

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
OPERA



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BOOSEY & HAWKES

FABER *ff* MUSIC

Cover illustrations

Front Scene from the Chicago Opera Theater production of *Death in Venice* by Ken Cazan (2004)

Photo: Liz Lauren

Back Scene from the La Monnaie production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by David McVicar (2004)

Photo: Johan Jacobs

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BENJAMIN BRITTEN

OPERA

Britten's operas form the most substantial and important part of his compositional legacy. Nearly all have firmly established themselves in the repertory and, as a whole, have come to be recognised as one of the most significant contributions to twentieth-century British music.

It was the popular success of his first full-scale opera, *Peter Grimes*, first performed in 1945, that established the future path of Britten's career as an opera composer. Tempting though it may have been, following this triumph, to continue producing works in the 'grand' tradition, Britten chose to take up the greater challenge of exploring other avenues, and it is notable how relatively few of his subsequent works for the stage require the full resources of the large opera house, *Billy Budd* and *Gloriana* being the major exceptions. This trend reflects not only Britten's artistic preferences for economy and clarity (matched in the post-war years by powerful commercial imperatives) but also his strong desire, with the formation of the English Opera Group, to bring what he once described as 'the most exciting of musical forms' to a wider audience.

The chamber operas - including *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Albert Herring* and *The Turn of the Screw* - employ small ensembles and are designed for the facilities of modest theatres, while the three Church Parables of the 1960s were composed specifically for the acoustics and ambience of church performance. The two works for children, *The Little Sweep* and *Noye's Fludde*, are designed to introduce young audiences to the conventions of opera within a readily assimilable context. In the television opera *Owen Wingrave* Britten took advantage of this very public platform to make a powerful and passionate denunciation of war. His last opera, *Death in Venice*, was clearly intended as a summing-up of his own life's work and crowns an operatic output of extraordinary depth and richness.



Photo: Kurt Hutton

The producer Colin Graham showing Maria Spall how to leave the ark as the dove in the original 1958 production of *Noe's Fludde*

The Passion of BRITTEN and his OPERAS

Benjamin Britten once said to me after an unsatisfactory rehearsal: "It's the words that make me write the music I write, so they must be more important than the singers think they are!" Although each opera and its format inevitably gestated in his mind beforehand, not a note of music was ever written until he was entirely satisfied with the libretto. Similarly, he liked visual input from designers and directors at the libretto stage to be sure that everyone was on the same page as him.

He was once asked by a distinguished (but unenlightened) lady at an Embassy dinner: "Mr. Britten – what is the difference between *Peter Grimes* and *The Rape of Lucretia*?" After a moment's thought, Ben replied "The notes, Madam, are the same, but they're in a different order." At that point he left the table.

Ben's unchallenged genius is the way he manipulated all those notes and words in such varied form in seventeen operas. And he never wasted one of them – not even in the "big operas" of *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *Gloriana* and *Death in Venice*. The same can also be said of choral works such as *War Requiem*. "I need to express the maximum emotion using the minimum of means." Whether in *Death in Venice* or the tiny *Golden Vanity* he wrote for the Vienna Boys' Choir. ("No female characters, PLEASE!" the boys begged before he wrote it.) the extraordinary and passionate conjunction of music, text and emotion never fails to grip their audiences. Even the comedies of *Albert Herring* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, speak with the same passion.

It is this passion that involves us all, audience and performers alike and which, in recent years, has swept his operas into public acceptance. Works which may have reached a restricted audience at the time of their first appearance on the stage (or, in the case of *Owen Wingrave*, on television) are now being performed in Europe and America in hundreds of performances, reaching thousands of audience members who invariably find themselves deeply affected. In the United States the reactions to three very recent and different productions of the once-despised *Gloriana* are witness to the emotional excitement the opera has brought to its audiences. Having been present (in the Gallery) at the opera's chequered world premiere at Covent Garden, I shall never forget the New York premiere by ENO in the Eighties when a stunned audience rocked the Metropolitan with their overwhelmingly enthusiastic response.

Britten was a genius. His operas, every single one of them, are the proof. They are providing audiences world-wide with great rewards and at every performance those audiences are vociferously acknowledging their pleasure.

If I may be allowed a final BB quote, the proof is in the pudding. Although he was often distressed by some productions that distorted his operas beyond his intentions, he once said to me this distress was his own fault, not the fault of the production: "If my operas are any good, they will stand on their own two feet, whatever may be done to them!"

They are, and they do.

