

# 1. Developing a Medium: The Collaborative Process in Stephen Goss's *Oxen of the Sun* (2003–4)

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## I A SOLO FOR SIX-STRING GUITAR AND TEN-STRING GUITAR

### *Ten versus Six*

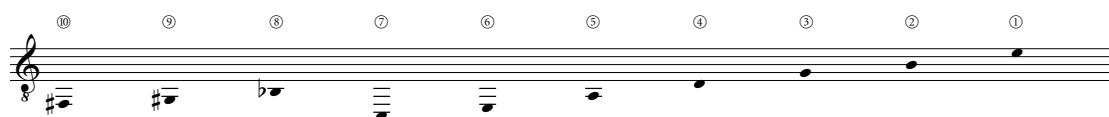
When Narciso Yepes launched his new ten-string guitar in a performance with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1964, it was after a period of consultation that involved not only the celebrated maker Ramírez, but composers as well: even before the Berlin premiere, Maurice Ohana had composed a half-hour cycle for Yepes's ten-string guitar (*Si le jour paraît...*, 1963) that plumbed its possibilities with extraordinary thoroughness and confidence. For Yepes, the ten-string guitar was a straightforward improvement to the traditional instrument. It is obvious from its tuning (example 1) that he was not concerned primarily with extending the guitar's bass register: the so-called 're-entrant' strings 8 to 10 follow the lead of many old stringed instruments by jumping to the octave above as soon as it becomes difficult to produce strings of sufficient quality and focus of sound. Rather, his principal concern was resonance:

When I decided to use the ten-string guitar ... my reasons were purely musical, and the first of them was that the guitar was not properly balanced. There was no equilibrium, because of the twelve notes of the scale, only four — E, A, B, D — had any resonance. If you play one of those notes and then stop the string with your finger, you will hear the sound lingering. But if you play one of the other eight notes of the scale, the sound dies immediately. On the ten-string guitar, I have resonance on all twelve notes. (Narciso Yepes in Kozinn 1981)

Yepes is certainly right in ascribing a far greater evenness of sympathetic resonance to the ten-string guitar, and along with a limited number of new works and transcriptions, he continued to play six-string guitar music on his expanded instrument, not necessarily seeking to play the extra strings but relying on them for resonance.

I came to the ten-string guitar principally for its repertoire, attracted as I was by Ohana's large-scale cycles. Within a few months of taking up the instrument, in 1994, I had commissioned a new work for it from Rob Keeley. And yet notwithstanding Yepes's characterisation of the ten-string instrument as a universal guitar, I soon came to feel that I could play six-string guitar

*Example 1* Narciso Yepes's tuning for the ten-string guitar, often referred to as the 'modern' tuning. Circled numbers denote strings; strings 6–1 match the stringing of the six-string guitar



music most freely on its intended instrument: the uneven response of the six-string guitar has its own charm, while the extra resonance of the ten-string guitar can be a little overpowering and difficult to control. And so I reconciled myself to taking two instruments to every performance.

Before long I started to think about the idea of combining the two instruments in some way, with the six-string guitar placed on a bench in front of me. A good deal of experimentation led to a carefully planned improvisation, which I would sometimes perform at the beginning of concerts. I retuned the six-string guitar and added a capo to raise the pitch of the instrument by a perfect fifth: this way, the combined open strings of the two instruments gave a gamut of sixteen pitches, though with a strong diatonic basis (example 2, a–c). My improvisation ended with an arrangement of a Galician folk song which I had originally made for guitar duo, ending with a chord swept across both guitars at once (example 2, d).

I was quite unaware that the idea of playing a solo on two guitars had already been tried at least twice. I now know that Gavin Bryars’s *The Fox, the Squirrel and the Ricketty-Racketty Bridge* was written as long ago as the sixties; more recently, Moritz Eggers has written a work for nylon- and steel-string guitars, *Vermilion Sands* (2000). Although both works are substantial pieces, neither attempts at all to research ways of combining the two instruments to create unusual textures. In Bryars’s piece, no notes are plucked and fretted in the ordinary way: all notes are sounded by hammering on to the fingerboard with the right or left hand. In *Vermilion Sands*, notes are produced normally for the most part, but the two guitars are used in an antiphonal way, and the two sonorities are scarcely ever mixed.

In my own exploration, I intended from the start to interlace the sonorities of the instruments, so I began to devise ways of playing chords simultaneously on both guitars and of moving from one instrument to the other within a phrase or figure. I was attracted initially by the purely sensuous possibilities, the magical resonance of the combination. Because even a moderate tempo presented formidable technical and cognitive difficulties, I thought less of the combination as a

Example 2 An open-string gamut for improvisation, enrichable with fretted notes and harmonics

a. Scordatura for ten-string guitar

b. Scordatura for six-string guitar (capo at fret 7)

c. Combined gamut

d. Goal chord of improvisation

The image contains musical notation for four parts of Example 2. Part a, 'Scordatura for ten-string guitar', shows a staff with ten notes labeled 10 through 1, with a sharp sign on the first note. Part b, 'Scordatura for six-string guitar (capo at fret 7)', shows a staff with six notes labeled 6 through 1, with a sharp sign on the first note. Part c, 'Combined gamut', shows a staff with the combined notes from parts a and b. Part d, 'Goal chord of improvisation', shows a guitar chord diagram with a sharp sign on the first note and a forte (ff) dynamic marking below it.

vehicle for virtuoso display. Nonetheless, I thought there was some potential to develop the medium. I began to think of commissioning someone else to write an extended solo for my two guitars, but I thought it would have to be a composer with a player's knowledge of the instrument, and one who would relish both the dramatic and virtuosic possibilities as well as the potential for sheerly sensuous texture. Stephen Goss is one of very few composers to meet this description, and so in 2002 I changed my long-standing request to Stephen for a ten-string guitar piece to a work for both guitars together. I proposed to perform the work for the first time in London's Bolívar Hall in a concert for the Venezuelan Embassy's guitar festival, a concert that would also feature Ohana's cycle *Si le jour paraît...* for ten-string guitar, along with some six-string works.

Stephen was somewhat taken aback by the commission. First, as far as we knew, no piece like this had ever been written before. There were no models, and time was relatively short for the concert I had in mind. Second, he thought that no one would ever play the piece apart from me; much later, we were surprised at the interest aroused by the publication and recording of *Oxen of the Sun* (as the work came to be called), although there have not yet been performances by other ten-string guitarists. As for Stephen's first objection, we arranged to meet so that I could demonstrate to him a repertory of techniques and explore ways of adding to it. We had only one extended meeting to go into the various resources, but Stephen carefully wrote them all down.

As the commissioner of the work, it was very important to me that the piece should justify the trouble and the theatre of having two guitars on the stage, combining them as fully and inventively as possible. Certainly, the two guitars produce fascinating sonorities together, but they also impose frustrating limitations, since it is impossible to move rapidly from one guitar to the other if the note on the first guitar is plucked with the right hand and fretted with the left. To play continuous passagework there must be *pivot notes* — notes played with only one hand. These can only be open strings, natural harmonics (played with one hand) or occasionally, hammered-on notes. Somehow I never clearly formulated this 'rule' in my discussions with Stephen. Still, my first request was that there should be some continuous passagework in the music.

It was more or less assumed at the outset that as in my improvisations, the six-string guitar would be the one placed on the piano bench in front, since all the extra resources of the ten-string guitar would be more easily accessed with it held conventionally. It is inevitable with this arrangement that the ten-string guitar will have to play more notes than the six-string, but we were keen to minimise this effect. The use of a capo to mechanically raise the pitch of the six-string guitar and thus differentiate the open strings of the two guitars also seemed a given.

### *The Compendium*

Before writing any music, Stephen sent me a copy of the 'compendium', or repertory of techniques, that he had compiled from our meeting. I reproduce it in table 1, numbering each one and adding to the right an indication of how the various techniques came to be used in the work. In the end, not every technique featured. Some were so thoroughly explored in a movement that there was no need for additional ones; and then, a few additional ways of combining the instrument emerged in the process of composing: the compendium grew.

