The Little Sweep* and *Noye's Fludde*. He also employs it in *Children's Crusade* but notes that two pianos is the preferred option.¹³ There are clear advantages in tone-weight (no small consideration for a choir of 350), tessitura of accompaniment and available textural resources. In the case of Britten's works, the piano duet can also cover instrumental sections played by children whose confident entries are not as reliable as those of professional musicians.

The vocal parts in *Ring Out Wild Bells* are Soprano, Alto and what is labelled Tenor in the score but in fact covers all broken (and many transitional) boys' voices. This is precisely the formula Britten used in *Welcome Ode*. As with *Welcome Ode*, the third voice part has a small number of optional divisi passages.

In the dissertation of this thesis, Britten's vocal lines are analysed for tessitura, average pitch, and pitch proximity (detailed methodology is presented in Chapter

¹² Heads of Independent Co-Educational Schools – a group of schools loosely organised for sporting and cultural activities in New South Wales.

¹³ Benjamin Britten, *Children's Crusade*. (London: Boosey and Hawkes 1970), vii.

Three). An analysis of these criteria for *Ring Out, Wild Bells* shows the following results:

Table 2: Analysis of vocal parts in *Ring Out, Wild Bells*.

	Sopranos	Altos	Tenors
Tessitura (semitones)	15	15	15
Average Pitch	Ab4	G4	Ab3
Pitch proximity	2.24	2.41	2.24

These results are not entirely reliable as hard data given the number of notes analysed was 716, as opposed to over 116,000 notes of Britten analysed. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, compared to average values for Britten's non-professional children's chorus music, the average pitch and implication-realization results are very similar. *Ring Out, Wild Bells* has a slightly smaller tessitura (Britten's result is 17, two semitones more). The pitch proximity value in *Ring Out, Wild Bells* is significantly higher than Britten's average (1.87) but this is attributable to a rising fifth as an important motivic device and the use of its compound (major ninth) towards the end of the song. The phrases in *Ring Out, Wild Bells* are short, as are those Britten wrote for non-professional children's choruses.

The connection between the remaining creative works and the dissertation is not so easily identified, but it is nevertheless important. Primarily, Britten offered the paradigm of an art music composer who wrote for some of the finest performers in the world also writing serious music for children. He quoted Kodaly: "Nobody is too great to write for children."¹⁴ By the same token, composers who write for children should also write for professionals. Therefore, the remaining works are included as a representation of a composer who writes to commission for very fine professional performers as well as for non-professional children and both of these outputs are of equal importance.

¹⁴ Britten quoting Kodaly as reported in Kildea, Paul (ed.). *Britten On Music*. (Oxford: OUP, 2003), 275

Finally, there is discernable musical influence of Benjamin Britten in some of these pieces. Its subtle presence can also be discerned in the original scores, in certain aspects of modality, of phrase shape and of instrumental choices. This presence was not invited, but it is not unwelcome.