

# *A Boy and His Boat*

for Symphonic Orchestra



*Boy Sailing His Boat* by Robert Gemmell Hutchison

## Rena Poling

Inspired by the Sampson Boat Co. Tally Ho Project

For Jesus Christ, the original 33 year old carpenter who rescued a wreck from destruction for glory

# *A Boy and His Boat*

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## **I. Saving Her From Destruction (ep. 1-18)**

*“If she is not rescued this summer, she will be destroyed. Her name is Tally Ho.” - ep. 1*

The 1910 classic sailing yacht Tally Ho is represented here, tremendously out of tune, poorly orchestrated, and missing some rather critical notes and harmonies. Surely she is a musical theme beyond saving... and yet, there are still traces that indicate a long-gone beauty that was once quite glorious.

The stage is set in Sequim, Washington, represented here by the key of Ab major. We are introduced to Leo, the “idiot who might be buying this boat,” who brings us into the fascinating worlds of both boatbuilding and sailing. We also meet Pancho the Maccaw, represented by the attention-stealing accordion, who is in Leo’s words, “perhaps the true star of the show.” The movement ends in England (Eb major) with Leo’s visit to Roy Childs, an old man who was once a young boy aboard the Tally Ho.

## **II. Pounding Live Oak (ep. 19-55)**

*“You would expect a bullet to be completely obliterated when it’s entered an object... Especially when it’s live oak. Probably cannonballs bounce off of it.” - ep. 41*

Georgia saw mill operator Steve Cross reads a “ditty” in ep. 19 on “pounding live oak,” which is where this movement gets its title. Tally Ho’s frames are constructed out of this special hardwood, from a tree that stays green year round and grows a-plenty in the southern US. Some live oak trees are literally older than the country they grow in, and speak to a time before Albert Strange’s boats. I couldn’t help but feel an ancient sort of magic within the sweeping branches of these crooked trees. They seem so full of life, producing a wood that is strong and stubborn. I also find it beautiful that Leo is given a few mallets made from live oak offcuts, so it appears that the pounding of live oak continues well beyond the framing.

When Leo mentioned that Tally Ho had 88 frames constructed in 44 pairs, I couldn’t help but jump at the opportunity to take the 88 keys on the piano and create my own “musical frames.” Every pitch on a

standard piano is represented by the orchestra in a diad (two-note) chord, from the lowest A0 pitch (contrabassoon) to the highest C8 (piccolo).

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Bow Frames". The score is written for three staves: Treble Clef (top), Alto Clef (middle), and Bass Clef (bottom). The time signature is 4/4. The music consists of diads (two-note chords) across the staves. The score is divided into four sections: "Bow Frames" (measures 1-9), "Station Frames" (measures 10-15), "Stern Frames" (measures 16-21), and "Intermediate Frames" (measures 22-26). The notes are marked with numbers 1 through 26, often with a suffix 'a' (e.g., 1a, 2a, etc.), indicating specific pitches or frames. The music is characterized by its sparse, diadic texture.

This movement also features two major “frame raising party” jigs and a few trips back to England (listen close and you’ll hear the Pellew sailing by). If you are curious about why the orchestra is shouting “shut up Janice,” don’t worry, because Janice is a rooster.

Framing Tally Ho spanned nearly 14 months of the overall project, so this movement is easily the longest, running about 9 minutes.

### III. Ship Of Theseus (ep. 56-74)

*“One could argue that the soul of the boat remains” - Robert d’Arcy ep. 12*

When does a boat’s identity truly begin to change? The ship of Theseus is an old philosophical quandary: how many pieces can you replace on a boat before it becomes a new vessel? If you save each piece that was replaced from the original and reassemble them later, which boat is now the real one? And, what would happen if you applied these ideas to a piece of music?

Tally Ho was built in 1910, the same year that English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote the masterful work “Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis.” Vaughan Williams beautifully arranged an older musical composition, making it into an arguably new piece of music, even though much of the original remains. Here, I have taken pieces of this Fantasia, as well as pieces of the original Tallis Theme, and have formed them into a musical work that I affectionately refer to as “Variations on a Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis by Ralph Vaughan Williams by Rena Poling.”

