

TIME AND CONCORD:
PURCELLIAN INFLUENCES ON BRITTEN'S CHORAL DANCES FROM GLORIANA
AND A CONDUCTOR'S GUIDE TO THE WORK

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF MUSIC
BY
SPENCER DOMER
DR. KERRY GLANN – ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2026

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Tables	iv
Figures	v
Musical Examples	vi
Introduction	1
Benjamin Britten and Background	1
Britten: The Purcell Realizations	2
The story, concept, and writing of <i>Gloriana</i>	3
Purcellian traits found in the <i>Choral Dances</i>	7
Imitation	7
Dotted Rhythmic Figures	11
Hemiola	13
Conductors' Guide	18
Instrumentation and Score Editions	18
Staging and Formation	19
Possible Areas of Conducting and Ensemble Attention	20
"Time"	20
"Concord"	21
"Time and Concord"	22
"Country Girls"	24
"Rustics and Fishermen"	24
"Final Dance of Homage"	25

Conclusion	26
Bibliography	27

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Compositional Structure Chart for Choral Dances, by <i>Benjamin Britten</i>	5

FIGURES

1. Standing formation chart for *Choral Dances* 19

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Example	Page
1. "O Lord God of hosts," Henry Purcell, mm. 1-6,	7
2. "Final Dance of Homage," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , Benjamin Britten, mm. 1-8	8
3. "Nunc dimittis," Z. 231, Henry Purcell, mm. 32-43	9
4. "Time and Concord," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , Benjamin Britten, mm. 16-23	10
5. "Triumph Victorious Love," from <i>The Masque in Dioclesian</i> , Henry Purcell, mm. 16-21	12
6. "Country Girls," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , Benjamin Britten, mm. 25-30	12
7. "Time," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , Benjamin Britten, mm. 16-17	13
8. "Time," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , by Benjamin Britten, mm. 1-10	15
9. "Time and Concord," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , by Benjamin Britten, mm. 14-16	16
10. "Chaconne," from <i>The Gordian Knot Untied</i> , by Henry Purcell, mm. 51-60	17
11. "Time and Concord," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , Benjamin Britten, m. 24	22
12. "Time and Concord," from <i>Choral Dances</i> , Benjamin Britten, mm. 31-34	23

Introduction

Benjamin Britten and Background

Regarded as one of the most influential English composers of the twentieth century, Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) pushed the boundaries of contemporary opera and vocal music. Britten is widely considered to be the greatest successor to Henry Purcell (1659-1695) in the development of English opera. Purcell's most popular opera, *Dido and Aeneas*, was first performed in 1689. Following Purcell's death, English language opera lacked a continuous line of development until Britten's grand opera *Peter Grimes* premiered in 1945. The connection between Purcell and Britten extends further than their compositional prowess and positions as icons of English opera. Britten's admiration for Purcell manifested itself in his composition of harmonic realizations for Purcell's song and operatic repertoire, his advocacy for their performance, and his eventual absorption of Purcellian style traits into his own compositions. Purcell's influence on Britten is widely recognized through some of Britten's solo compositions and arrangements, but it is also clear in his Elizabethan-era opera, *Gloriana*. In the masque scene of *Gloriana*, later excerpted as a stand-alone concert work, Britten uses compositional devices and elements that show a clear inspiration from and comprehension of Purcell's music and the English Baroque style. The purpose of this thesis is to highlight the Purcellian influences of imitation, dotted rhythmic figures, and hemiola apparent in Benjamin Britten's *Choral Dances from Gloriana* and to offer conductors' insights on the work. To do this, this paper will compare examples of Purcell's writing with that of Britten found in the *Choral Dances from Gloriana*.

As a young boy, Britten studied with well-known violinist and instrumental composer Frank Bridge (1879-1941). This relationship proved fruitful to Britten's development as a musician and composer. Bridge taught Britten a late-romantic-inspired style and encouraged him

to engage in the French impressionist and Austro-German conventions of harmony and melodic writing.¹ Britten's study under Bridge, from his adolescence through his time at the Royal College of Music, helped nurture his compositional style, harmonic language, and recognition of the long-standing English-music tradition. Britten's harmonic language is often characterized as modal, atonal, or neo-tonal, given that he often disregarded secure key centers to write in a modernist color.²

While Britten's writing was steeped in twentieth-century practice, the influence of Purcell and the English Baroque can clearly be seen in some ways in which Britten approaches composition. Britten was "invested heavily in spreading the name of his baroque predecessor (Purcell), not only by realising editions and continuos, but also by programming a lot of Purcell's works for his concerts, and by referring to this baroque composer's art in his own music too."³

Britten: The Purcell Realizations

Since Purcell and Britten have been recognized as the leaders of English opera, there is a strong correlation in style and status between the two. Given the long-standing tradition of English vocal repertoire, whether operatic, art song, or choral literature, it is fair to assume that Britten was acquainted with the vocal writing of Purcell as he matured as a musician and composer. This relationship between the two was further strengthened as Britten realized the figured bass and published numerous Purcell songs in 1945, for the 250th anniversary of his death. Britten scholar Eric Roseberry remarks, "This happy fusion of Britten's exceptional talents

¹ Christopher Mark, "Juvenilia," in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

² Peter Evans, "Benjamin Britten," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Vol. 3, ed. Stanley Sadie (Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1980), 293.

