

<b>Institution: University of Nottingham</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: UoA 35 (Department of Music)</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b> Engaging Britten: The impact of Mervyn Cooke's Britten research upon public understanding, musical organisations and creative practice
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>This case study describes the impact of Professor Mervyn Cooke's research on the music of Benjamin Britten. A six-volume edition of Britten's correspondence, new performance editions, public talks, and programme notes for concerts and CDs has enhanced the understanding of Britten's music amongst a wide general audience, contributed to the educational and outreach remit of performance organisations, and stimulated creative output in the form of performances, recordings, and popular biographies.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Mervyn Cooke's Britten research since 1993 has utilized the intensive study of primary source materials (including music manuscripts, libretto drafts and correspondence, the vast majority of which had never been examined in detail before) in order to illuminate aspects of the composer's biography and creative work. Specific focal points within this activity include studies of major works (books on <i>Billy Budd</i> and <i>War Requiem</i> [output 3], published in 1993 and 1996), investigation into the composer's creative response to Indonesian and Japanese music (the monograph <i>Britten and the Far East</i>, 1998 [output 1]), revival of a rare work (student and professional performances and premiere recording of <i>The Ascent of F6</i>), and a new edition, made together with Donald Mitchell, of a suite from Britten's ballet <i>The Prince of the Pagodas</i> (1997). These and other Britten-related research projects formed the foundation for the detailed editorial commentary contained in the recently-completed multi-volume edition of Britten's letters (2004, 2008, 2010, 2013 [outputs 4-6]), described by Peter Ackroyd as 'one of the most illuminating biographical projects in recent years' (source: Boydell and Brewer promotional flyer). Within this edition, each letter receives substantial contextualising commentary, based on a voluminous range of primary source materials, giving an unprecedentedly detailed account of Britten's career, creative preoccupations and personal life.</p> <p>The scope and rigorous documentary basis of Cooke's Britten research has furnished a vast array of new insights and findings. Topics that have received sustained attention include the composer's characteristic working methods, literary and artistic interests, commitment to festival organisation and performance (as pianist and conductor), attitude towards audio and television recordings of his works, relationships with institutions such as the BBC and Covent Garden, dealings with both professional and amateur collaborators, his activities in Asia, and his controversial relationships with children. This breadth of insight enables him to contribute to a wide range of public events, performances and recordings, in the course of which public understanding of Britten's music is changed, the missions of assorted musical organisations are furthered, and the creative output of performers, writers and filmmakers is stimulated. Some indicative specific examples are given in section 4.</p> <p>Cooke has been a member of academic staff at Nottingham throughout the period covered here (1993–2013). For vol. 3 of the letters edition (2004), the editorial work was split equally between Cooke, Mitchell and Philip Reed. Vol. 4 (2008) was edited entirely by Cooke and Reed (50:50), although Mitchell's name remained on the cover. Vols 5 and 6 were both edited solely by Cooke and Reed (50:50), Mitchell having retired from the project.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b> (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mervyn Cooke, <i>Britten and the Far East</i> (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1998), monograph with accompanying CD of archival recordings. Available on request.</li> <li>2. Mervyn Cooke, ed., <i>The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), edited volume. Available on request.</li> <li>3. Mervyn Cooke, <i>Britten: War Requiem</i> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996),</li> </ol>

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monograph. Available on request.

4. Philip Reed, Mervyn Cooke and Donald Mitchell, eds, *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*, volume 4: 1952–57 (The Boydell Press and Britten–Pears Foundation, 2008), critical edition with detailed annotation. Available on request.
5. Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, eds, *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*, volume 5: 1958–65 (The Boydell Press and Britten–Pears Foundation, 2010), critical edition with detailed annotation. Available on request.
6. Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, eds, *Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*, volume 6: 1966–76 (The Boydell Press and Britten–Pears Foundation, 2013), critical edition with detailed annotation. Listed in REF2.

