

A TWELVE-TONE  
REPERTORY  
*for* GUITAR

Julian Bream and the British Serialists, 1956–1983

OLIVER CHANDLER

Edited by Nathan Cornelius & Jonathan Leathwood

*for Gwen*

## Abstract

WHILE THE HISTORY of the formation of a modern British guitar repertoire around the central figure of Julian Bream is known in broad brushstrokes, we lack a thoroughgoing, technical understanding of the particular idiom that Bream's composers developed. Important in the nascent stages of the guitar's modernist evolution, for example, was its relationship to twelve-tone serialism. Through close readings of individual works by Reginald Smith Brindle (*El Polifemo de oro*, 1956), Denis ApIvor (Variations, 1958), Thomas Wilson (*Three Pieces*, 1961; *Soliloquy*, 1969), and Richard Rodney Bennett (Impromptus, 1968; Sonata, 1983), I map the formation of a peculiarly British vein of dodecaphony. To varying extents, these composers adapted or rejected the techniques, systems, and/or aesthetics of the Second Viennese and Darmstadt schools in order to arrive at a more moderate compositional approach. But despite this common cause, their approaches to composing dodecaphonically *on the guitar* differed substantially: ApIvor and Bennett attempted to build their twelve-tone materials around the guitar's affordances; Smith Brindle and Wilson saved idiomatic sonorities and playing techniques for moments in which twelve-tone logic was to be purposefully overridden.

By exploring the foregoing ideas and themes analytically, I attempt to demonstrate, in as musical a way as possible, how some of the most pressing compositional questions of the mid-twentieth century—Is twelve-tone serialism the only way forward? Is musical tradition dead in the water?—were responded to by composers crucial to the guitar's modernist legacy.

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