³ Yarrid Dhooghe, "Succeeding the Orpheus Britannicus: The Influence of Henry Purcell on Benjamin Britten's Vocal Music," *Revue Belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Muziekwetenschap* 71 (2017): 137–52. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26623449>.

as performer and composer attains complete fulfilment, perhaps, in his activity as an interpreter of the music of Henry Purcell—a highly sympathetic figure with whom Britten has strong creative affinities, and possibly the greatest single influence on the development of his own vocal and operatic style."⁴ Britten was fascinated by looking back at the Baroque through working on these realizations, leading him to eventually publish forty-five of Purcell's songs and his operas *Dido and Aeneas* and *The Fairy Queen*. Britten's work realizing Purcell's songs and opera not only engaged him in the compositional style of early music but also in the textures, timbres, and setting of the English language.

Given Britten's in-depth knowledge of early music and, more specifically, the vocal music of Purcell, it was only a matter of time before his worlds of original composition and the music of the English Baroque began to intersect. This intersection came to full fruition through Britten's opera, *Gloriana*.

The story, concept, and writing of *Gloriana*

Gloriana, Op. 53, is often viewed as a lesser work in Britten's catalogue due to its mediocre critical reception upon its premiere, but it has gone on to have prominent performances and recognition since its 1953 debut. The opera was composed for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II but tells the story of Queen Elizabeth I. Set near the final years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign and portrays her relationship with the Earl of Essex. The devious Earl is planning to overthrow Elizabeth and assume the throne. His stealthy plot fails, as Elizabeth recognizes the threat and signs a warrant for the Earl's death. Even though the story revolved around a figure of English royalty, the opera was met with an underwhelming response due to the depiction of

⁴ Eric Roseberry, "Britten's Purcell Realizations and Folksong Arrangements," *Tempo*, no. 57 (1961): 7.

Queen Elizabeth I. The once-powerful and mighty monarch had been reduced to a human character, complete with missing teeth, a balding head, and a fickle manner. The English audiences loathed the weakness shown in this depiction of Elizabeth I.⁵

The opening of Act II of *Gloriana* features the notable "Choral Dances," a sequence of musical numbers performed in a masque offered to Queen Elizabeth I upon her arrival in Norwich. This collection of unaccompanied choral movements is led and directed by a character known as The Spirit of the Masque. The Spirit, performed by a solo tenor, serves as a master of ceremonies for the masque being performed for the Queen. Over the course of the masque, the Spirit helps facilitate the plot as multiple communities of Norwich pay their respect and homage to the Queen. The plot features numerous vignettes, first focusing on the relationship of two characters representing Time and Concord in the first three movements. The use of the term "character" is not that of a physical being, but the personalized representation of the concept that they represent. In the later movements, local women, fishermen, and the community as a whole offer tributes to the Queen. Britten eventually removed the masque from performances of the full opera to streamline the plot.⁶ Years following *Gloriana's* debut, Britten excerpted the masque for the grand opening of Queen Elizabeth Hall in London in 1967. This newly created concert work, *Choral Dances from Gloriana* (hereafter referred to as *Choral Dances*), was scored for tenor soloist (The Spirit of the Masque), SATB chorus, and harp. Table 1 shows the overall structure of the work.

⁵ Antonia Chirgwin, "Gloriana: Britten's 'sighted child'," in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. Mervyn Cooke (Cambridge University Press 1999), 113-15.

⁶ Heather Wiebe, "Gloriana and the 'New Elizabethans,'" in *Britten's Unquiet Past: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction*, (Cambridge University Press 2012), 129.