In this span of videos we see the construction of the boat’s deck structure, crafted from New England white oak. This wood is represented throughout the movement by the harsh muted brass passages. Contrasted against the vibrant live oak of the second movement, here we get a timber that seems, oddly enough, to be followed by a theme of death. We are told that the snow covered white oak at the mill is often harvested only after the trees have died naturally, that it is sometimes sourced from cemeteries, and that some of the oldest surviving white oak trees are now dying off. Furthermore, we learn about cancer-defying individuals who help to mill and transport the wood across the country. This movement ends with Leo addressing rot and weakness within structures that had otherwise appeared to be quite strong, optimistically resolving with a restoration of the ship’s original teak transom.

#### **IV. Polishing Bronze (ep. 75-84)**

*“A very solid casting will have a very nice uniform ring and tone to it” - Pete Langley ep. 75*

This short movement gives us a glimpse of the beautiful bronze floors and hanging knees of the boat. First, a wooden template is made. Then, sand is shoveled. Next, liquid bronze is poured. Finally, the bronze is ground, buffed, polished and installed.

#### **V. Sheer, Shutter, Whiskey (ep. 85-94)**

*“The weather’s been crazy this last week. It’s just been like sunny and calm and then the next minute gale force winds and pouring rain, snow, hail, and then sunny again... pretty crazy” - Leo ep. 92*

Lengthy planks begin to transform the skeletal hull of the boat into a unified body. We get our first glimpse at Tally Ho’s sail plan and learn about the rig and spars. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, tremendous drama swoops in and rattles the project’s devoted community for exactly two weeks. However, a resolution is made, the sun shines again, and whiskey is consumed.

#### **VI. Fairing Well (ep. 95-103)**

*“Born again?” - Guy with a Jesus sign ep. 102*

Fairing is another term for sanding, or smoothing something until it is good and flat and... fair. We also bid each other farewell when we part. And we may be tempted to complain about things “not being fair” when we don’t get our way, or when we have to move our boat from one town to another and say goodbye to our dear friends and our favorite parrot. Amazingly, Leo never seems to complain, even when things don’t appear to be fair. Rather, he finds ways to keep moving the boat closer to the water. Here we hear the team’s steady and active work amidst uneasy circumstances, higher emotions, and new beginnings. Tally Ho is sanded. She is painted. And by the time she is moved ‘round the corner to the boat yard in Port Townsend, she is undoubtedly reborn.

#### **VII. Port Townsend Triple Fugue (ep. 104-132)**

*“This video is more just showing all the different things that happen within one week here, dipping into many, many different ongoing projects...Rather than focussing on one specific task, I’ve tried to give a sense of the variety of different jobs which might happen within any one week here” - Leo ep. 126*

At this point in the video series, the interior, deck and keel are underway simultaneously, creating a sort of thematic “triple fugue.”

A fugue is a traditional musical form that interweaves two or more melodies in an orderly and playful way. First, a melody, or “subject,” is introduced in isolation from any harmony. Next, we hear a “countersubject,” or second melody, enter along with the “answer,” a repetition of the subject but played in another key. Now, to make it a triple fugue, you need three subjects, each with a countersubject, which can all be presented separately and simultaneously. These melodies then dance around each other, getting developed and varied until they finally conclude in the key from the beginning of the piece.

To highlight some of the flavors and characters of the Port Townsend sailing community, I’ve used a combination of musical genres to represent various parts of the boat: the interior is classical baroque, the deck is easy-going English folk, and the keel is modeled after American ragtime.

### **VIII. Adding To The Magic (ep. 133-152)**

*“And even if a lot of it has been replaced, to me that just adds to the magic, because it will be a mix of a vessel that’s over one hundred years old and one that I’ve built myself.” - Leo ep. 11*

Boat systems are complex, but there is certainly a manner of magic to the electrical and plumbing systems on Tally Ho. This chunk of videos introduces a number of new teammates to the project, adding many highly skilled local craftsmen and professionals. Episode 133 also marks the beginning of a new era for the Sampson Boat Co. channel, because it is here that Leo begins bringing in advertisements due to “rising costs” for the project. It doesn’t take long for the team’s creativity to generate some very entertaining and magical ads.

Because these videos focus on elements that were not available to the original build (like batteries, a GPS, and a wood-epoxy dinghy) I decided to bring in less traditional methods of composition that were not present until after 1910. These include 12-tone serialism, minimalism, and aleatoric “chance” music. Some tunes may sound a little familiar as I played around with some melodies from the videos’ licensed music. This movement ends with Tally Ho’s front door, the unbelievable addition to the boat, from April 1st, 2023.