Table 1 *The Compendium for Oxen of the Sun*

Compendium (precompositional)	Eventual application in work
1 The standard 'modern' 10-string tuning: F# (top fret 12), G# (12), A# (12), Low B or C (13), E (14), A (16), D (17), G (18), B (19), E (19). Listen to Jonathan's recordings with the ten-string, particularly Beaser's 'Barbara Allen' and Poulenc's <i>Caprice Parisien</i> (string 7 = low A), and live recording of Ohana	Standard 'modern' tuning used, with lowest (7th) string in B
2 The 6-string could have an odd tuning and a capo	Throughout, but the capo is removed in 'Circe', replaced in 'Narcissus' and then removed again.
3 The 10-string could have a capo over the top (or bottom) 6 strings	[not used]
4 Chord of open strings and harmonic doublings	[not used]
5 Chromatic clusters and diatonic clusters	[throughout]
6 The 10-string is excellent for bridge percussion	'Pan', 'Aeolus', 'Circe'
7 Sustained cross-string patterns	'Pan', 'Orpheus', 'Arethusa', 'Narcissus' (version 2)
8 Rich chord of harmonics	'Circe'
9 2-guitar dialogue: hammer-on 6 note chords	'Narcissus' (version 2)
10 Strum 6-string with tamb. on 10-string	'Pan', 'Circe'
11 Both hands doing hammer-ons on 1 or 2 guitars	'Aeolus'
12 Hammer-on all 6 strings while playing a chord on 10-string	[not used]
13 RH trem on 10-string (good on G#) with a dramatic backwards LH hammer-on/pull-off melody on 6-string.	'Circe'
14 The harp, open strings and natural harmonics RH 10-string, LH 6-string. Harmonic chords at various frets — up to 6 (or 10) notes	'Orpheus', 'Arethusa', 'Narcissus' (version 2)
15 Harmonic chords dampened higher up (i.e. pluck fret 12 harmonic and then brush at fret 7 (5, 4 etc)	'Aeolus', 'Circe'
16 Left hand on 10-string can produce very clear hammer-ons in the bass. A singing bass line would work well.	[not used]
17 RH harmonic pattern on 10-string, cello melody on 6-string	'Circe', though the melody on 6-string turned out to be in open strings and harmonics
18 RH ostinato on 6-string (pizz/harm or as percussion instrument) with hammer-on melody on 10-string	[not used]
19 RH fingered harmonic chords	'Circe'
20 Subtle clustery chords: points, not big brushstrokes.	'Pan'
21 Big chords across both instruments, double strikes or big gestures	'Circe', 'Narcissus' (version 2)

For the most part, the compendium deals with ways of combining the two guitars, and does not reflect an important aspect of our discussion that day: the striking resources that the ten-string guitar affords on its own. Still, the impression that the table gives — that ‘Pan’, ‘Aeolus’, ‘Circe’ and ‘Narcissus’ (in its second version) draw on the compendium the most — corresponds quite closely with the finished work. In the case of ‘Sirens’, the first movement, the repertory of techniques hardly applies, because the movement enacts a gradual awakening of the six-string guitar lying in front of the performer. The six-string guitar only echoes the ten-string solo before becoming suddenly and dramatically independent in the second movement, ‘Pan’.

But why is the compendium spread so unevenly over the other movements? Stephen had written in his diary:

The piece may well be a number of miniatures or mood pieces, based on something like the Tarot Cards (but not the Tarot Cards), a kind of compressed LGT.<sup>1</sup> Could be a filmic, literary or artistic source.

We talked about what the piece might do. Jonathan would like something that has action, but is not necessarily fast. He showed me a compendium of possibilities. The piece will be about the instrument and the performer. A music box, box of tricks, the sounds will be unique, intriguing and novel. A cross between a harp and a guitar. Inventions as variations? There could be a very simple harp movement — a theme in the middle or at the end? Try not to duplicate Jonathan’s folksong arrangement idea. One piece will be just natural harmonics. ‘The Harp of Orpheus.’ Sympathetic Strings. 6 *Metamorphoses after Ovid* as a model or starting point? *Metamorphoses* after Britten?

A ‘box of tricks’: it is easy to suppose that the compendium will generate ‘set-piece’ episodes and striking gestures, *bloques sonores* that will quickly exhaust themselves, leaving the composer with the task of finding an intuitively correct arrangement to build a larger form. In fact, the finished seven-movement structure is far less obvious. It is already apparent in his jottings that Stephen intended one or more movements to focus on a single sound. The central movement, ‘Orpheus’, treats the two guitars as one, a kind of harp or lyre, in a hypnotic exploration of a single technical idea. ‘Arethusa’ builds on this technique, moving twice as quickly and adding stopped notes and ten-string sweeps.

The remaining movements — the ones that can be called episodic — draw on the compendium to very different ends. In particular, ‘Aeolus’ is a genuinely dramatic structure, in that it invokes contrasts of stability and instability, statement and development. As table 2 shows, it is in one sense a ‘box of tricks’. There are four episodes of similar length, each labelled with a character: *Light and clear*, *Strong and heavy*, *Scherzando* and *Faster*. Each of these episodes draws on the compendium — or presents a similar, strongly idiomatic effect — in a clearly defined way. Indeed, neither guitar is played quite conventionally until the final section, which is a solo for ten-string guitar. But the last episode is a reprise of the first, transforming its static, ostinato-like figuration into a forceful climax and decay. The rising passage in bars 50–54 is made out of motives from

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<sup>1</sup> *Looking Glass Ties* (2001) is a work by Goss for solo guitar, discussed below (pp 15–17).

Table 2 'Aeolus', coordination of the form with extended techniques

section	MM	character	bar no.	instrumental features
Statement [A]	♩ = 60–66	Light and clear	1–18	10-string: harmonics 6-string: <i>tambora</i> on open strings
Development [B]	♩ = 112–20	Strong and heavy	19–32	Both guitars: hammered-on notes with separate hands
		<i>Scherzando</i>	33–49	10-string: <i>tambora</i> on low strings; resonance transformed into harmonics 10-string: improvised <i>tambora</i> on low strings, tinged with harmonics 6-string: arpeggio figuration
Reprise [A']		Faster	50–69	10-string alone, played conventionally

Example 3 'Aeolus', bars 50–69, cross-referenced with ideas from the opening section

49

*p* *mf* *fff*

bars 11–12

55

*pp* an echo in the decaying sonority

*fff*

slap strings with side of thumb

bar 9

62

bar 1

*pppp*

Example 4 'Aeolus': section B's two episodes take as their starting point distortions of opening material

The image displays musical notation for two episodes in section B of 'Aeolus'.  
 - **Beginning of B (bar 19):** Shows a six-string guitar staff with a treble clef and a ten-string guitar staff with a bass clef. The six-string staff has a dynamic marking of *f* and includes annotations for 'RH hammer-ons' (finger 6) and 'LH hammer-ons'.  
 - **Beginning of Scherzando episode, bars 33–35:** Shows a six-string guitar staff with a treble clef and a ten-string guitar staff with a bass clef. The six-string staff has a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction 'l.v. sempre'. The ten-string staff has a dynamic marking of *p* and the instruction 'tamb.'. Below the ten-string staff, the text 'harmonic tamb. ad lib.' is written.  
 - **Beginning of A (bar 1):** Shows a six-string guitar staff with a treble clef and a ten-string guitar staff with a bass clef. The six-string staff has a dynamic marking of *ppp* and the instruction 'l.v. sempre'. Fingerings are indicated by circled numbers 2, 4, 8, 3, 9, and 10 above the notes.  
 - **bars 2–3:** Shows a six-string guitar staff with a treble clef and a ten-string guitar staff with a bass clef. The six-string staff has a dynamic marking of *p* and the instruction 'tamb.'.

bars 10–12 in the opening statement, while the decay links bars 1 and 9 into a stuttering sequence (example 3).