TABLE 1: Compositional Structure Chart of *Choral Dances from Gloriana*, Benjamin Britten

Movement Title (or first line of text)	Musical Forces in Score
Introduction: "The Masque Begins"	The Spirit of the Masque, SATB Quartet/Chorus, Harp
I. "Time"	SATB Chorus
Recitative: "Time could not sow"	The Spirit of the Masque and Harp
II. "Concord"	SATB Chorus
Recitative: "Now Time and Concord"	The Spirit of the Masque
III. "Time and Concord"	SATB Chorus
Recitative: "And now, country maidens"	The Spirit of the Masque and Harp
IV. "Country Girls"	SA Chorus
Recitative: "Behold, a troupe of..."	The Spirit of the Masque and Harp
V. "Rustics and Fishermen"	TTBB Chorus
Recitative: "Led by Time and Concord"	The Spirit of the Masque and Harp
VI. "Final Dance of Homage"	The Spirit of the Masque, SATB Chorus, Harp

Musicologist Yarrid Dhooghe analyzed the influence of Purcell's vocal music on select Britten repertoire and drew a correlation between the two.⁷ Dhooghe cites numerous Baroque compositional devices that Britten's music integrates in his *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* and *Canticle I: My beloved is mine and I am his*, including imitation, text painting/prosody, and ornamentation. The *Choral Dances* are not discussed in Dhooghe's publication. However, the compositional elements he cites serve as a guideline for analyzing how Purcell's vocal writing

⁷ Dhooghe, "Succeeding the Orpheus Britannicus."

influenced Britten in the writing of the *Choral Dances*. By utilizing numerous Purcellian compositional traits, Britten creates a link between early and contemporary music.

Setting of the *Choral Dances* and historical context of a masque

Britten's inspiration and inclusion of a masque helps cement the Elizabethan environment he sought to create with *Gloriana*. A masque is a form of entertainment often performed for members of the nobility or aristocracy. These productions consisted of music, drama, and dance, often intended as a tribute to a cherished figure. Masques were popular in the Elizabethan and Tudor eras, with notable performances being given to Henry VI, Henry VIII, and Elizabeth I. Britten loved including moments of levity and pageantry in his operas, whether it be the masque of *Gloriana* or others. The masque from *Gloriana* is fully independent from the opera's plot, thus making it cleanly extractable.

One could see Henry Purcell's semi-opera and masque *The Fairy Queen* as a possible inspiration for Britten's inclusion of the *Gloriana* masque. Purcell's masques and staged works not only influenced the masque seen in *Gloriana* but also inspired Britten's affinity for celebratory scenes in the opera.⁸

⁸ Wiebe, "Gloriana and the 'New Elizabethans,'" 129.

Likewise, Britten integrates imitative gestures in the *Choral Dances* in multiple instances. In “Final Dance of Homage,” Britten presents the main melody in the sopranos, who are then echoed by the tenors on the same material, creating a canon, the most form strict of imitation (see Ex. 2).

EXAMPLE 2: "Final Dance of Homage," from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, mm. 1-8

The image displays a musical score for the "Final Dance of Homage" from Benjamin Britten's *Choral Dances*, measures 1-8. It features four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The lyrics are: "These to - kens of our love re - cei - - - ving,.....". The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp* (pianissimo) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). A red box highlights the initial phrase in the Soprano part, and a blue box highlights the imitative phrase in the Tenor part. The score also includes performance instructions like *poco cresc.* and *mf*.

In “Final Dance of Homage,” Britten extends this technique throughout the movement in different voices. Each of these gestures continue to create a contrapuntal texture until the final gesture, which is resolved by the tenor soloist.

Paired imitation is thoroughly integral to this moment in the piece. The different melodic phrases are highlighted in red, blue, and purple; this clear segmentation shows the overlapping imitation that Purcell used in his composition (see Ex. 3).

In the third movement of the *Choral Dances*, "Time and Concord," Britten uses paired imitation as the primary compositional device. The entire movement is written with a similar melodic gesture that is introduced as paired imitation between the treble and bass singers.

EXAMPLE 4: "Time and Concord," from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, mm. 16-23

The image displays a musical score for the third movement of Benjamin Britten's *Choral Dances*, "Time and Concord," measures 16-23. The score is presented in two systems, each with four staves (two treble and two bass). The lyrics are: "No Greek nor Ro-man, Greek nor Ro-man Queen-ly wo-man....." and "Knew such fa-vour, knew such fa-vour From Heav'n a-bove.....". The score is annotated with colored boxes to highlight specific melodic phrases: a red box highlights the first two staves of the first system, a blue box highlights the next two staves, a blue box highlights the first two staves of the second system, and a purple box highlights the next two staves. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf* and *f*, and various musical notations including notes, rests, and slurs.

Each melodic subject is highlighted in red and blue; the beginning of each phrase is traded between the soprano/altos and the tenor/bass singers (see Ex. 4).

As imitation is a foundational compositional device found in the English Baroque, Britten's use of imitation emphasizes his historical inspiration in the *Choral Dances*. Through the integration of imitative and even canonic gestures, the texture of the *Choral Dances* highlights the Purcellian influence on the work.