Colin Graham

St Louis, June 2006

Paul Bunyan, Britten's earliest operatic venture, was originally conceived as a 'choral operetta' for student performance. Troubled by dramatic flaws and the negative reviews of several critics, Britten withdrew the work after the first run of performances in New York in 1941 and it was only revived (with a few revisions) in 1976, since when the work has entered the repertoire and proved to be a valuable addition to the canon of Britten's stage works. It marked the composer's largest, and only operatic, collaboration with W.H. Auden whose story of the giant lumberjack of American legend is set by Britten in a score of striking freshness and ingenuity. The musical influences run from Donizetti through Gilbert & Sullivan and Kurt Weill, to the blues and country-and-western, though this characteristically eclectic mix is melded into a highly individual synthesis that could be the work of no other composer. Although the 'Broadway musical'-type structure is far removed from Britten's later practice and there are as yet few hints of his main dramatic preoccupations, the experience and example of writing Paul Bunyan clearly prepared the way for the more fully-realised achievement of his first full-scale opera Peter Grimes.



Photo: Catherine Ashmore

Scene from The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden production by Francesca Zambello (1997)

CAST

Narrator

Baritone or tenor

The voice of Paul Bunyan

Spoken part

Johnny Inkslinger

Book-keeper *Tenor*

Tiny

Daughter of Paul Bunyan *Soprano*

Hot Biscuit Slim

A good cook *Tenor*

Sam Sharkey

A bad cook *Tenor*

Ben Benny

A bad cook *Bass*

Hel Helson

Foreman *Baritone*

Fido

A dog *High soprano*

Moppet

A cat *Mezzo-soprano*

Poppet

A cat *Mezzo-soprano*

PAUL BUNYAN

op.17 (1941, rev. 1974-75)

Operetta in two acts and a prologue

Libretto by W.H.Auden

Duration

114 mins

First performance

5 May 1941 *Columbia University, Brander Matthews Hall, New York*

First stage performance of revised version

4 June 1976 *Snape Maltings Concert Hall*

Andy Anderson, Pete Peterson,
Jen Jenson, Cross Crosshaulson

Four Swedes 2 *Tenors*, 2 *Basses*

John Shears

A farmer *Baritone*

Western Union Boy

Tenor

Quartet of the Defeated

Contralto, Tenor, Baritone, Bass

Four Cronies of Hel Helson

Baritones

Heron, Moon, Wind, Beetle, Squirrel

Spoken parts

Three Wild Geese

Soprano, 2 Mezzo-sopranos

(Prologue only: these roles may be doubled with those of Fido and the two cats)

Chorus of Old Trees (*SATB*)

Four Young Trees (*SSTT*)

Chorus of Lumberjacks, Farmers and Frontier Women (*SATB*)



Photo: Mark Kiryluk. Courtesy of Central City Opera

Alison Trainer and Ryan MacPherson in the Central City Opera, Denver production by Ken Cazan (2005)

SCORING

2 fl(II=picc), ob, 2 cl in B flat(II=alto sax), bass cl, bn—2 hn,
2 tpt in C, 2 trbn, tuba—timp(=perc), perc(trgl, cymb, susp cymb,
sd, bd, wb, td, xyl, glock, tamb, gong, vibr, coconut shells)—
harp, pf(=cel)—str

The Ballad Interludes are accompanied by guitar (or banjo), with solo violin (doubling the tune) and double bass (pizzicato) ad lib. (or other appropriate instruments).

An alternative instrumentation of the opera, with the accompaniment rescored for two pianos and percussion (1 player) by David Matthews, is also available.

TIME & PLACE

United States of America, early times

Photo: Deborah Gray Mitchell



Scene from the Florida Grand Opera production by Mark Lamos (2005)

SYNOPSIS

Paul Bunyan tells the mythical story of the legendary giant American folk hero. In the Prologue, Four Young Trees are heard rebelling against their elders' complacency. Three Wild Geese enter and prophesy the birth of Paul Bunyan, who will clear the forest to make way for civilisation, at the next blue moon. In the First Ballad Interlude, the Narrator relates the story of the birth and early life of Paul Bunyan. In a clearing in the forest, the lumberjacks appear. A Western Union boy enters with a telegram recommending Hel Helson as head-foreman. Bunyan hires him along with two cooks, and a book-keeper, Johnny Inkslinger. The Second Ballad Interlude then tells the story of Paul's marriage to Carrie, the birth of daughter Tiny and Carrie's death. After complaints about the standard of the food, Inkslinger employs Hot Biscuit Slim as cook. Bunyan returns to the camp accompanied by Tiny who attracts both