In the context of this arch structure, the two central episodes emerge as developmental. They, too, take after rhythms and melodic shapes from the slower opening statement, but in a distorted form (example 4 shows the beginning of each central episode). The sense of distortion is palpable in the choice of techniques taken from the compendium, as well. Whereas the opening statement had exploited the gamut of ten-string harmonics, already familiar from the first two movements, *Strong and heavy* asks for quavers to be hammered on, a technique (no. 11 in the compendium) which sounds a subsidiary indeterminate pitch along with each written note. In the second episode, *Scherzando*, the chords marked *tambora* are produced by striking the strings with an outstretched finger around various harmonic nodal points, transforming the high pentatonic *tamboras* of the opening statement into a 'dirty' and indeterminate mixture of bass cluster, harmonics and noise. Here Stephen had in mind technique 6 in the compendium: in his original draft of the *Scherzando*, he had asked for 'some kind of magical bridge percussion sound', leaving the exact realisation up to me. But we had discussed this technique of 'harmonic *tambora*' and I chose to use it here because I thought it would heighten the developmental, distorting quality of the central episodes.

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, 'The Oxen of the Sun' is the title of the fourteenth episode, in which Joyce recapitulates the development of English prose in a series of pastiches and parodies. Not that Stephen's work attempts such a feat in music—in fact the seven movements of *Oxen of the Sun* are more stylistically unified than in much of his output. But the title reflects the diversity of styles found in Stephen's work as a whole and the multiplicity of inspirations for *Oxen's* schema. Three movements take their titles from episodes from *Ulysses* (Homer and Joyce): 'Sirens', 'Aeolus' and 'Circe'.<sup>2</sup> The image of the two instruments as a lyre defines the central movement: 'Orpheus'. As for the remaining three, 'Pan', 'Arethusa' and 'Narcissus', not just their titles but their musical material may be sourced in Britten's *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid* for solo oboe, op. 49.

A few years before *Oxen of the Sun*, Stephen had written an article on one of the major works in the guitar's repertoire, Benjamin Britten's *Nocturnal after John Dowland*, op. 70 (Goss 2001). As editor of the journal—and as someone who shared Stephen's passionate preoccupation with the work—I entered into a process of revision and collaboration with Stephen that rather presaged our work on *Oxen of the Sun*. We shall come back to *Nocturnal* specifically in due course, but Stephen is a composer who thrives on the association of ideas, and I was not surprised to find that he was looking for ways to incorporate the music of Britten into the new piece. On January 24th, 2003, he wrote in his diary:

I've spent the morning thinking and reading around the 16-string piece. I am pretty sure that it will be called *Oxen of the Sun*. Orpheus's lyre had 9 strings, 2 more than Apollo's (9 + 7 = 16). There will be parallels to *The Odyssey* and *Ulysses*. Six of the movements will come from the Britten Ovid Metamorphoses. They will be recomposed expanding and contracting the original material and making use of the compendium. Single models.

...

If not 9 movements, then 7. I may not use all the Britten movements. I need to work on them next and a movement plan.

...

I might not recompose all the Britten, although 'Narcissus' is a gift for reflections in the water. 'Arethusa' is a good one—a fountain of notes.

Within a couple of days, Stephen had arrived at the plan for the finished piece:

I don't want the movements to be long. The Britten pieces should be distillations, concentrations of the originals. There is a theme developing of lust, temptation and retribution.

...

The Joyce episodes for consideration are:

'Sirens'—seduction and Orpheus link, slow and sexy

'Circe'—enchantress, cf. Kundry

'Aeolus'—wind ...

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2 In Joyce's *Ulysses*, 'The Sirens' is episode 11, 'Aeolus' is episode 7 and 'Circe' is episode 15.



Plan 3 — almost final

1	Sirens	slow	Homer/Joyce	rich chords & beautiful song
2	Pan	faster	Ovid–Britten	cross-string resonances
3	Aeolus	fast	Homer/Joyce	high pitched? moto perpetuo
4	Orpheus	medium	The Lyre — Cage	open strings of the lyre 7 & 9
5	Arethusa	fast	Ovid–Britten	waterfall/fountain music
6	Circe	slower	Homer/Joyce	magic music
7	Narcissus	slow	Ovid–Britten	2 guitars in dialogue

As an avowed pluralist with an ambivalent attitude towards notions of authorship and originality, Stephen has made no secret over the years of his use of samples and models from other composers past and present. Sometimes the work of others is echoed in a relatively recognisable form; at other times it is apparent only to those in the know, occluded as it is by filters or other distortions in the compositional process. Either way, it is easy to dwell too exclusively on Stephen's borrowings in *Oxen*: the entire span of 'Aeolus' just discussed provides one of many passages throughout the work that are composed from scratch. Nevertheless, models and samples abound. 'Orpheus', for example, is based loosely but audibly on John Cage's 1948 piano piece, *In a Landscape*, at times down to the merest grace note.

The references to Britten's *Metamorphoses* describe a continuum. Example 5 illustrates how the first movement of Britten's to be treated, 'Pan', is passed through a kind of instrumental and gestural filter. One of the solo oboe's particular strengths lies, of course, in expressive and flowing melody, and in the opening *forte* and *mezzo-forte* phrases, Britten evidently set out to build his arabesques with no intervals other than diatonic steps, encompassing just a major ninth in all. In this way Britten's oboe conveys the rustic essence of Pan's flute. The two guitars, on the other hand, are capable of producing rich clusters, and that is the *instrumental* filter through which Britten's melodic arcs are passed. The tuning of the two guitars offers a gamut of harmonics and open strings which correspond exactly to the diatonic collection expressed in Britten's 'Pan'. As they are transformed into clusters, just enough of the original line is retained to make the model recognisable — and recognition, surely, is one of the responses allowed for in this recomposition. Indeed, the presentation of the opening 'hook' is strongly marked as the climax of the previous movement.

Recognition, on the other hand, can hardly be expected in the contrasting soft section that makes up the second part of Stephen's 'Pan'. The repeated notes and arching, chromatic gestures of Britten's original are verticalised into attenuated chords in harmonics, depicting a static landscape that is particularly characteristic of Stephen's music. The model is buried.

By contrast, the fifth movement, 'Arethusa', brings Britten's original more into the open by following its melodic outline and dynamics closely, now employing a series of pitch filters that begins with the open strings and harmonics of the two guitars. The moment of change from one pitch collection to another corresponds closely between model and reworking (example 6).

In the first version of *Oxen of the Sun*, the presence of Britten's *Metamorphoses* culminated in the last movement, which presented a literal transcription of 'Narcissus' (no. 5 in Britten's set).

Example 5 Goss's 'Pan' is derived from Britten's by converting scales into clusters

Britten: 'Pan' from *Six Metamorphoses after Ovid*

Senza misura

oboe

*f* *f* *mf*

Goss: 'Pan' from *Oxen of the Sun*

Senza misura: take plenty of time

six-string guitar

*f* l.v. sempre

ten-string guitar

5

*f* *f* *pp*

Very slow, free and calm  
gently strike strings with index finger at 19th fret, leaving finger on strings

*ff* long pause

semi-pizz. pont. *pp*

[Britten's movement continues...]

6

*pp* (accel.) *mf*

long pause

semi-pizz. pont. semi-pizz. pont. *ppp*

Attacca Aeolus

How this movement came to be replaced with an entirely different 'Narcissus' is a question we must soon come to, but first let us discuss the original version, which I performed a number of times throughout 2003 and 2004.