Dotted Rhythmic Figures

Dotted and double-dotted rhythmic figures are Baroque traits that are also utilized in the *Choral Dances*. Typically, rhythms in music are viewed as representing a specified, defined duration of sound; however, the treatment of dotted figures is the topic of much scholarship in Baroque and early music performance practice. In theory, the dot extends the value of a note by half its duration, but in practice, the dot can imply much more than that straightforward interpretation.

The dot in Baroque composition is variable and can mean multiple things. In some instances, the dot "may augment the value of the dotted note by less than half (under-dotting), by half (standard dotting), or by more than half (over-dotting), including in some cases half as much again as standard dotting (double-dotting)."¹⁰ Although these different interpretations of how to perform dotted rhythms may seem minute in theory, their use can drastically change the emotion of the musical gesture used.

Long and winding melodies that are built upon dotted figures seem to be a common musical gesture in Baroque music when a character or text is expressing some sort of jubilation

¹⁰ Robert Donington, *Baroque Music: Style and Performance, A Handbook*, (W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 48.

or praise. Purcell writes such a melodic line in "Triumph Victorious Love" from *The Masque in Dioclesian* (see Ex. 5).

EXAMPLE 5: "Triumph Victorious Love" from *The Masque in Dioclesian*, Henry Purcell, mm. 16-21



Likewise, Britten uses successive dotted figures in the fourth movement, "Country Girls," to emulate the sound of girls laughing. The movement is full of levity and is a cheerful display of the local girls of Norwich bringing flowers to the Queen in the masque.

EXAMPLE 6: "Country Girls," from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, mm. 25-30

Britten not only constructs a melody that is based on dotted rhythm, but also utilizes double dots with the quarter notes in measures 27-29 (see Ex. 6). In performance, this movement is not only filled with the Baroque sound of lively and dotted rhythm, it also perfectly embodies the character of the country girls portrayed. The writing almost leads the sopranos to sound as if they were skipping while singing this jaunty melody. The high tessitura of the line for the sopranos further adds to the vocal "laugh" quality heard in "Country Girls."

Another example in which Britten uses a lively dotted figure in the *Choral Dances* is found in the first movement, "Time." The dotted figure is used to create the "grotesque" feeling

as described by the expression marking in the score, which one could also interpret as a new tempo (see Ex. 7). The rhythmic rigidity contrasts the lively hemiola figure seen earlier in the movement. The dotted rhythmic gesture is stiff, especially when contrasted to the playful beginning of "Time."

EXAMPLE 7: "Time", from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, mm. 16-17



This rigid use of the double dot to portray the decrepit character of Time is also an example of text painting. Each voice part in the choir has a similar dotted gesture.

The use of over-dotted or double-dotted rhythms is a Baroque compositional gesture often used in celebratory or pageant music. Britten's use of the double-dot further draws the connection between the *Choral Dances* and the rhythmic language in the English Baroque.

Hemiola

The hemiola is a common compositional device that arose in the fifteenth century in Europe.¹¹ Although the hemiola has been implemented in works for centuries, its use was most prominent in the Baroque. English Baroque composers including Handel and Purcell utilized hemiola in their writing. In Baroque compositions, the hemiola was typically used as a cadential gesture, whether for an ending of a phrase or in final cadential figures.¹² In later eras, composers employed hemiolas in new and expanded ways.

¹¹ Julian Rushton, "Hemiola," *Grove Music Online* (2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.12768>.

¹² Robert Donington, *Baroque Music*, 40.

Scholars have associated the term "complex hemiola" with composers in the Romantic period and later for their further development of the hemiola in their compositions.¹³ The hemiola is a recognizable rhythmic figure in Britten's *Choral Dances*, appearing in numerous movements in either blatant, augmented, or subtle ways. Although Britten utilizes the hemiola in a different manner than its original form in the Baroque, the term "complex hemiola" is rather vague when describing the use of hemiola in the *Choral Dances*. A complex hemiola can refer to a multitude of different iterations that can seem convoluted. Rather, a term that could be coined to describe Britten's use of hemiola in the *Choral Dances* is "chained hemiola," wherein multiple hemiolas are linked in succession. Britten utilizes the chained hemiola figure in the first movement of the *Choral Dances*, "Time."

¹³ Richard Cohn, "Complex Hemiolas, Ski-Hill Graphs and Metric Spaces," *Music Analysis* 20, no. 3 (2001): 295.

