

Enthusiasts Choose Your Own Adventure Workshop

April 11th, 2026

with Lynne Snyder

“Carol” from Five Bagatelles by Gerald Finzi

About the piece, from the publisher (<https://www.boosey.com/cr/music/Gerald-Finzi-Five-Bagatelles/1202>):

By the outbreak of World War II in Europe, Finzi's technical facility as a composer had developed considerably; on the cusp of 40, he felt more in command of his skills than ever before. Although he believed Britain had no alternative but to fight the Nazi menace, he felt intensely frustrated at the prospect of looming war service which would interrupt his composing, just at this moment of new confidence. Nevertheless, in the spring and summer of 1941 he grabbed the moment for a burst of composition before he was drafted to work in the Ministry of War Transport that July. Among works completed were three character pieces for clarinet, using, according to Finzi, '20-year-old bits and pieces', which he had been working on since 1938. Together with a fourth, completed in January 1942, they were given their first performance on 15 January 1943 by Pauline Juler accompanied by Howard Ferguson at one of the renowned National Gallery daily lunchtime concerts that did so much to hearten war-weary Londoners.

Subsequently, when Finzi discussed publication of the *Bagatelles* with Leslie Boosey (co-founder of Boosey & Hawkes) the latter wanted to print them separately; however, the composer stuck to his belief that they should be published together, and won the argument, albeit with the compromise that he would add a fast additional movement, following comments after the premiere that a quick finale was needed. When published in July 1945 the *Five Bagatelles* rapidly became Finzi's most popular work, the initial print run selling-out within a year. However, their success vexed Finzi – 'they are only trifles' – he complained, and 'not worth much, but got better notices than my decent stuff'. Firmly within the capabilities of amateur musicians and students, though, they have remained a staple part of the clarinet repertoire and 'set pieces' for examination boards.

Finzi was attracted to the deep-hued sound of the clarinet and demonstrated in the *Bagatelles* a highly effective exploitation of the instrument, its range and colour. The 'Prelude' (*Allegro deciso*) is the longest, showing the influence of Bach on Finzi,

indeed it might be likened to a two-part invention. Its slower central section also features one of the composer's melodic finger-prints, the interval of a falling minor 7th, creating that wistful quality so redolent of his music. *'Romance' (Andante tranquillo)* has a peaceful, slightly other-worldly character, with a melodic line in which triplets are prominent and a song-like middle section.

An aspect of Finzi's compositional method is how some compositions came to fruition over many years, decades even passing from start to finish. The *'Carol' (Andante semplice)* exemplifies this, since it began life as 'a little carol for Ursula Mary Howells', composed on 16 December 1925 for the daughter of the composer Herbert Howells. It was a setting of a poem titled 'Carol' from the collection *Severn and Somme* by Ivor Gurney beginning 'Winter now has bared the trees'. It lay dormant for over a decade until Finzi took the melody up again for this bagatelle. Marked by a simple, tender clarinet melody, in the final verse, the piano has embedded as a tiny refrain, the melodic phrase from the song heard at the words 'Christus natus hodie!'

The fourth bagatelle bears the title *Forlana (Allegretto grazioso)*, perhaps borrowed from Ravel's *'Forlane'* in his *Le Tombeau de Couperin*, although Finzi confessed to the composer Edmund Rubbra that he was having difficulty finding a suitable description for a piece that in character seemed on the one hand, a berceuse, and the other a forlane. Certainly this tender, lilting music seems worlds away from the lively Venetian folk dance which is the origin of the word. The *Fughetta (Allegro vivace)* undoubtedly provided the lively finale that Boosey wanted. Full of Bachian conceits, it explores the full range of the clarinet in a devil-may-care exuberance.

Andrew Burn

April 2011

© Copyright 2011 by Andrew Burn

Tackling a New Piece

Play Through – Sight reading

Practice Challenging Parts:

- Fingers
- Counting
- Air Support
- Tone Quality
- Notate as needed

Practice Details: “Playing the Ink”

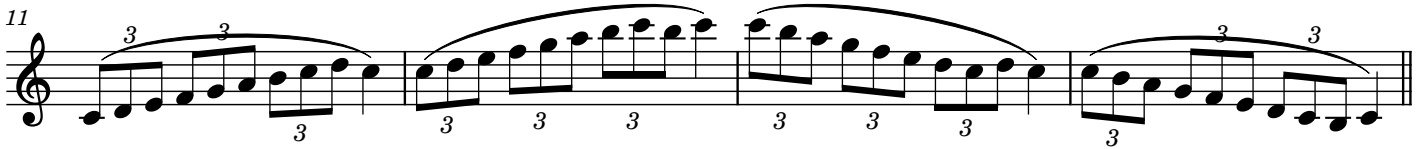
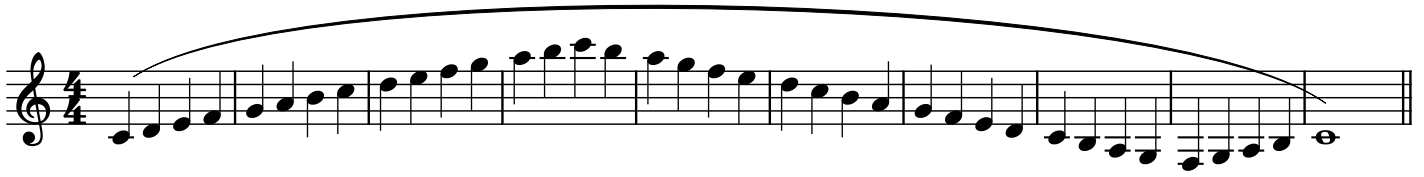
- Articulations
- Dynamics
- Expression Markings
- Notate as needed

Think about bigger picture:

- Key area
- Analyze what is happening in this piece – Form?
- Phrasing
- Overall Arc – the high/low emotional arc of the piece
- Listen to recordings, adopt styles you like

Finzi "Carol" Warm-ups

L. Snyder



Finzi play along YouTube Links:

Color is the piano: quarter at 82

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl4PA0s8kJQ&list=RDKl4PA0s8kJQ&start_radio=1&pp=ygU9Y2Fyb2wgZnJvbSBmaW56aSBmaXZlIGJhZ2F0ZWxsZXMgY2xhcmluZXQgcGlhbm8gYWVudKAHAQ%3D%3D

Color is the piano: quarter at 92

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bgzTsd9Yu6I&list=RDbgzTsd9Yu6I&start_radio=1&pp=ygU9Y2Fyb2wgZnJvbSBmaW56aSBmaXZlIGJhZ2F0ZWxsZXMgY2xhcmluZXQgcGlhbm8gYWVudKAHAQ%3D%3D

Finzi PDF on IMSLP

[https://imslp.org/wiki/5_Bagatelles%2C_Op.23_\(Finzi%2C_Gerald\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/5_Bagatelles%2C_Op.23_(Finzi%2C_Gerald))