Inkslinger and Slim. Tiny goes off to help in the kitchen, to Inkslinger's regret. Helson is put in charge of the camp and is urged to challenge Paul's leadership. Paul and Helson fight as Tiny and Slim declare their love. Helson loses and, presumed dead, is carried off to a mock-funeral march. Coming to his senses, he turns on his cronies. The Third Ballad Interlude tells of Helson's reconciliation with Paul, the love of Tiny and Slim and the spread of Paul's achievements. At a Christmas Eve party, Inkslinger announces that Slim has found a position at a Manhattan hotel and is to wed Tiny, while Helson is off to Washington. The telegram boy returns with a message summoning Inkslinger to Hollywood. Paul's work is accomplished and he bids goodbye, telling his friends that America is what they choose to make it.

Photo: Mark Kiryluk Courtesy of Central City Opera



Scene from the Central City Opera, Denver production by Ken Kazan (2005)

Photo: Catherine Ashmore



Scene from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden production by Francesca Zambello (1997)

RECORDINGS

Pop Wagner, James Lawless,
Dan Dressen,
Elisabeth Comeaux Nelson,
Chorus & Orchestra of
The Plymouth Music Series
Minnesota/Philip Brunelle
EMI 7243 5 85139 2 9

Peter Coleman-Wright,
Kenneth Cranham,
Kurt Streit, Susan Gritton,
Royal Opera House
Orchestra and Chorus/
Richard Hickox
Chandos CHAN 9781

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571519385 Libretto
0571506100 Chorus part
0571505384 Vocal Score
0571506801 Full Score



PETER GRIMES

op.33 (1945)

Opera in three acts and a prologue

Libretto by Montagu Slater *derived from a poem by George Crabbe*

Duration

147 minutes

First performance

7 June 1945 *Sadler's Wells, London*



Photo: Johan Jacobs

Michael Myers in the La Monnaie, Brussels production by Willy Decker (2004)

Photo: © Bernd Uhlig/Osterfestspiele Salzburg 2005



Scene from the Salzburg Easter Festival production by Sir Trevor Nunn (2005)

In 1941, Britten, then living in America, came across an article by the novelist EM Forster on the Suffolk poet George Crabbe, an encounter that was a decisive factor in Britten's resolve to return to England for good. It was Crabbe's poem 'The Borough' which subsequently served as the basis for Britten's first full-scale opera, Peter Grimes, the work that launched him internationally as the leading British composer of his generation and which almost single-handedly effected the renaissance of English opera. The composer's avowed aim in the opera was 'to express my awareness of the perpetual struggle of men and women whose livelihood depends on the sea' and anyone who has visited the coastline around the composer's home town of Aldeburgh will recognize the uncanny certainty with which Britten has captured that land- and seascape in Peter Grimes. Perhaps more importantly, the opera also introduces some of the fundamental dramatic themes which characterise Britten's entire operatic output: the individual against the mass, and the corruption of innocence.



Photo: Ken Howard

Anthony Dean Griffey and Austin Allen in The Santa Fe Opera production by Paul Curran (2005)

SYNOPSIS

At an inquest into the death of William Spode, apprentice to the fisherman Peter Grimes, coroner Swallow calls various witnesses, including Grimes himself, but the verdict of death in accidental circumstances does not satisfy most of the villagers, who regard Grimes as a violent criminal. Their attitude becomes one of open antagonism when his only friend, the schoolmistress Ellen Orford, collects another apprentice from the workhouse for him. In the pub that evening Grimes claims his new boy, to a reception from his fellow townsfolk that is openly and almost universally hostile. Ellen befriends the boy, John, but before long is horrified to find evidence on his body of mistreatment. Challenging Peter with this, she is struck in her turn, and while the pub landlady Auntie and her dubious nieces find some sympathy for her, the men of the village march in deputation to Grimes' hut to tackle him. It is found empty – a moment earlier, the new apprentice had fallen to his death over the cliff edge and Peter had climbed down after him. Grimes now disappears, and the local gossip Mrs Sedley stirs the village worthies once more into action, this time with the entire Borough (minus Ellen and the retired sea captain Balstrode) forming a manhunt. While they chase after him, Grimes, completely unhinged by his experiences, turns up on the shore, to be sent by Balstrode to sink himself and his boat at sea. As the village returns to life the following morning, a report of a ship going down is dismissed as a rumour.