EXAMPLE 8 "Time," from *Choral Dances*, by Benjamin Britten, mm. 1-10

Yes he is Time, Lus - ty and blithe, Lus -
 Yes he is Time, Lus - ty,
 Yes, yes..... he is Time, Lus - ty and
 Ha ia Time Lus -
 - ty and blithe! Time is at his... ap - o - gee!...
 lus - ty..... and... blithe! Time's at his ap - o - gee!...
 blithe, Lus - ty and blithe! Time's at his... ap - o - gee!...
 - ty, blithe! Time is at his ap - o - gee!...

Example 8 shows the opening ten measures of "Time." The chained hemiola figures appear in the alto and tenor voices in measures 1-7, indicated with red brackets. The alto and tenor text align on the emphasized beats of the hemiola, which are marked with accents in the alto part.

The interplay between the rhythm of the soprano line and that of the alto and tenor creates a cacophonous musical gesture. In this passage, the sopranos also sing a hemiola rhythm, but it is offset when compared to the alto and tenor hemiola figure (see blue brackets in Ex. 8). The soprano hemiolas may not be as obvious, given the dominance of the alto/tenor hemiola, but they add to the complexity of the rhythmical character of the phrase, weaving together numerous

layers of syncopation. This same melodic gesture from the first ten measures of "Time" returns in measures 21-27 in the alto and tenor part with new text.

In the third movement, "Time and Concord," hemiolas are employed just prior to cadences, adding rhythmic momentum to the ends of phrases in a typically Purcellian and Baroque use of the gesture. This use of a cadential hemiola concludes each new line of text "Time and Concord" (see Ex. 9).

EXAMPLE 9: "Time and Concord" from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, mm. 14-16

The image shows a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in 3/4 time. The lyrics are: "splen-dent, swell re - splen-dent From earth be - low!". The score is marked "dim." and features a cadential hemiola in the final measure of each line, indicated by red brackets above the notes.

The moment homophony at the cadence suggests a contrast between the harmonious nature of Concord and the cacophonous nature of Time.

Hemiola is also used in the fourth movement, "Country Girls," in measures 28-29 in the alto line and can be seen as cadential patterns in the fifth movement, "Rustics and Fishermen," in measures 5-6, 11-12, and 24-25. Finally, hemiola can be observed in "Rustics and Fishermen" in measure 17 as it propels the momentum forward.

Purcell uses hemiolas pervasively in his works. For example, "Chaconne" from Purcell's *The Gordian Knot Untied* includes numerous instances of hemiola, as seen in Example 10.

EXAMPLE 10: "Chaconne," from *The Gordian Knot Untied*, Henry Purcell, mm. 51-60

The image displays a musical score for Henry Purcell's "Chaconne" from *The Gordian Knot Untied*, measures 51-60. The score is written in G minor and 3/4 time. It consists of a treble staff, a bass staff, and a vocal line. Red brackets are used to highlight specific hemiola passages, where two measures of music are grouped together, effectively creating a 3/2 time signature for those sections. The score shows a complex interplay of rhythmic patterns and melodic lines across the different parts.

Britten's use of hemiola is another example of how he integrates the compositional practices of the English Baroque.

Conductors' Guide

The *Choral Dances* are a unique blending of Britten's twentieth-century, modal harmonic language and compositional traits from the English Baroque. The preparation and performance of this work in a concert format by the Ball State Concert Choir helped identify areas of difficulty in the score for either the conductor, soloists, or ensemble. This conductor's guide will reflect upon that performance and offer suggestions for ways to rehearse, stage, or use conducting gesture to achieve the most efficient and effective performance possible.

Instrumentation and Score Editions

Two editions were used in the performance of the *Choral Dances*. The conductor, harpist, and soloists used the full score (Boosey & Hawkes Catalogue Code M060014444), whereas the choir sang from the choral score (Boosey & Hawkes Catalogue Code 5400057). This decision was made due to the cost of each edition, with the vocal score costing on average 40% less than the full score.

The difference between the editions were minimal but required effective communication to be successful. The largest differences between the two editions are the inclusion of the opening "Introduction" and the Spirit of the Masque's recitatives in the full score; the choral score does not include either. The introduction begins with the Spirit of the Masque calling the performance to start, followed by the choir opening the masque. Since the full ensemble did not have the full score, our performance utilized a solo quartet (supplied with the full score) to sing this opening choral gesture.

Without The Spirit of the Masque's recitatives being included in the choral score, the choral entrances following those passages proved to be difficult transition points. The best way

to navigate those transitions was to verbally identify and rehearse the reference pitch where The Spirit of the Masque ends his recitative. From the final note of a recitative, the conductor should teach the ensemble how to audiate their starting pitch for the next choral movement.