### Evidence of quality:

- An AHRC Research Leave award (£34,840) was made in 2008 in support of research carried out for volumes 4 and 5 of the letters edition; outcome graded Outstanding. An AHRC Fellowship (£61,083) was awarded in 2012 in support of research carried out for volume 6 of the letters edition.
- Rigorous scholarly peer review procedures for monograph and Cambridge volumes.
- Reviews: *Letters from a Life*, vol. 3: ‘... the long awaited third volume of what will surely be considered as the definitive biography’ (*Musical Times* (Spring 2005), 89–93); *Letters from a Life*, vol. 5: ‘The editors have done a thoroughly professional job ... a meticulously produced enterprise’ (*Music and Letters*, 93/1 (Feb 2012), 96–101); *Letters from a Life*, vol. 6: ‘... the magnificent accompanying annotation and detailed apparatus make [these letters] richly revealing’ (*The Spectator*, 9.2.13); this volume ‘is triumphant vindication of the methods set in train with volume 1, and reflects enormous credit on the skill as well as the stamina of the editorial team’ (*Musical Times* (Summer 2013), 105–10).

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Cooke’s Britten research has benefitted public understanding, musical organisations and creative practice. Indicative impacts are described here according to category of beneficiary:

**(a) Music-lovers and concertgoers:** Cooke’s research has transformed the understanding of a large general audience of music-lovers through the media of public talks, notes for programme booklets, book sales, and CD liner notes (discussed in section b). Between 2008 and 2013 Cooke has given public talks on Britten at venues including LSO St Luke’s in London, the Royal Opera in Copenhagen, the Royal Northern College of Music, and Wigmore Hall. The first of these events is indicative of the relationship between Cooke’s original research and these engagement activities. It involved sharing new archival findings on Britten’s creative and personal relationships with first performers of his works (especially the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich and soprano Galina Vishnevskaya), to illuminate a discussion and subsequent live performances of Britten’s Cello Sonata and *War Requiem*. Unsolicited correspondence from audience members testifies to ‘such an interesting and enjoyable lecture. An inspiring and evocative account of all the events surrounding the War Requiem’, and ‘Wonderful day yesterday – thank you – so illuminating’ (source 1). In the same period Cooke has provided articles and notes on Britten for the programme booklets of leading European opera houses (ROH, ENO, Opera North, La Monnaie (Brussels) and Bilbao), festivals at Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Edinburgh and Krakow, and concerts at Brighton Dome, Carnegie Hall, Royal Festival Hall (Philharmonia Orchestra), and Wigmore Hall. These contributions, while serving an introductory function for non-specialists, are also regularly illuminated by new insights: for instance, notes on the opera *Death in Venice* for Aldeburgh Festival and Opera North draw original comparisons between the principal character Aschenbach’s attraction to an ‘eastern’ soundworld in the context of the score’s serial elements, and the composer’s own creative block in the mid-1950s which he solved by borrowing from the music of the gamelan.

The public reach of the Britten letters edition (outputs 4 to 6) is evidenced by numerous press reviews in non-specialist publications (see e.g. *The Telegraph* 5.7.08 and 26.12.10, *The Spectator*, 14.6.08, *The Economist* 9.12.10, *Wall Street Journal* 18.1.13, *The Spectator* 9.2.13) (source 2), and by sales figures which substantially outpace most musicological titles (to end July 2013: vol. 4:

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1,115; vol. 5: 841; vol. 6: 812; source 3). Volume 6 of the edition was the subject of an item on BBC Radio 3's *Music Matters* (24 November 2012), whose presenter Tom Service found the letters 'extremely revealing' and commended the 'astonishing detail' of the editors' notes (source 4). Since 2008, Cooke's other Britten publications (outputs 2 and 3) aimed at general audiences have also continued to sell well (cumulative sales figures to end July 2013 are *War Requiem*: 3904; *Cambridge Companion to Britten*: 3731; source 5). Further public engagement is achieved through Cooke's CD liner notes (see section 4b), which have recently included a cover CD of Britten's *War Requiem* for the *BBC Music Magazine* (ABC circulation figures of 41,226 for 2012).