Example 6 Goss's 'Arethusa' is modelled on Britten's in rhythm, contour and modification of pitch collections (bars 1–26)

Largamente

oboe  
*f espress.*  
 Largamente ♩ = 126c.

six-string guitar  
*f espressivo, l.v.*

ten-string guitar  
*f*

10

19

*mf* *cresc.*

*mf*

*Transcription and appropriation: the first 'Narcissus'*

Although the 2003 'Narcissus' quotes Britten's movement unchanged and in its entirety (the models for 'Pan' and 'Arethusa' are truncated) it is something more than a literal quotation; for, as example 7 shows, it makes explicit – in live performance, visible – the dialogue between Narcissus and his reflection, or as Britten depicts it, between melody and inversion. This is the most palpable instrumental filter of all, in which one guitar becomes the reflection of the other, and the effect of it became heightened in performance by a discovery I made while preparing the first performance: it was easier to play the transcription if I reversed the arrangement of the two guitars, holding the six-string in the normal playing position and putting the ten-string guitar on the bench in front, playing the inverted echoes on the ten-string (as in example 7). Swapping



been reworked by Stephen in later compositions) but in the place of a central fifth movement, so to speak, one finds a transcription made by Stephen of Scarlatti's Sonata K25. Even here, there is a filter, though of a most unusual kind: a direction that the sonata should be performed 'in the style of the Russian piano school' — Stephen suggests a recording of Mikhail Pletnev's as a model. In this way, Stephen pays tribute — in admiration, I believe — to Pletnev's way of playing Scarlatti while wryly separating the playing style from the musical content. It is a separation that must disconcert the performer, because it makes self-conscious what should be instinctive, and asks the performer to play the sonata a certain way irrespective of how he or she might 'hear' the piece. In this context, Scarlatti's music will tend to become a vehicle for the style: although few listeners may be able to pinpoint the provenance of the interpretive style, some might sense nonetheless that the performer is playing a role.

The rest of *Looking Glass Ties* is replete with quotations and allusions, and yet it provides no clue as to the 'meaning' of the Scarlatti sonata in the work as a whole, unless as one of a number of distancing strategies. In his introductory note to the score, Stephen explained that 'the diverse portraits that make up *Looking Glass Ties* are reworkings of existing pieces displayed in a new light and from a different perspective — pieces through the looking glass.' This is putting it mildly in the case of the Scarlatti, which elevates the arranger to the status of the composer. The sonata's intrusive presence aggressively denies traditional expectations of originality. And if doubts arise in the mind of the listener — is this a gimmick? — then Stephen could reply that he is the composer of those doubts.

Similar appropriations in Stephen's output help to define his notion of quotation and its role. In another solo guitar work, *Raise the Red Lantern*, commissioned in 2004 by the Chinese virtuoso Xuefei Yang for an album of works with a Chinese theme, a transcription again features, this time of 'Von der Jugend', the third song of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. Mahler's song-symphony is based on Chinese texts; although the text is lost in the transcription to solo guitar, the *chinoiserie* of the music is unmistakable. The main test for the culturally aware listener, then, is to recognise Mahler's music at all, before pondering on the significance of the quotation among movements which otherwise allude to recent Chinese cinema.

Mahler appears again in Stephen's 2004 guitar duo, *The Raw and the Cooked*. The fifth movement, 'Caught Between', transcribes a song from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*: 'Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt', which Mahler had himself adapted for the Scherzo of his Second Symphony. In *The Raw and the Cooked* it is preceded by another transcription, this time of the eighth song from Schumann's *Dichterliebe*, 'Und wüßten's die Blumen, die kleine'. As always in Stephen's music, wit is part of the motivation: the transcription continues innocently into the introduction to *Dichterliebe*'s next song, 'Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen'; but before long Schumann's music turns seamlessly into Mahler's.

The link between Schumann's 'Das ist ein Flöten und Geigen' and Mahler both 'Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt' and the Second Symphony Scherzo has been discussed extensively in the Mahler literature. Abbate points to the musical connections (1991, 265, n.13) before turning to the connection between the Heine poem of Schumann's song and Mahler's own

description of the symphonic scherzo. But in *The Raw and the Cooked*, what had previously been shown in prose and the odd musical example is now illuminated in performance space, though still at a distance — these are guitars we are hearing, after all, and the title, ‘Caught Between’, underscores the doubt as to whose music this is, whether Schumann’s or Mahler’s. Finally, the listener to Stephen’s version in *The Raw and the Cooked* might well be reminded, via Lévi-Strauss as well as the music itself, of Berio’s reworking of Mahler’s Scherzo in his *Sinfonia* (1968–9). Berio’s masterpiece is a *locus classicus* of postmodernism in music, with its ceaseless divagations into quotations from other musical masterpieces and the anxious reflections on originality pursued in the singers’ texts. Goss reverses Berio’s conception by pointing Mahler’s Scherzo back towards its source.

In all of these examples, then, the listener is drawn into a maze of referents which can never be grounded into a coherent structure, since these block quotations are not integrated into the rest of the work, and the music seems to comment on itself, its own aims and expressive aspirations, in an unsettling (if often light-hearted) way. Nor is this the ambiguity and open-endedness of the symbolism of a hundred years before, in which the very wordlessness of music was celebrated: there can be little doubt that Stephen intends to provoke, among other things, thought in the form of words — verbal association and a kind of wordplay encoded in the music; not symbolism, but semiosis in the literary sense that modern thought has tended to give it, an interest in music as text.

Since the late nineteenth century, transcriptions have featured heavily in the repertoire of many guitarists. One of today’s leading players, Paul Galbraith, plays transcriptions almost exclusively, and a comment on his website represents, I think, the credo of all practitioners of the art: ‘It’s so easy to play transcriptions in a way that merely excites nostalgia for the original version. The great thing is for the transcription to be convincing to the point that you feel it was originally conceived for your instrument’ (Galbraith 2004). As a guitarist himself, specialising in two areas with a scarcity of repertoire — guitar quartet and voice and guitar — Stephen Goss has made many transcriptions that reflect these values, though increasingly, those too have become increasingly ‘unfaithful’ and allusive.<sup>3</sup> In his compositions, the transcriptions are done just as skilfully; one suspects, however, that to sound ‘originally conceived for the instrument’ is far from his aim. Indeed, few guitarists, surely, would consider programming a straightforward transcription of, say, ‘Von der Jugend’, for exactly the reasons that Galbraith adduces. But place the work within protective quotation marks, as *Raise the Red Lantern* does, and performing it becomes a possibility. The guitar’s timbre and perhaps even the guitarist’s struggles to realise something like a Mahler song for tenor and orchestra both make their ironic point. The more aware the listener becomes, the further away the music seems, whether through the distancing action of the transcription or through the distancing appeal to verbal (and often erudite) thought — and then, most drastically, the insouciance towards notions of compositional voice and the sanctity of the work.

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3 See for example *Carmen Fantasy* (1998) and *Gnossiennes after Erik Satie* (2002), both for guitar quartet.

By now it is perhaps clear just how exceptional the final quotation of Britten's 'Narcissus' in the first version of *Oxen* was. For one thing, the transcription works almost in the traditional way – stunningly so, as the dialogue between each phrase and its inversion falls on to the two guitars as though intended for them. For another, its appearance and placement are part of a much more traditionally coherent scheme than is present in any of the works just discussed. At least to those who know the *Metamorphoses after Ovid*, there is not only integration within the work as a whole but also a sense of progression. 'Pan' briefly alludes clearly to Britten before burying it; 'Arethusa' partly reveals its model by paraphrasing it throughout; 'Narcissus' at last states Britten literally and in full. Above all, it brings an element of variation to the multi-movement form. Example 8 shows how an inversion of 'Narcissus' is the point of departure for the whole work. Since Britten's 'Narcissus' also inverts its melody in its call-and-response form, the connection is partly made for the listener when the final movement arrives. This opening movement, 'Sirens', is of course one of the 'Joycean' movements in the set, and another version of the melody appears in one of the others, 'Circe'.

By stating its melody clearly, then, the original version of 'Narcissus' brings a sense of completion, even resolution, to both threads in the work: Britten and Joyce. The central movement, 'Orpheus', stands outside the process. Deep in the background, *Oxen* becomes a theme-and-variation set in which the theme is placed at the end. This is the very form adopted by Britten in the *Nocturnal* which Stephen and I had worked on a couple of years before *Oxen* (as well as other Britten works such as *Lachrymae* for viola and piano). It is worth recalling, too, that variations were already a possibility in Stephen's mind in the diary entry quoted above: 'Inventions as variations? ...[A] theme in the middle or at the end?' To the extent that *Oxen of the Sun* – in its first version – is a theme-and-variation set, there is nothing shocking about the presence of an entire movement by another composer: what could be more traditional than to quote the theme on which the rest of the work is based?