Staging and Formation

For the performance of the *Choral Dances* with the Ball State Concert Choir, the choir was arranged in choral symphonic order. This choral standing order orients the choir from high voice to low voice from stage right to left (see Fig. 1). This decision strengthened the sound of each section and provided visible separation for the soprano/alto and tenor/bass movements, "Country Girls" and "Rustics and Fishermen."

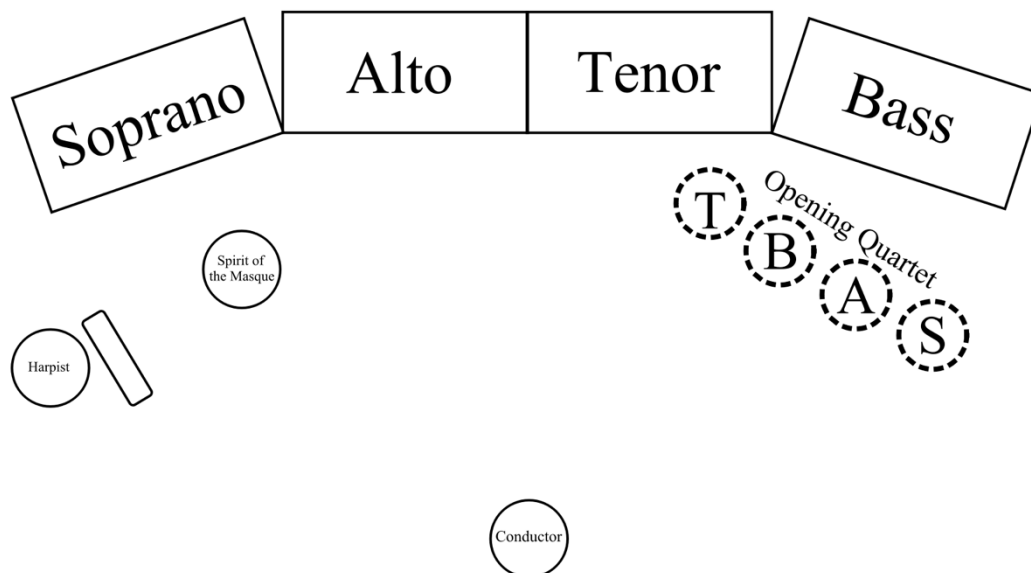


FIGURE 1: Standing formation chart for *Choral Dances*

As the opening quartet consisted of auditioned members from both within and outside the ensemble, their positioning was designed to allow them time to either return to their position in the choir or exit the stage following the introduction.

Possible Areas of Conducting and Ensemble Attention

"Introduction"

The Introduction of the *Choral Dances* masque does not feature many musical or conducting challenges. Perhaps the only moment needed for attention are the syncopated entrances in measure 6. Having clear and articulate ensemble unity for the off-beat entrances is crucial to achieve the desired layering of voices.

"Time"

The first movement, "Time," features multiple sections that prove to be challenging in rehearsal. The first concerns aligning the multiple layered hemiola gestures in measures 1-10 and 21-38. The rhythmic dissonances are rather disorienting; when introduced, it is best to speak the texts in rhythm to preserve vocal resources and build-in the part independence. The soprano entrance on "Lusty" (measure 2, beat 3; see Ex. 8 above) is perhaps the most difficult hemiola gesture to align, as the part stands alone in starting a phrase on that beat and does not conform to the dominant rhythmic character of the piece. Given our staging, it was an easy gesture to cue this different rhythm for the sopranos. A gesture that may assist your ensemble could be to dedicate your left hand to cueing that articulation on "Lusty" since it falls before the standard beat division. The stage left portion of your ensemble would simply follow your predictable pattern in your right hand while you tend to the altered rhythm with your left hand for the sopranos.

The "Grotesque" section (measures 16-17) features a new harmonic and rhythmic idea that also may prove non-intuitive. The disjunct melodic contour of this section made it more challenging for the choir. Rehearsing based on interval recognition and integrating interval

training into the warmup sequence was helpful in building the skills to best perform this section. For the conductor, a new gesture and presence truly helped portray the change in musical character. The rigid rhythm in the "Grotesque" section depicts Time as an old and decrepit man when contrasted with the "lusty and blithe" character previously portrayed. A rigid and stiff conducting gesture can aid in the ensemble's characterization, and then return to the flowing, jovial gesture at measure 21, when the lively hemiola figure returns.

"Concord"

The second *Choral Dance*, "Concord," is preceded by an accompanied recitative. "Concord" itself is unaccompanied and is followed by an unaccompanied recitative that is then followed by another unaccompanied choral movement. This long stretch of unaccompanied singing makes "Concord" one of the most crucial movements to the overall performance of the *Choral Dances*. Given the sonorous and homorhythm form of "Concord," it is very easy for an ensemble to begin to lose intonation. It is vital that you work on improving the pitch and rehearsing your ensemble to consistently return to F major through all the harmonic shifts in the movement. Our staging aided us as we deliberately placed singers with either perfect pitch or strong aural skills in the back of the ensemble to best influence their section towards more accurate intonation.