TIME & PLACE

The Borough, a fishing village, East Coast of Anglia, towards 1830



Scene from the La Monnaie, Brussels production by Willy Decker (2004)

CAST

Peter Grimes

A fisherman *Tenor*

Boy (John)

His apprentice *Silent role*

Ellen Orford

A widow, schoolmistress of the Borough *Soprano*

Captain Balstrode

Retired merchant skipper *Baritone*

Auntie

Landlady of "The Boar" *Alto*

Two nieces

Main attractions of "The Boar" *Sopranos*

Swallow

A lawyer *Bass*

Bob Boles

Fisherman and Methodist *Tenor*

Mrs (Nabob) Sedley

A rentier widow of an East India Company's factor *Mezzo-soprano*

Rev. Horace Adams

The rector *Tenor*

Ned Keene

Apothecary and quack *Baritone*

Hobson

Carrier *Bass*

Dr Crabbe

Silent role

Chorus of townspeople and fisherfolk

SATB



Photo: © Bernd Uhlig/Osterfestspiele, Salzburg 2005

Robert Gambill in the Salzburg Easter Festival production by Sir Trevor Nunn (2005)

SCORING

2 fl(=picc), 2 ob(II=ca), 2 cl in B flat & A(II=cl in E flat), 2 bn, dbn—4 hn, 3 tpt(I, II in C, III in D), 3 trbn, tuba—timp, 2 perc(sd, td, bd, tamb, trgl, cymb, gong, whip, xyl, rattle)—harp, cel—str

Off stage

org, bells, tuba

Off-stage band *members of the orchestra*

2 cl in B flat, perc(cymb, sd, bd), solo vn, solo db, pf(ad lib.)

RECORDINGS

Peter Pears, Claire Watson, Royal Opera House Orchestra and Chorus/Benjamin Britten

Decca 414 755-2

Also available in a digitally re-mastered version on

Decca Legends, 467682-2

Jon Vickers, Heather Harper, Royal Opera House Orchestra and Chorus/Sir Colin Davis

Philips 46287

Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Felicity Lott, Thomas Allen, Royal Opera House Chorus and Orchestra/Bernard Haitink

EMI CDS754832-2

Philip Langridge, Janice Watson, London Symphony Chorus, City of London Sinfonia/Richard Hickox

Chandos CHAN 9447/8

Glenn Winslade, Janice Watson, Anthony Michaels-Moore, London Symphony Orchestra/Sir Colin Davis

LSO Live label, LSO0054

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01494-9 Libretto

M-060-01493-2 Vocal Score

M-060-01492-5 Study Score (hardback)

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

op.37 (1946, rev.1947)

Opera in two acts

Libretto by Ronald Duncan *after the play by André Obey*

Duration

107 minutes

First performance

12 July 1946 Glyndebourne Festival Opera

It was a combination of economic realities and aesthetic preferences that encouraged Britten to develop the concept of chamber opera, employing a small cast and an orchestra of thirteen players. His first work in the new medium was The Rape of Lucretia, first performed just over a year after Peter Grimes, in 1946. There is, however, no loss of colour or atmosphere – indeed the pared-down textures produced an intensification of Britten's operatic vision which was to serve him further in Albert Herring and The Turn of the Screw. With the roles of the Male and Female Chorus, who comment on the action 'out of time' (as in Greek tragedy) and the use of solo piano to accompany recitative passages, Lucretia achieves a certain classical poise and detachment. However, Lucretia and Tarquinius are driven by real human emotions and desires (Lucretia's music is surely some of Britten's most beautiful) and the resulting amalgam is an opera of great musico-dramatic power and expressive richness.



Photo: George Mott/Glimmerglass Opera

Nathan Gunn and Earle Patriarco in the Glimmerglass Opera production by Christopher Alden (2001)

CAST

Male Chorus

Tenor

Female Chorus

Soprano

Collatinus

A Roman General Bass

Junius

A Roman General Baritone

Prince Tarquinius

Son of the Etruscan tyrant, Tarquinius Superbus Baritone

Lucretia

Wife of Collatinus Contralto

Bianca

Lucretia's nurse Mezzo-Soprano

Lucia

Lucretia's Maid Soprano

SCORING

fl(=picc & alto fl), ob(=ca),
cl in B flat & A(=bass cl), bn—hn—
perc (timp, sd, td, bd, gong, susp cymb,
trgl, whip, tamb)—harp, pf—
string quintet(2 vn, va, vc, db)