So it was that in March 2003, I performed *Oxen of the Sun* for the first time, with the transcription of Britten's 'Narcissus' as the closing movement. And yet paradoxical as it may sound,

Example 8 Comparison of Britten's 'Narcissus' with Goss's 'Sirens' and 'Circe'

The image displays three staves of musical notation in treble clef. The top staff is labeled 'Britten, Narcissus' and shows a melodic line with a fermata over the first two notes, followed by a sixteenth-note triplet marked with a '6' above it. A bracket labeled 'bar 11, echo' spans the final two notes. The middle staff is labeled 'Goss, Sirens' with a dynamic marking of *mp*. It features a melodic line with a dotted line indicating a connection to the 'Narcissus' staff, and a bracketed section with circled numbers 4 and 5. The bottom staff is labeled 'Goss, Circe (line 3 in opening section)' with a dynamic marking of *f*. It shows a melodic line with a dotted line indicating a connection to the 'Sirens' staff.



coherence on so many levels was too good to be true, especially in a work by Stephen Goss, who revels in hints, discontinuities and blind alleys. In one way, *Oxen of the Sun* marks a turning point in Stephen's attitude to multi-movement form, away from pluralist potpourri towards a greater degree of interrelation between the movements. Perhaps Stephen's Sonata for guitar of 2006 could not have been written without *Oxen*. But the movement that ties so many threads together, the transcription of 'Narcissus', was to be replaced with a new finale that would leave the structure more open-ended, more tantalising yet more cathartic.

#### *A New 'Narcissus'*

After the premiere, I was surprised that the only review (in *Classical Guitar* magazine) did not so much as mention the extensive quotation at the close of the work (the movement appeared in the programme as 'Narcissus [Britten]'). But the work was received all the same with some excitement, and not only for its ostentatious instrumental concept: many listeners found the work touching. A few, it is true, found the preponderance of slow and quiet music excessive, but I felt that the work was asking listeners to accept this preponderance in a legitimate way that reminded me of the music of Federico Mompou.

Even so, although I was delighted with the work and played it in almost every recital for the next eighteen months, I felt that the ending was not as effective as it might be. The sense of release that might be provided by Britten's more traditional tonality and phrase structure does not come out of any agitation: the only big climax happens rather early, towards the end of 'Aeolus'. It seemed to me that the end of 'Circe' needed to extend and accelerate into a climax at least as big and to project a virtuosic image for the last time before settling into the Britten quotation, rather as the final passacaglia of *Nocturnal* does before settling into the music of Dowland.

Something else was on my mind. My sense of the possibilities of the two-guitar combination had developed somewhat through the experience of working on *Oxen*. New ways of creating a continuous texture with the two guitars — more rapid than that of 'Orpheus' or 'Arethusa' — had occurred to me, and I was hoping to have them incorporated into some extra passage just like the one described, or even into another solo for two guitars. I had found one of them while playing 'Narcissus'. At the climax of the dialogue between Narcissus and his reflection I had slightly redistributed Britten's part-writing for the sake of more speed and ease (example 9). In this redistribution, the right hand plucks open strings on one guitar, and the left hand hammers on and pulls off fretted notes on the other. Both the speed and the sonority of this technique are rather striking and much more obviously virtuosic than anything I had been able to show Stephen in the past. It occurred to me that a whole range of tetrachords could be played this way — probably enough to make an extended passage, despite the limitation that two of the four notes must be open strings.

In short, I had developed as an exponent of this Siamese-twin-like combination, precisely because of playing *Oxen of the Sun*. Indeed, two further additions to the compendium had occurred to me that I felt pushed the boundaries of the medium towards greater virtuosity and



Example 9 'Narcissus' (first version): the approach to the climax

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: oboe, six-string guitar, and ten-string guitar. The oboe part is in the top staff, starting at measure 22. The six-string guitar part is in the middle staff, labeled 'right hand'. The ten-string guitar part is in the bottom staff, labeled 'left hand alone'. The score is in a key signature of two flats (B-flat major or D-flat minor) and a common time signature. The music features complex rhythmic patterns, including sixteenth and thirty-second notes, and a crescendo leading to a fortissimo (ff) section. A trill (tr) is marked in the oboe part near the end of the excerpt.

drama. The first possibility was that of combining full strummed chords on the open strings with chords hammered on by the left hand. The alternation of hands would give time to move rapidly between guitars, and although it would be difficult to hammer on anything other than barred chords, some interesting harmonies might still emerge from the combination of the open strings of one guitar with the barred chord of the other. The other technique which I had been experimenting with was again rather tied to the open strings, but was capable of generating some speed, and that was simply to alternate the right and left thumbs on the two guitars.

Meanwhile, we were starting to look towards the possibility of publishing and recording *Oxen*, and the question of copyright to the Britten movement remained a nagging one. Stephen had contacted the Britten estate and obtained permission for the transcription, but we wondered how the estate might react to its incorporation into a work by another composer, not least in a recording. At the same time, Stephen had always intended to revisit and revise the work, since he had been under some pressure to complete it in good time for the first performance. He agreed in principle with the suggestion of placing another climax after 'Circe', but to my surprise began instead to plan an entirely new final movement, still entitled 'Narcissus'. In December 2004, I stayed with Stephen for a couple of days so that we could work on the new techniques to be used.

Before my visit, Stephen had already made a plan for the movement:

Ideas for a new 'Narcissus' 29th November 2004

*Tuning*

10-string open — 6-string with a capo at fret 4

This generates a 9-note 2-octave open-string scale built using major 3rds and semitones:

E, G#, A, C#, D, F#, G, B, D#, E

(It's very similar to my HCE scale — B natural, C, E — which generates a 24-note scale over two octaves with every chromatic note twice by alternating minor 2nds and major 3rds.)<sup>4</sup>

A beautiful open-string strum is 6-string top-down, 10-string bottom-up.

4 The reference here is to a collection used in Goss's *Dreamchild* (1994–5), a song cycle for soprano and large ensemble.

*The Piece*

The piece will start on B — the fulcrum note in the scale, on both guitars alternating (2nd string on 10-string, 3rd string on 6-string). Some kind of single-note fast passage with occasional 2-note chords with one note per guitar. There may be echo moments or reflective pauses.

As the piece gains energy and momentum and the intensity builds up, chords alternate quickly between the guitars and Ginastera-style strum damping helps to accentuate the rhythm. The rhythm should be irregular with groups of 2, 3, 4 and 5 all mixed up. A climax or crisis moment is reached. I am undecided about the ending — either a dance to the death or a wind down. A dance to the death probably. Something insanely virtuosic.

OK, that's it so far. It would be most useful if we could get together and work something final out. I have so many questions about hands and position and what things sound like. I want to use a number of things that we discussed last time, but I wonder how much further we could go. I think if we spent a couple of hours together, I could finish things off quite quickly. It may just be a case of getting you to improvise around these ideas and then take all the gestures and finalise the piece. Collaboration indeed.

Example 10 illustrates the tuning and pitch collection referred to in the quoted passage. It was clear that the open-string gamut provided by the previous movements needed varying for the last movement; just as importantly, the new note collection had a unison B surrounded by symmetrical intervals, suggesting Narcissus's reflection in the water.