**(b) Recording companies:** Since 2010 Cooke has written liner notes for twelve Britten CDs, including nine on the internationally-distributed Hyperion and Chandos labels. The Chandos notes are downloadable at [www.chandos.net](http://www.chandos.net) and [www.theclassicalshop.net](http://www.theclassicalshop.net) (our request for CD sales figures or web-page hit data was declined). The notes provide an opportunity for the findings of Cooke's original research to be shared with the CD-buying public, as in the case of Hyperion's Gramophone Award-winning CD of Britten's songs for baritone and piano, which relates the previously unknown circumstances of composition of the lesser-known songs. As well as benefitting music lovers, this activity directly benefits the reputation of independent record labels like Chandos and Hyperion for being closely informed by cutting-edge scholarship (on its website Chandos describes its mission as 'groundbreaking') (source 6). The Literary Editor for Chandos (who commissions all CD liner notes), writes that Cooke 'is our first choice for consideration' for Britten releases, because 'he writes with unusual care and elegance, and is able to concentrate an extraordinary amount of information within the relatively limited space available in our booklets'; he adds that 'one always comes away from reading his notes with a thrilling sense of having absorbed a huge amount of fresh knowledge, and then turn eagerly to the music' (source 7). CD reviewers frequently cite Cooke's notes approvingly, adding lustre to the releases: see, for instance, *International Record Review* (March 2011, 'Notes are by the Britten authority Mervyn Cooke'), *American Record Guide* (July/August 2011, 'As Mervyn Cooke's liner notes point out ...'), *Fanfare* (Sept/Oct 2011, 'the clear and sensible notes of Mervyn Cooke') (source 8).

**(c) Performance organisations:** Cooke's engagement activities benefit the educational and outreach remit of performance venues, music festivals and performing groups – a remit upon which these organisations' public subsidy is often dependent. Indicative are Cooke's contributions to a 2011 London Symphony Orchestra Discovery Day – events marketed by the orchestra under 'Lifelong Learning' – which included two illustrated lectures on the *War Requiem* and the Cello Sonata, and a panel discussion on the Sonata with the two performers (source 9). The event served to bring together Cooke's research findings, a substantial public audience of interested concert-goers and amateur musicians, and players from the UK's most prestigious orchestra. In 2013 Cooke introduced an afternoon film screening of *Night Mail* (music by Britten) at Wigmore Hall, to an audience of c. 65, in advance of a concert performance of Britten's radio and film music by the Nash Ensemble.

**(d) Performers:** Cooke's research has broadened the Britten repertory, furnishing conductors, orchestras and singers with attractive and highly marketable new repertoire. The suite drawn by Cooke and Mitchell from the full-length ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas* has stimulated new public interest in one of the composer's most neglected major works, which was hitherto an impractical proposition for the concert hall. Since 2008 the suite has been performed eight times, by three internationally renowned orchestras and conductors (LSO, Tilson Thomas; Hallé, Elder; Spanish National Orchestra, Slatkin), with four more performances scheduled for 2014 in San Francisco (SFSO, Tilson Thomas) (source 10). Audience figures from the LSO performance, which sold out the Barbican Hall (1,884 tickets; source 11), indicate the commercial attractiveness of this music. The *Guardian* review of this performance noted that 'Britten's 1957 ballet, given in the concert suite prepared in 1997 by Donald Mitchell and Mervyn Cooke, ... is a gift for Tilson Thomas, whose conducting tingled with excitement from start to finish' (12.6.13); and a review of Elder's performances asked enthusiastically for 'a repeat performance of this suite by [other] concert orchestras' (bachtrack.com review, 4.2.13) (source 12).