TIME&PLACE

In or near Rome, 500 BC



Sarah Connolly and Ian Bostridge in the Bayerische Staatsoper production by Deborah Warner (2004)

SYNOPSIS

The Male and Female Chorus describe the historical background to the story, and reveal their view of events to be that of a later, Christian era. The action is set in and around Rome immediately before the end of the reign of the Etruscan king Tarquinius Superbus in 510 BC. At a military camp outside the city his son, the prince Tarquinius Sextus, is drinking with two generals, Collatinus and Junius. They discuss an earlier, unfortunate bet, in which the constancy of various Roman wives was tried and found wanting. Of the married men (Tarquinius goes to brothels) only Collatinus can boast a faithful wife, Lucretia, who was discovered sleeping alone in her husband's absence. Urged on by the malicious Junius, Tarquinius decides to prove Lucretia chaste by attempting her virtue himself, and rides off to Rome. His arrival at her house produces consternation, but hospitality forces Lucretia to offer him a room for the night, despite her misgivings and those of her servants. Tarquinius's purpose, however, is made clear when he wakes her and forces himself upon her before leaving the house. The following morning her late appearance in a distressed, broken state is only slowly understood by her nurse Bianca and maid Lucia, and her husband is sent for. Collatinus arrives with Junius to hear the news, and despite his at least partial understanding of Lucretia's shame it is too painful for her to bear, and she stabs herself. Her death provides the impetus for the Romans to throw out the Tarquins. The Male and Female Chorus attempt to come to terms with these events in a Christian context.



Delphine Galou and Diogenes Randes in the Opéra national du Rhin, Strasbourg production by Stephen Taylor (2001)



Scene from the Bayerische Staatsoper production by Deborah Warner (2004)

RECORDINGS

Peter Pears, Heather Harper, John Shirley-Quirk, Bryan Drake, Benjamin Luxon, Janet Baker, Elizabeth Bainbridge, Jenny Hill, English Chamber Orchestra/ Benjamin Britten
Decca 425666-2

Alan Opie, Alastair Miles, Ameral Gunson, Catherine Pierard, Donald Maxwell, Jean Rigby, Nigel Robson, Patricia Rozario, City of London Sinfonia/ Richard Hickox
Chandos CHAN 9254

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01508-3 Libretto

M-060-01507-6 Vocal score

M-060-01506-9 Study score (hardback)

ALBERT HERRING

Comic opera in three acts
op.39 (1947)

10



Photo: Nigel Luckhurst

Scene from the Britten–Pears Young Artist Programme production by Lindy Hume at Snape Maltings (2005)



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

Scene from the Komische Oper Berlin production by Willy Decker (2004)

Libretto by Eric Crozier
*freely adapted from a short story of
Guy de Maupassant*

Duration
137 minutes

First performance
20 June 1947 *Glyndebourne*

Britten's second chamber opera was composed just a year after its predecessor, The Rape of Lucretia, in 1947. However, the contrast in style and subject matter could not be greater: instead of a tragedy based on a tale from Roman antiquity, Albert Herring is a comic opera set in the imaginary East Suffolk town of Loxford at the turn of the 20th century. The score contains some of Britten's wittiest musical invention and his gifts for parody and caricature, already evident in Peter Grimes, are given full rein. However, the work is in no sense a farce: Albert is a sympathetic and credible figure who, tied to his mother's apron-strings and frustrated by small-town pieties, experiences a liberating 'breaking out', a theme fully in keeping with the composer's favourite subject of the loss of innocence. Moreover, such poignant passages as the third-act Threnody, in which Albert, presumed dead, is mourned by the gathered townsfolk, make Donald Mitchell's description of the opera as 'a serious comedy' seem completely apt.

CAST

Lady Billows
An Elderly Autocrat *Soprano*
Florence Pike
Her Housekeeper *Contralto*
Miss Wordsworth
Head Teacher *Soprano*
Mr Gedge
The Vicar *Baritone*
Mr Upfold
The Mayor *Tenor*
Superintendent Budd
Bass
Sid
A Butcher's Assistant *Baritone*
Albert Herring
From the greengrocers *Tenor*
Nancy
From the bakery *Mezzo-Soprano*
Mrs Herring
Albert's Mother *Mezzo-Soprano*
Emmie
Soprano
Cis
Soprano
Harry
Treble

TIME & PLACE

The small East Suffolk market town of Loxford, 1900

SCORING

fl(=picc & alto fl), ob, cl in B flat(=bass cl),
bn—hn—perc(timp, sd, td, bd, trgl, cymb,
castanets, tamb, gong, t bells in F,B flat,D,
glock, whip, wb)—harp, pf—
string quintet(2 vn, va, vc, db)

