

Six Metamorphoses after Ovid, by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Ovid was a Roman poet who was born in 43 BC. His most famous work was a poem called *Metamorphoses*, which included 15 books. In these poems, he told stories of Greek myths, many of which involve the deities changing forms.

Pan - Pan was the god of the forest. He was a satyr, with the body of a goat and a human like head, with horns like a goat. Pan's moodiness is expressed in this piece. He fell in love with Syrinx, but she didn't want anything to do with him. Attempting escape from Pan, Syrinx was transformed into a reed plant by her friends, the nymphs. Pan then made the reeds into a pipe, and played this new instrument.

Phaeton – Phaeton's father, Helios, promised to grant his son one wish. Phaeton's wish was to ride his father's chariot for a day. It took immense strength and experience to control the chariot, and even Zeus was unable to handle it. Helios plead with his son to make another wish, but Phaeton insisted on having his chariot ride. Helios had to keep his promise. Unable to control the chariot, Phaeton darted towards the sun. As he got nearer to the sun, the earth got colder and finally froze. In order to prevent the earth's destruction, Zeus struck him with a thunderbolt, and he fell to the earth and died.

Niobe – Niobe had 14 children, 7 girls and 7 boys. She bragged about this to as many goddesses as she could. She boasted most cruelly in front of Leto, who had only 2 children. Because of her arrogance, Leto's 2 children took revenge. The goddess, Artemis, killed her daughters' and her son, Apollo, killed her sons. Of course, she mourned relentlessly, Zeus turned her into a mountain.

Bacchus – Bacchus is the god of wine and ecstasy. The metamorphosis here is that the music and dancing helps free people of fear. At his feasts is heard the giggling women's tattling tongues and shouting out of boys.

Narcissus – Narcissus, obsessed with his own image, was transformed into a flower. This was my least favorite one, until I realized what the composer was doing. Beginning with the second phrase, one can hear the same motifs an octave higher, like a reflection in water. At one point, it's like he even winks at himself. Near the end, when he has turned into a flower, one can hear concentric circles, caused by the flower rippling in the water.

Arethusa – Arethusa was a nymph, who, flying from the love of Alpheus, the river god, was turned into a fountain.