The conference 'Benjamin Britten on Stage and Screen' at Nottingham in July 2013 saw a rare performance and subsequent premiere commercial recording of another neglected Britten work, his incidental music to *The Ascent of F6*. This work from 1937 was revived by Cooke and student

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performers at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1996, and his advocacy has now brought the participation of two leading professional singers (Jean Rigby and Andrew Kennedy), the Ex Cathedra choir under their conductor Jeffrey Skidmore, and NMC Records. As part of this project, Cooke also oversaw and performed in the premiere recording of the incidental music to *On the Frontier* (1938) for inclusion on NMC's commercial CD release (source 13), which will further their pioneering commitment to releasing hitherto unrecorded Britten works; and the performers have gained valuable employment and exposure in the process. The conference also included a performance of *The Golden Vanity* by the choir of Loughborough Grammar School.

**(e) Other creative output:** The letters edition is widely acknowledged as an essential source for popular biographies of Britten, of which there has been a small explosion in recent years. For instance, in his *Britten's Children* (2006), John Bridcut states 'I should acknowledge the central importance of the first three selections of Britten's letters' (p. xii); Paul Kildea's recent highly-publicised *Benjamin Britten* (2013) similarly states 'This book could not have been written without the groundbreaking Britten letters project' (p. xv), and specifically mentions the pre-publication access given to the final volumes in the series.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Unsolicited email correspondence from audience members at LSO Discovery Day. Available on file.
2. Press coverage of letters edition: 'Queen of the luvvies', *The Telegraph*, 5 July 2008, [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non\\_fictionreviews/3555835/Queen-of-the-luvvies.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/non_fictionreviews/3555835/Queen-of-the-luvvies.html); 'The time is ripe to rediscover Benjamin Britten', *The Telegraph*, 26 December 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/simonheffer/8222708/The-time-is-ripe-to-rediscover-Benjamin-Britten.html>; 'A gift for friendship', *The Spectator*, 14 June 2008, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/766531/a-gift-for-friendship/>; 'Songlines', *The Economist* 9 December 2010, <http://www.economist.com/node/17672912>; 'The English Orpheus', *Wall Street Journal*, 18 January 2013, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324581504578231682217627990.html>; 'The music man', *The Spectator*, 9 February 2013, <http://www.spectator.co.uk/books/books-feature/8838541/the-music-man/>. All sources viewed 25 September 2013; available on file.
3. Sales and Marketing Manager, Boydell and Brewer Ltd (factual statement).
4. BBC Radio 3, *Music Matters* webpage, 24 November 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01nznw> (viewed 25 September 2013). Available on file.
5. Royalties Department administrator, Cambridge University Press (factual statement).
6. Chandos, website home page, <http://www.chandos.net> (viewed 25 September 2013).
7. Literary Editor, Chandos Records (factual statement).
8. CD reviews citing Cooke's liner notes: *International Record Review* (March 2011); *American Record Guide* (July/August 2011); *Fanfare* (Sept/Oct 2011). Available on file.
9. Programme booklet for LSO Discovery Day, 9 October 2011, <http://iso.new.mindunit.co.uk/page/3090/LSO-Discovery-Day-Britten/314> (viewed 25 September 2013). Available on file.
10. Hire Services Administrator, Boosey and Hawkes (factual statement).
11. Senior Marketing Manager, London Symphony Orchestra (factual statement).
12. Concert reviews of *Prince of the Pagodas Suite*: *The Guardian*, 12 June 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2013/jun/12/iso-tilson-thomas-barbican-review>; Bachtrack website, 4 February 2013, <http://www.bachtrack.com/review-halle-elder-britten-ravel-janacek>. Both viewed 25 September 2013; available on file.
13. NMC, webpage for *Britten to America* CD, <http://www.nmcrec.co.uk/roman-wall-blues> (viewed 25 September 2013). Available on file.