I had already mentioned to Stephen that I had new ideas for fast, open-string passagework and strumming on the two guitars. Now I had to show him my idea for the fast tetrachords — I had also found that I could play harmonics with the right hand alone instead of open strings, making it possible to play tetrachords in the high register. And so it was that we spent some time improvising on these techniques (I played and Stephen made suggestions) until we had discovered some particularly attractive sounds: unisons between the two guitars, tetrachords with both open strings and harmonics and bass strings that would combine with them, and combinations of strummed open-string chords on one guitar with bar chords hammered on to the other guitar. After a couple of hours, even the order in which these ideas would occur had been decided. Stephen recorded our improvising and later wrote the shape down, with some extra details, in his diary:

30 December 2004

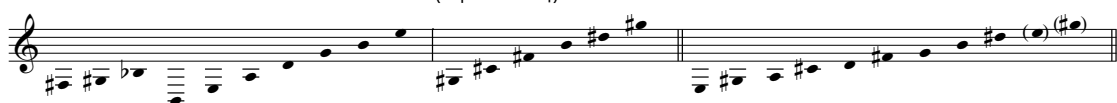
**Narcissus 2**

*Section 1*

Starts with open Bs played with the thumbs

*Example 10* Tuning for 'Narcissus' and nine-note scale

10-string guitar                      6-string guitar (capo at fret 4)                      scale on nine open strings



Moving to thumbs on all the other strings, 10–6 all the time  
Movement to the F#s, one open (6-string), one as an octave harmonic (10-string)  
Gradual descent to the low G#s loud and strong

#### *Section 2*

Low open strings are used to colour the G#, particularly F# and low B  
Gradually this moves into the 4-note pattern  
The 4-note tetrachord or trichord patterns work their way up (not directly) to the D#, E, C#, B. These should try to contain 3 open strings and one stopped note. Hands can be changed, by going back to Bs and slowing down enough to swap over. Down to triplets and duplets in time rather than *rallentando*? Slowing down and speeding up will help. Open strings on the 10-string sound very good here — track 4 [on recording].

#### *Section 3*

The bass notes are gradually added — the A and C# together, some subtle dissonances  
Gradually the strumming takes over and the capo is removed

#### *Section 4*

The strumming section

#### *Section 5*

The final gesture:

- 1, both open string sets played together
- 2, 10-string 12th fret harmonic semi-damping
- 3, 6-string 12th fret harmonic semi-damping
- 4, fade

Because this movement grew out of live improvisation, learning the finished composition presented perhaps fewer difficulties than any of the previous movements. I suggested only one change to the finished score, and that was to insert two climactic chords in high harmonics right before the final open-string gesture. In example 11, the inserted chords are marked in bar 34 (in the last line of the example). After these chords comes the gesture described in section 5 of Stephen's plan, which sounds the open strings of both guitars and converts them to octave harmonics. I felt that this gesture, which we had worked out in our meeting, lost some of its effect because the climax of the strumming section (bar 33) also sounds only open strings. The second of my two inserted chords converts the open strings into harmonics sounding a major third and two octaves above (the fifth partial), forming a dissonance with the octave harmonics of my first inserted chord.

Not only does this dissonance create a moment of instability just before the cadence, following the model of many a tonal cadence, it sums up the pitch organisation of the movement. The top line of example 11 recalls what example 10 has already shown: that in section 1 all the pitch material is derived from the open strings of the two guitars, with the six-string guitar transposed up a major third by the use of a capo. In section 3, the capo is removed, so that the open strings

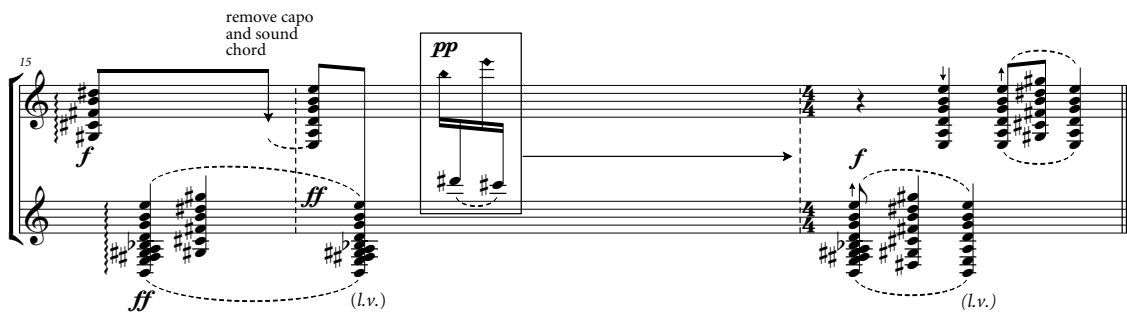
Example 11 'Narcissus'

'Narcissus': open strings of the two guitars, generating much of the pitch material throughout

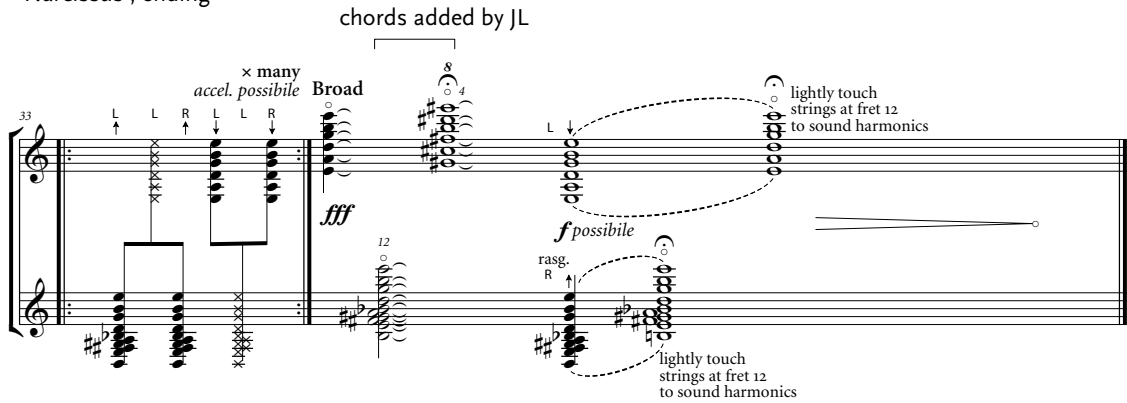
6-string has capo at 4th fret, bars 1–15  
 capo removed from 6-string, bars 15ff



'Narcissus', bars 15–17



'Narcissus', ending



1–6 of the two guitars match in pitch: line 2 of the example shows how at the moment the capo is removed, all of these pitch relationships are made explicit. In bar 17, the straightened left index finger is used like a capo to rehearse the major third open-string transposition once more on both guitars. In the strumming section that follows (section 4), the index finger continues to be used in this way, but on different frets. At the end, the inserted chords in combination with the final gesture convert the complex of open-string transpositions (unison/octave and major third) into natural harmonics.

At the centre of the movement is the tetrachord found at the climax of Britten's 'Narcissus' (example 9). This is the only reference to Britten in the movement, but if the moment of climax can be said to include or imply the movement as a whole, it is a telling residue.

*The Notion of the Original*

When is a piece of music finished? In the piano literature, Chopin and Liszt spring to mind as composers who revisited their music over long periods, effectively creating a series of *Urtexts* and for the interpreter, some fascinating choices. In the guitar's twentieth-century literature, the question may be more intractable still: when is a piece started? Ever since the guitar's first serial collaborator, Andrés Segovia, began to commission works from the composers he favoured, the first fair copies of the resulting music have had in many cases a rather provisional look, lacking the idiomatic features that the published editions manifest. And if the composer who returns to revise an early work is on occasion judged to have interfered rather than improved, in the case of the guitar repertoire there is usually a much more suspicious presence to deal with: the dedicatee. Many of the landmarks in the guitar's modern repertoire are the result of a collaboration with an influential performer, whose fingerprints may usually be discerned in the published edition. The editions made by Andrés Segovia of the works written for him, for instance, contain a number of idiosyncrasies that dissatisfy many guitarists of the present day. And yet there is no guarantee that a search for the 'original' will turn up more than a draft, full of impracticalities and guesswork.

Example 11 shows two versions — two states — of 'Arethusa', the fifth movement of *Oxen of the Sun*. The upper system shows Stephen's first draft (I received it by email on February 14, 2003), the lower as it appears in the edition published around three years later. Stephen's note in bar 15, 'Use six-string when feasible', gave me the task, in effect, of finishing the piece, and I quickly realised that the way Stephen had chosen to divide the figuration between the guitars was largely impossible. I had particularly asked him to write some continuous music for the medium, but had never spelt out that one can move rapidly from one guitar to another only while playing a note with one hand (the 'pivot notes' that I defined in part I).