For the conductor, it was useful to show the choir how to articulate the consonants. This came through physically closing the fingertips together to show the closing of the "n" of "Concord." Additionally, it was beneficial to tell the ensemble to sing through all the voiced consonants and to truly ingrain them into the melodic line, ensuring that the consonants would not bring the vowels out of alignment.

A strong emphasis on active and passive gestures in this movement is also crucial as to not over-conduct the piece. The literal meaning of “concord” is “to have harmony,” and a still and tranquil gesture portrays that emotion.

"Time and Concord"

If the previous *Choral Dance*, "Concord," was the most difficult movement to align with regards to intonation, "Time and Concord" is perhaps the most difficult to align rhythmically. Written as a paired duet between the sopranos/altos and tenors/basses, it is easy for the ensemble to find the rhythmic interplay between both lines. The choral entrances fall on the fifth eighth note of a 6/8-time signature, which tend to be late. A solution to this was to tell the ensemble that the release of the fermata that precedes each of these entrances would also serve as the breath (see Ex. 11).

EXAMPLE 11: "Time and Concord," from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, m. 24

The image displays a musical score for four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass) in 6/8 time. Each line begins with a fermata over a half note, followed by a half note and a quarter note. The lyrics are: Soprano and Alto: "- bove..... As"; Tenor: "- bove....."; Bass: "- bove.....". Red arrows point to the first eighth note of the half note after the fermata in each part. Annotations above the arrows are: "Breath, in tempo, pp cres" for the Soprano and Alto parts, and "Release" for the Tenor and Bass parts.

This quickly aligned the sections and created a strong understanding of the syncopated entrances, with which nearly every line of "Time and Concord" begins.

The most difficult rhythmic gesture of the *Choral Dances* proved to be in the last four measures of this movement (see Ex. 12). The tempo typically relaxes into the final cadence. Considering the complex nature of segmenting the measures of 6/8, it was difficult for our ensemble to confidently sing their rhythm correctly once the tempo relaxed too far. In the penultimate measure, the paired duets unwind in a complex hemiola figure to the final cadence.

EXAMPLE 12: "Time and Concord," from *Choral Dances*, Benjamin Britten, mm. 31-34

The image shows a musical score for four vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in 6/8 time. The lyrics are: "Hath all our love, hath all our love, all our love!". The score includes dynamic markings: *p*, *p dim.*, and *ppp*. Red and blue circles highlight specific notes in the penultimate measure, indicating right-handed and left-handed cues respectively.

Our solution relied on our staging. Given our standing formation, with treble voices on one side and bass voices on the other, cues could be directed to alternate sides of the ensemble. The colors in example 12 show right-handed (red) and left-handed (blue) cues, where each beat of the 6/8 gesture was conducted (see Ex. 12). This not only helped unify a *ritardando* through the phrase but aided in dictating the rhythms to the ensemble. Given our standing position, this made it very easy for our ensemble to sing the written rhythm in this tricky moment.

"Country Girls"

The fourth movement, "Country Girls," is simple in theory, but difficult for a collegiate choral ensemble soprano section. The altos have an easier time, often singing in their mid-voice and with simple rhythms. The sopranos have a highly agile line that sits in a difficult tessitura from A4 to A5 consistently. This vocal agility is impressive when done effortlessly, which is hard to navigate through different registers. The best practice for this would be to show a light and floated conducting gesture to encourage vocal levity. If the pattern is too powerful, the singers will sympathetically bring far too much vocal weight into this high register, which is not preferred. It is also ideal to rehearse much of the soprano parts down an octave for learning purposes to prevent vocal fatigue.

"Rustics and Fishermen"

Perhaps the simplest movement, "Rustics and Fishermen" present the tenors and basses with a few moments that need a conductor's clarity but is otherwise straightforward. Once rehearsed, the off-beat entrances for each line in measures 1-3, 7-9, 13-16, and 19-21 are easy to comprehend, but they require attention from the conductor and a conducting gesture that shows the syncopation. One alteration that was beneficial was to modify to a large "one" pattern rather than the fast, standard 3/4 pattern for the syncopated lines on "Woven, woven blankets" to collect the energy (as in measures 16-17).

Given the high energy of this movement, it is easy for the ensemble to neglect the practices of good diction. It was imperative to consistently reiterate that the word "woven" must have a schwa for the final vowel as to not stress the unstressed syllable. The IPA transcription [ˈwovən] was provided to the ensemble to encourage the stressed syllable.

