

For a seventieth birthday tribute to the distinguished Swiss Conductor, Paul Sacher, Mstislav Rostropovich hit on the idea of inviting twelve of Sacher's composer friends* to collaborate in writing a set of variations based on his name. Rostropovich himself played the complete set (all for solo cello except for Boulez's contribution, which also needed six tutti cellists) at Sacher's birthday concert in the Tonhalle, Zurich, on 2 May 1976.

Paul Sacher had conducted the premiere of Britten's *Cantata Academica* at Basle University in July 1960 – and there was a memorable concert given by him in the Jubilee Hall at the 1956 Aldeburgh Festival. When approached by Rostropovich with his plan at the beginning of 1976, Benjamin Britten was already seriously ill, but he agreed to write the theme itself rather than a variation. The use of note names as letters of the alphabet (as a kind of cypher) to spell out a name or message is an old musical trick, dating back to at least medieval times. So in this case the notes used in Britten's *Tema* are these: E flat ('Es' in German) – A – C – B natural (H in German) – E – D. This last, called 'Ré' in French, supplies the final letter of the name SACHER.

R.S.

* The twelve were Conrad Beck, Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Benjamin Britten, Henri Dutilleux, Wolfgang Fortner, Alberto Ginastera, Cristobal Halffter, Hans Werner Henze, Heinz Holliger, Klaus Huber, Witold Lutoslawski.

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TEMA 'SACHER'

Edited by Mstislav Rostropovich

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

(1913-1976)

Lento maestoso (♩)

f "e)S A C H *sf*

p E R(e)" *III* 5 *(III)*

f

p 5 *III* 5 *cresc.* *II* *sempre cresc.*

Largamente *ff*

risoluto *f* *ff*

Ossia