For the time being, our collaboration had to progress by email. In his note accompanying the draft, Stephen had written:

'Arethusa' is going to be the most tricky movement to play. It is a companion piece to 'Orpheus' as the other harp-like piece. Some of the cross-guitar stuff might prove impossible; if so, just put the notes on the 10-string and don't worry that the 6-string isn't so involved in this movement.

The next day I replied:

Yes, 'Arethusa' is going to be very hard, and I can't always get from one guitar to the other in time. For example, I can't think of a way of stopping and plucking notes on the ten-string and then interpolating six-string notes, as in bars 23 ff. Beautiful passage! But I'm experimenting, and new ideas come up every time I sit down and try again.

For example, just this moment I'm experimenting with playing bars 14–22 of 'Arethusa' on the ten-string, and bars 23–27 on the six-string, reaching over and stopping strings with my

Example 11 A comparison of the first draft and the published version of 'Arethusa'

(continued overleaf)

First draft, February 14, 2003

Largamente ♩ = 148–160

Musical score for the first draft of 'Arethusa'. It consists of two staves: a six-string guitar staff (top) and a ten-string guitar staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked 'Largamente' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 148–160. The six-string guitar part is marked 'sim.' and the ten-string guitar part is marked 'f espress. (or p espress.)'. The score shows a series of eighth-note patterns with some slurs and accents.

Published version, 2006

Largamente ♩ = 126c.

Musical score for the published version of 'Arethusa'. It consists of two staves: a six-string guitar staff (top) and a ten-string guitar staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked 'Largamente' with a metronome marking of ♩ = 126c. The six-string guitar part is marked 'f espressivo, l.v.' and the ten-string guitar part is marked 'f'. The score shows a series of eighth-note patterns with some slurs and accents.

Musical score for measures 10-18. It consists of two staves: a six-string guitar staff (top) and a ten-string guitar staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked 'Largamente'. The six-string guitar part is marked 'use 6-string when feasible' and the ten-string guitar part is marked 'f'. The score shows a series of eighth-note patterns with some slurs and accents.

Musical score for measures 19-24. It consists of two staves: a six-string guitar staff (top) and a ten-string guitar staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked 'Largamente'. The six-string guitar part is marked 'mf' and the ten-string guitar part is marked 'mf'. The score shows a series of eighth-note patterns with some slurs and accents.

Musical score for measures 25-30. It consists of two staves: a six-string guitar staff (top) and a ten-string guitar staff (bottom). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The tempo is marked 'Largamente'. The six-string guitar part is marked 'f' and the ten-string guitar part is marked 'f'. The score shows a series of eighth-note patterns with some slurs and accents.

Example 11 continued

The musical score is presented in two systems, each with two staves (treble and bass clef). The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#). Measure numbers 30, 36, and 40 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. The first system (measures 30-35) features a forte (*f*) dynamic. The second system (measures 36-40) includes fortissimo (*ff*) and mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamics. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-4. A capo is indicated by a '9' over a bar line in measures 34, 38, and 40. The piece concludes with a final chord in measure 40.

left hand as necessary. It's just an idea: the left hand has to think in reverse, with 4 playing the lowest fret and 1 the highest. Maybe it won't work in the end. But I'm thinking all the time of the visual interplay between the two hands and the two guitars, and also the sound. I'm not often satisfied with the sound of the left-hand fingers plucking on the six-string with capo, but it sounds fine very quiet, and I'm learning to pluck with my left-hand thumb and nail.



I'm also seeing if I can learn to play harmonics on the ten-string with just my left hand — left thumb plucks, 3 or 4 touches string. Perhaps I shouldn't let you in on these ideas, as they are just experiments, and I think it might be good to have some tricks up my sleeve. Everything is harder than it looks, and my very first try out with 'Orpheus' was depressing and scary. But I've cheered up now, and feel sure that we'll have something beautiful next month. Of course, in the last resort there isn't anything one can't play on the ten-string alone, so there's always that way out in a difficult bar.

My biggest difficulty was that in experimenting with this new medium I could not always tell what could be achieved with practice over time. I spent some time on the middle episodes in particular, with uncertain results. Eventually I noticed that the third episode in bars 15–22 fitted the range of the six-string guitar very well, and wondered if this might be the key to developing an exciting choreography. Nowhere else in the work did I have to lean forward and play an extended passage with fretted notes on the six-string guitar and to do so now would not be merely a visual effect: with the capo setting its pitch a whole perfect fifth higher, the six-string guitar takes on a distinctive timbre. One can hear that the passage is composed (accidentally, it is true) within the limitations imposed by the capo. The following scheme emerged:

Episode 1	1–7	Interplay of two guitars
Episode 2	8–14	Ten-string alone (after first bar)
Episode 3	15–22	Six-string alone
Episode 4	23–30	After some initial combining, six-string alone
Episode 5	31–44	Very close interplay, including alternating semiquavers and a final sweep exchanged between the two instruments

This is the scheme adopted in the final version, shown in the lower system of the example. The pivot notes are notated with their own stem. In the final episode, I wanted to preserve the cross-guitar pattern beginning in bar 33 and so I proposed the ten-string glissandi to make it possible to get to the first note on string ten without any pause.

Even with this scheme, it was impossible for me, in the passages combining the two guitars, to approach Stephen's original metronome marking ( $\text{♩} = 148\text{--}160$ ), because the guitars have to be at least a little distance away from one another and I could not move my hands between guitars fast enough. Eventually I asked Stephen to sanction a lower value to the quaver, about 126, which doubles the tempo of the previous movement, 'Orpheus'.

It is in an account such as this that the *anxiety* of the dedicatee emerges: the anxiety of being the first one to play the work and the one who asks the composer to approve changes in the score. Like many performers of my generation, I have been raised to ascribe a kind of divine status to the composer. What if my limitations and idiosyncrasies have tainted his creation (Britten's and Goss's)? The finished score now has a new tempo for others to follow, and the faster tempo has been suppressed. The ten-string glissandi are just one of a number of 'flashy' idiomatic features that I added throughout *Oxen*. I sought the permission of the composer, certainly, but if another

performer should find them vulgar, that defence, I suspect, will be to little avail: we dedicatees can be very persuasive, and we know how to give the composer little choice.

But this is the condition of collaboration. In this case, there is no *original* to return to, no *Urtext*. Certainly, another performer, suspicious of my manipulations, could unearth the first draft and reject every one of my decisions. After all, it would not be inconsistent with the psychology of many a specialist-interpreter to make a distinction between the composer's 'divine' aspect, expressed here in the composer's draft, and the earthly personality expressed in the same person's email, in which he gives me the freedom to devise a choreography for the movement and discuss it with him. But since the sharing of the figuration between the guitars is unrealisable in the composer's draft, a different choreography would have to be devised, and the resulting performance would no more represent the 'original' than mine does. Nor would it represent a collaboration.

An alternative: publish the first draft with no indication of how to share the line between the guitars and a tempo range. Ask the performer to realise it on the medium *ad libitum*, and relegate my version to an appendix. But this movement marks an extreme in the collaborative process: every movement contained problems for me to solve; every movement had its trail of emails. To try to return the score to a pure, pre-collaborative state would be to create an indeterminate piece.

#### *The Dedicatee as Transcriber*

Setting aside for a moment the pitch filters, 'Arethusa' might be thought of as a transcription of Britten's original, a transcription in which I played an important role. As I tried out one option after another, looking for the most elegant way to let the fountain of notes flow between the two guitars, my inability to achieve the suggested tempo – the tempo an oboist might naturally take in the original – troubled me increasingly. Transcriptions for guitar that are much harder to play than their originals are now a commonplace in the repertoire, as the ambitions of guitarists have grown. A guitarist who chooses to play, for instance, Bach's First Partita for keyboard, can play every movement at a credible tempo, to be sure; but the sheer difficulty of the transcription imposes severe limitations not just on the tempo but on the range of voicings and articulation – in short, on the performer's imagination.

