

DLA Doctoral Dissertation Theses

Miranda Liu

BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND HIS VIOLIN CONCERTO

SUPERVISOR: DR. LÁSZLÓ TIHANYI

Franz Liszt Academy of Music

Doctoral School No. 28 of Music and History of Art and Culture

Budapest

2023

## I. The Antecedents of the Research

As a violinist, it is not surprising that I am drawn to Benjamin Britten's *Violin Concerto*. After hearing it in concerts a few times, I started learning it in 2016 in preparation for a performance in the United States the following year. It was my first time studying a piece by Britten, and from the moment I began playing the *Violin Concerto*, I was captivated by the composer's powerful and expressive writing and was keen on familiarizing myself with his musical language and other works.

Since my discovery of the *Violin Concerto*, I have been fortunate to have studied and performed two other works by Britten, the *String Quartet No. 3*, which I performed in London's Barbican Hall in 2020, and the *Suite for Violin and Piano*, which I performed in 2023 in Budapest at the 5<sup>th</sup> New Millennium International Chamber Music Festival and Academy. Both works had a profound impact on me and my musicianship and helped me understand the *Violin Concerto* on a deeper level.

Living in Hungary for over ten years, I have noticed a lack of programming and research on Britten's music. Despite his visit to Hungary and his dedication of a piece to the Jeney twins, his works are rarely showcased in the concert life of the country. This realization has fueled my desire to program Benjamin Britten's pieces as often as possible. His compositions are first-class works that deserve more attention internationally.

## II. Sources

The sources that inspired and supported my research on Britten's *Violin Concerto* are wonderfully diverse and rich, offering a broad spectrum of perspectives that deepened my understanding of both the work itself and its performance intricacies (see: *Bibliography*). They range from in-depth academic analyses, such as detailed discussions of Britten's compositional techniques and historical context, to insightful concert reviews and scholarly articles that explore the broader cultural and musical impact of the concerto. These sources, complemented by recordings from a range of fine performers, offered invaluable practical insights into how various artists have approached the technical and interpretive challenges of the work.

The score of Britten's *Violin Concerto*, published by Boosey and Hawkes, served as my primary source of inspiration, offering a direct and intimate look into the composer's intentions. In addition to the published score, I consider the invaluable input of my many esteemed colleagues, chamber partners, teachers, and mentors to have significantly enriched my research. Their expertise, developed through years of collaboration and performance, provided me with a wealth of knowledge. Through their guidance and shared experiences, I

gained a deeper understanding of the work's technical demands on the violin, finding solutions to difficult passages and refining my approach to performance problems. This combination of scholarly and practical sources enabled me to present a more nuanced and well-rounded perspective on Britten's *Violin Concerto*, particularly from the standpoint of a violinist.

### III. Research Methods

During my research, the biggest challenge was finding the right balance between my personal connection to the work as a performer and the academic analysis of it. Ultimately, I chose not to treat these as separate tasks, but rather to let the research complement my expertise as a performer.

As I delved into what scholars had written about Britten's life and works, I made it a priority to spend significant time reflecting on their insights. I often questioned whether my own interpretations aligned with theirs, and where they didn't, I made sure to articulate those differences in my dissertation. This process involved constantly consulting the score, recordings, and scholarly literature, allowing me to create a well-rounded perspective.

### IV. Results

My primary objective in selecting Benjamin Britten's *Violin Concerto* as the focal point of my dissertation was to bring greater attention to Britten's works in Hungary, with the hope that more leaders in the Hungarian music scene will recognize the value of programming his compositions and that more musicians will be inspired to learn and perform them. By highlighting the richness and depth of Britten's compositions, I aim to spark interest among Hungarian musicians and encourage them to explore his music, which remains underappreciated in Hungary.

This topic has been relatively neglected not only in Hungary but also on the international stage. Despite Britten's prominence as a composer, many of his works, including the *Violin Concerto*, do not receive the recognition or performance frequency they deserve. By choosing this piece, I hope to address this gap and promote a broader understanding of its significance.

Additionally, my goal was to gain a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of this particular work through rigorous research. By studying the work in depth, I sought to not only broaden my own knowledge but also to contribute to a greater appreciation of Britten's music within both the Hungarian and international musical communities, encouraging its inclusion in concert repertoires and inspiring future performances.

## V. Documentation

Chamber Evening – Echoes from the Past: The Legacy of the Hubay Violin School  
Opening Concert of the 5th New Millennium International Chamber Music Festival and  
Academy

August 31, 2023, 7:00 PM

FUGA Budapest

Program:

Benjamin Britten: Suite for Violin and Piano, Op. 6

Béla Bartók: Rhapsody No. 1, Sz. 87

Jenő Hubay: Preghiera, Op. 121

Maurice Ravel: Tzigane

Performers:

Miranda Liu – violin

Orsolya Soós – piano

---

Pre-concert before the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO)

March 15, 2020, 5:30 PM

Barbican Hall

Program:

Britten: String Quartet No. 3, Op. 94

Miranda Liu – 1st violin

Theresa Jensen – 2nd violin

Mabon Llyr Rhyd – viola

William Clark-MacSwell – cello

---

**Chamber Concert**

December 3, 2019, 7:00 PM

Estonian Academy of Music

*Program:*

Britten: String Quartet No. 3, Op. 94

Miranda Liu – 1st violin

Theresa Jensen – 2nd violin

Mabon Llyr Rhyd – viola

William Clark-MacSwell – cello

---

Chamber Concert

November 27, 2019, 8:00 PM

Guildhall School of Music & Drama

*Program:*

Britten: String Quartet No. 3, Op. 94

Miranda Liu – 1st violin

Theresa Jensen – 2nd violin

Mabon Llyr Rhyd – viola

William Clark-MacSwell – cello

---

**Concert**

April 8, 2017

Cañada College Main Theater

*Program:*

Britten: Violin Concerto

*Performers:*

Miranda Liu – violin

Redwood Symphony

Conductor: Eric K