"Final Dance of Homage"

Though it may seem simple on the page, "Final Dance of Homage" is rather difficult for an ensemble to confidently perform. This is the only movement that integrates The Spirit of the Masque, harpist, and the choir, so there are additional forces to consider. Given the fact that all musicians are featured in "Final Dance of Homage" in a polyphonic texture, it is imperative that the conductor provides ample cues to each of the musicians and choral sections.

The sopranos enter near the top of the staff on an E5, which proved to be difficult. The first issue was confidently audiating the starting pitch from the preceding recitative. Then, given the high register and marked [pp] dynamic marking, it also proved to be difficult to phonate through the "th" consonant of "These." In this instance, it is imperative to voice the "th" consonant and to find a vowel modification to allow the sopranos to succeed. As the written vowel [i] is too closed, our ensemble was encouraged to modify towards an [ɪ] vowel. Each voice part may need special vowel attention as their lines often sit in an awkward tessitura or feature wide jumps.

Due to its vocally strenuous nature coming at the end of the whole work, it was difficult to maintain energy through this movement. One thing that aided the rehearsal process was to speak through the important text and highlight where the emphasized words should be the climax of a phrase. When the text is well-prepared and understood, "Final Dance of Homage" truly does resemble the sound of a polyphonic Purcellian piece, which is a fitting finale to the *Choral Dances*.

Conclusion

Benjamin Britten's *Choral Dances from Gloriana* highlight his appreciation and understanding of the works of Henry Purcell as well as his commitment to reviving the brilliance of the English language in music. Utilizing Baroque compositional devices such as imitation, dotted rhythmic figures, and hemiola, Britten composed a work that honors the English Baroque; these pieces provide a retrospective view of Purcellian spirit in their musical style. The *Choral Dances* pose a unique set of challenges that demand a deep understanding of both stylistic details and practical execution for the conductor and ensemble. Musical difficulty can arise from multiple factors, whether they be rhythmic complexity, issues of textual clarity and intent, or technical vocal challenges. Ultimately, the *Choral Dances* extend beyond their original purpose as simple celebration in *Gloriana*. When approached with an awareness of their Purcellian influence and attention to the conductor's and ensemble's needs, they emerge as a lively blend of Time and Concord—revitalizing the spirit of Henry Purcell and the English Baroque.

Bibliography

- Carpenter, Humphrey. *Benjamin Britten: A Biography*. Faber & Faber, 1992.
- Cohn, Richard. "Complex Hemiolas, Ski-Hill Graphs and Metric Spaces." *Music Analysis* 20, no. 3 (2001).
- Cox, Richard. *The Choral Music of Benjamin Britten: A Conductor's Guide*. Hinshaw Music, 2011.
- Dhooghe, Yarrid. "Succeeding the Orpheus Britannicus: The Influence of Henry Purcell on Benjamin Britten's Vocal Music." *Revue Belge de Musicologie / Belgisch Tijdschrift Voor Muziekwetenschap* 71, (2017).
- Donington, Robert. *Baroque Music: Style and Performance, A Handbook*. W. W Norton & Company, 1982.
- Evans, Peter. *The Music of Benjamin Britten: Gloriana*. University of Minnesota Press, 1979.
- Mallow-Chirgwin, Antonia. "Gloriana: Britten's 'slighted child'," *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, edited by Mervyn Cooke. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Mark, Christopher. "Juvenilia." in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, edited by Mervyn Cooke. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Mosley, Imani Danielle. "'The Queer Things He Said': British Identity, Social History, and Press Reception of Benjamin Britten's Postwar Operas." (PhD diss., Duke University, 2019).
- Palisca, Claude. "Lute and Harpsichord Music in France." In *Baroque Music*, edited by H. Wiley Hitchcock. Prentice Hall Inc, 1981.
- Planchart, Alejandro Enrique. "Paired imitation." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 24 March 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.20715>.
- Roseberry, Eric. "The Concertos and Early Orchestral Scores." In *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, edited by Mervyn Cooke. Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Rushton, Julian. "Hemiola." *Grove Music Online*. 2001; Accessed 24 March 2026. <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.12768>
- Seymour, Claire. *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Gloriana*. The Boydell Press, 2004.

Wiebe, Heather. "Gloriana and the 'New Elizabethans.'" In *Britten's Unquiet Past: Sound and Memory in Postwar Reconstruction*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

White, Eric Walter. *Benjamin Britten: His Life and Operas*. University of California Press, 1983.

Woodward, Ralph. "Music for Voices." In *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, edited by Mervyn Cooke. Cambridge University Press, 1999.