### **IX. A Boat Is Never Finished (ep. 153-186)**

*“A wooden boat is certainly never finished. Keep moving forward, keep motivated, and keep working towards the goal of launching the boat.” - Leo ep. 76*

In these final months of tireless effort we feel an incredible push towards the “light at the end of the tunnel” as Leo puts it (ep. 161). There is a looming sense of time pressure that only seems to grow in intensity until we learn about the tragic loss of a dear friend. Amidst a project that can admittedly never be completed, we are suddenly faced with a story that has come to an absolute end.

But in a world where things break, how beautiful is it to see something being mended? Tally Ho’s restoration reminds us that there is a saving hope, even when faced with the reality of death.

These videos seem to focus more and more heavily on the boat’s proximity to the water, often staring longingly off into the harbor with slow drone footage and contemplative background music. The goal is so close, yet still seems unreachable. In this movement we also get a 70 mile boat race, and a gift of a violin, handcrafted out of Tally Ho’s offcuts. The boat continues to make incredible strides, gaining her galley, her rig, her own independent electrical power, and eventually she even reaches her launch date! But don’t be deceived in thinking that this is the end. Even in the water, she is not yet finished.

### **X. Launch!**

*“It’s amazing what a boat can do.” - Darlene M. ep. 173*

At the time that I am writing this, Tally Ho has yet to be launched. But in confidence I imagine it will be something like this movement: After Tally Ho is placed into the water, she moves into the ever growing waves of the ocean where she finally unveils her six sails and displays the glory anticipated from the infamous 1927 Fastnet Race photograph. From here she heads home to the UK, where she was originally built, and is presented before royalty, or perhaps, hopefully, Roy Childs (ep. 18).

In the middle of the music we see Leo for the first time as a sailor on *his own* ship, reflecting on the time and effort that has brought him to this reality. At this point there are twenty-one measures of polyphony (multiple melodies at once) where I did my best to represent “A lot of amazing people.” Every helper whose name is mentioned on screen in the Sampson Boat Co. videos is represented... I was able to gather one hundred and fifty-two names, and turned each into its own melody, some as short as one note, others as long as the entire twenty-one-bar passage. Together they seem to blend into, and strengthen, Leo’s theme.

The boat Tally Ho is, as you may know, named after a fox hunting call. We may think of it as a fancy “go get ‘em!” but the phrase likely comes from the French “taïaut,” roughly translating to “swords up!” Personally I like to think that Tally Ho’s name corresponds directly to her destiny. Perhaps from the first day Leo owned her, he has been calling her by the name of the goal that has been driving him to complete her. Perhaps “Tally Ho” could be considered synonymous with the word “launch!”

### **About the Symphony**

*“For something to be redeemed in at least one sense it must remain what it is. What that implies is that it must have enough intrinsic value to be worth redeeming in the first place.” - C.R. Wiley*

This work was inspired by the @sampsonboatco boatbuilding youtube channel, and it has been structured very closely to match the pacing of Mr. Leo Sampson Goolden’s 190-some videos, wherein he restores, rebuilds, and launches the historic vessel Tally Ho. There are roughly 30 seconds of music written for each month that Leo has owned the Tally Ho, so approx. every second of the music corresponds to one day of the project, with the only exception being the final movement where the boat is launched. In total, the work is roughly 47 minutes.

The story of Tally Ho’s rebuild is a powerful story that is worth retelling again and again, because it is the story of redemption. We live in a world where things break, so how powerful is it to watch something be mended? When Leo purchased Tally Ho in 2017, he believed her to be worth it. He wanted to save her and restore her and make her his.

### **It’s an awfully romantic story of a boy and his boat.**

But more than that, it’s a reflection of an even greater story. The brokenness of this world doesn’t just affect our boats. It affects our bodies, our hearts, our relationships, and our lives. Can these things possibly be mended? Yes. But Tally Ho did not mend herself. She needed a boatbuilder to rescue her. Likewise, we cannot save ourselves from the brokenness of this world. If we try, we will rot. We will be destroyed. We also require a savior. The Bible tells us that God created us, that we wrecked ourselves in the garden, and that God alone has made a way for us to be mended. We cannot mend ourselves. God became a man, a carpenter, in fact. One who spent a great deal of time with fishermen, near the water, and occasionally on boats. Sometimes on the water without a boat. This man is Jesus. He is the creator, and the mender. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves, and he paid for us with his life. But if death and rot are what breaks us, then how glorious is it that Jesus conquered death itself? He rose from the dead, and is alive today, actively working to mend our broken world. Will you let Him mend you?