There is a further point: *ease* and *difficulty* can be expressive aspects in themselves, frequently lost in transcription. A simple classical piano sonata can become an Everest on the guitar, and thus affords a different kind of aesthetic experience from the original. Similarly, when a composer presents me with an extremely difficult passage, I ask myself whether *difficulty* is an expressive aspect of the music. If not, then I suggest revisions. However virtuosic one's technique is, the sound of difficulty is unmistakable.

In the case of 'Arethusa', though, an important distinction must be made. As much as Stephen's 'Arethusa' and Britten's resemble one another on the page, the former is really an *elaboration* of the latter. It is true that the two-guitar 'Arethusa' does not introduce divisions into the figuration, except in the final bars, but the constant switching between instruments creates

a ceaseless interplay of colours and sonorities that is not part of the oboe original: there are a greater number of *events* in the music. On this view, a fairer comparison may be not so much with a transcription of a Bach keyboard partita as with Liszt's piano transcriptions of Paganini. In the case of a work such as Liszt's version of *La Campanella* (s141) the reduction in tempo is well established in practice. A violinist playing the original (the last movement of Paganini's Concerto no. 2, op. 7) might typically set the dotted crotchet at around MM 80; but Liszt's piano version has to accommodate such elaborate subdivisions that a tempo closer to MM 60 is typical of today's virtuosi. A similar reduction in tempo would very likely have been expected in the intabulations of the 16th and 17th centuries, when lutenists realised the original vocal lines with copious divisions.

All of these versions, including 'Arethusa', are elaborations because they are denser than the originals. The ratio — about 3:4 — by which I reduced the tempo corresponds closely with the expected reduction from Paganini to Liszt, albeit for different specific reasons.

One feature of the *transcription* remains in 'Arethusa', in the choreography I devised for it, the performer will need to take time to cover the space between the instruments and almost certainly, adopt a certain rubato to smooth over the bigger difficulties. The composer has to accept a certain playing style; the performer is restricted in the kind of performance he or she can give. The lack of real choice in tempo and performing style can be, in my experience, a source of anxiety in the collaborative process. Can I perform this piece as it should be performed? Should I have asked the composer to rewrite so extensively that I can decide tempo and timing on more 'objective', that is to say, imaginative grounds?

#### *Transposition of Topics*

When confronted with an established classic, I become an interpreter. I assume that the notation is there to convey a series of gestures which the composer vividly experienced. I have to discover, if only for myself, how the piece *goes*. The approach of a Glenn Gould, which seems to treat a work as a structure from which many characters can emerge, is surely exceptional — indeed, it is for this disregard of character in favour of structure that Alfred Brendel attacks Gould in a recent interview:

[I]t seems to me that he has no interest at all in the character of the piece. He is not aware that it exists...He does not consider that there might be a character which is indissolubly connected with the piece, which one must find and bring to life. (Brendel 2002, 201)

Working with many composers on their own music has disabused me of the idea I took for granted as a beginner: that in the process of creation the composer heard an ideal performance. Still, the idea remains that what is in the score is there because the composer wanted to express a character, and that character must imply a certain range of tempi and articulations.

And yet in working on *Oxen of the Sun* I sometimes abandoned my interpretive ideals, discarding character and gesture while preserving the notes. The opening episode of 'Aeolus' in the first draft had the dotted crotchet set at 112–120, but I found it quite impossible to jump from one

harmonic to another at that tempo. As the recording and publication dates approached, I asked Stephen if I could fix the tempo at 60–66, adding an *accelerando* two bars before the next section, when the original metronome mark became possible. Of course, halving the tempo in this way destroyed the original character of the music. If I had taken that character as the essence of the music — of the composer’s inspiration — than clearly I could not have made the suggestion I did. Rather, I would have had to work with Stephen on reworking the pitches to make the original tempo possible.

This latitude is possible because in halving the tempo at the beginning of ‘Aeolus’, I changed one topic into another, and both are typical of Stephen’s music. The beginning now sounds limpid, even, glacial, undisturbed: such passages occur in all of Stephen’s extended works.

Something similar happened in the new, semi-improvised ‘Narcissus’. When I started to work on it, I assumed that the topic was in a sense, *improvisation*: the textures work within a large range of possibilities and the tempo can be manipulated according to the physical demands of the piece. It only has to flow. To learn the piece, I had to experiment with the extended techniques to find out what kinds of speeds were possible, how flexible the rhythm could be, and how to achieve a sense of virtuosity. I played all the written notes, but this process could scarcely be compared to working out an interpretation of, say, a Bach lute suite.

#### *Fixity and Fluidity*

Like the artist’s sketch, the detail of a photograph, an unfinished story, there is a particular beauty to a piece of music that is not yet fixed in its final version. Improvisation played a distinct role in the genesis of *Oxen of the Sun* — ‘Narcissus’, for example, was to some extent improvised figures worked into a coherent shape — and in the published score some latitude in rhythm and the realisation of extended techniques remains. But for me, all of the early performances of *Oxen* had an improvisatory element. I felt free to play with the musical gestures in search of a viable and effective work. I did not always ask the composer’s permission before trying something out in public: a sin of omission but not an unusual one. Julian Bream once told me that in his second performance of Tippett’s *The Blue Guitar*, he decided to try leaving a few passages out of the last movement. Having performed it that way, he concluded that the movement was much more convincing with the omissions. Only at that point did he phone the composer. The published score omits these passages.

Now that the piece has been published and recorded, I have made the crucial decisions based on two years of performance, discussing everything with the composer. When an improvisation crystallises in this way, little is lost for the one doing the improvising: I am ready to ‘settle down’. But what of other performers? *Oxen of the Sun* is now no different from other published works: a score with more or less set tempi, dynamics and articulation. New performers must master its techniques and develop a faithful reading. This seems to me more difficult a process than the one I underwent. It might result in successful performances, even better ones, but there are performances that may never be, because the piece had to assume a final version. In my accompanying

notes to the score I tried to point to some of the places where the performer can experiment with the techniques, but ultimately the fixity of the notation seems intractable.

Is this why we guitarists are so fond of looking at unedited drafts of compositions decades after their production — of looking for ways to forestall, in retrospect, the collaborative process? Perhaps, by placing ourselves in a one-sided conversation with a composer who may not be around to respond, and supplying the answers we want to hear, we hope to create for ourselves that sense of improvisatory freedom that might enhance the final performance — to recreate for ourselves that blessed, improvisatory state that the collaborator enjoyed. In that case, by leaving traces of the process, in manuscripts, letters — even writings such as this — composer and collaborator can help to make that process more meaningful, even more honest. So often, it seems to me, this essentially creative, defamiliarising process of subverting historical collaborations is conducted by stealth: it is advertised as a return to the original, to the *Urtext*, even though it may entail placing an idealised composer in place of the human being who wrote the piece with a player in mind and let him or her be part of its creation. Working as a collaborator myself has made me not so much protective of the version for which I acted as midwife as sympathetic to those who would seek a version of their own.

Can one analyse a composer-performer collaboration with any rigour? As a reflective performer, I am surprised to discover that for me, the collaborative process is the last bastion of the purely intuitive. Some things grow best in the dark. And yet some kind of reflection is necessary. At least, by working with composers, I know better what the collaborative process is *not*. It is not tampering with a pristine original, for there never was one. It is not transcription in the conventional sense, because that is all too faithful, too anxious to leave the character of the music untouched. Is it composing? That is to claim too much, but many of the best collaborative performers are composers *manqués*. It may well be that any notated score is not only a poor translation of a composer's inner imaginings, but also something incomplete. Those inner imaginings may not take the form of an imaginary performance but something slightly more abstract: something not quite in time, ready to explode into performance. In that case, the task of any interpretation might be not so much to go back, to recover the composer's imperfectly notated intentions, as to go on: to put oneself honestly at the service of the energy contained in the score, and by supplying one's own intentions, to finish the work and to accept the double image — composer *and* performer — that inevitably results.