Photo: Nigel Luckhurst



Scene from the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme production by Lindy Hume at Snape Maltings (2005)

SYNOPSIS

In a small Suffolk market town Mr Gedge the Vicar, Police Superintendent Budd, Mr Upfold the Mayor and the local head teacher Miss Wordsworth meet at the home of Lady Billows to appoint at her behest a May Queen as an encouragement to local chastity. As they review the list of candidates, Lady Billows's housekeeper Florence Pike, armed with reports of unworthy behaviour, condemns each and every one. Eventually none is left, and instead a May King is proposed and Albert Herring – blameless son of a widowed shopkeeper – is chosen. The group informs Albert and his mother at their shop – though the shy young man tries unsuccessfully to refuse. At the ceremony in a marquee in the vicarage garden, butcher's assistant Sid laces Albert's lemonade, so that his contribution to the occasion consists largely of hiccups and silence. Later, back in the shop, Albert casts envious glances at the affectionate relationship between Sid and his girlfriend Nancy and, armed with his prize money, sets off in search of a little adventure of his own. By the following afternoon, concern is growing at his disappearance.

The police are called in. Eventually the hasty villagers decide that he must have come to a bad end, and begin to mourn him. Up turns Albert, however, to face a telling off for going absent without leave and shocked reactions from his elders and betters when his carousing in public houses is revealed. Albert, of course, is unashamed, and celebrates his new-found independence by inviting three local kids into the greengrocers to share some peaches, tossing his May King's orange blossom wreath into the audience as a final gesture.

RECORDINGS

Sylvia Fisher, Johanna Peters, April Cantelo, John Noble, Edgar Evans, Owen Brannigan, Joseph Ward, Peter Pears, Catherine Wilson, Sheila Rex, English Chamber Orchestra/ Benjamin Britten

Decca 421849-2

Josephine Barstow, Susan Gritton, Della Jones, Felicity Palmer, Ann Taylor, Robert Lloyd, Peter Savidge, Gerald Finley, Christopher Gillett, Stuart Kale, Northern Sinfonia/ Stuart Bedford

Naxos 8.660107-08

James Gilchrist, Pamela Helen Stephen, Roderick Williams, Susan Bullock, Sally Burgess, Alan Opie, Stephen Richardson, Robert Tear, Rebecca Evans, Anne Collins, Yvette Bonner, Rebecca Bottone, Gregory Monk, City of London Sinfonia/ Richard Hickox

Chandos CHAN 10036

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01388-1 Libretto (Eng)

M-2025-1930-1 Libretto (Ger)

M-060-01386-7 Vocal Score

M-060-01385-0 Study Score (hardback)

Photo: Monika Rittershaus



Scene from the Komische Oper Berlin production by Willy Decker (2004)



The popularity of Britten's three chamber operas proper (*The Rape of Lucretia*, *Albert Herring* and *The Turn of the Screw*) has tended somewhat to overshadow his brilliant realisation of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*, which was completed in 1948. Indeed, Britten's harmonisations and arrangements of the pre-existing tunes, which he described as 'among our finest national songs', is so personal and idiosyncratic that the opera sounds like a totally original work. Despite the longish stretches of spoken dialogue, Britten brings all his skills of dramatic characterisation to bear and binds the work together by effective use of leitmotif and key-schemes. The scoring too is brilliantly imaginative with the range and constitution of the orchestra varied almost from number to number. Dramatically, the story reflects Britten's preoccupations with the penultimate scene, where the condemned Macheath reflects on his fate, remarkably foreshadowing a similar moment near the end of Britten's next opera, *Billy Budd*.



Photo: Ken Jacques Courtesy Lyric Opera San Diego

Douglas Murray Schmidt in the San Diego Lyric Opera production by Leon Natker (2004)

CAST

Beggar <i>Speaking role</i>	Ladies of the Town Mrs Vixen
Mrs Peachum <i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Jenny Diver Suky Tawdry
Mr Peachum <i>Bass</i>	Mrs Coaxer Dolly Trull
Polly Peachum <i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Mrs Slammekin Molly Brazen
Captain Macheath <i>Tenor</i>	<i>Sopranos/Mezzo-Sopranos</i>
Filch <i>Tenor (or Speaking role)</i>	Gentlemen of the Road Ben Budge
Lockit <i>Baritone</i>	Wat Dreary Mat of the Mint
Lucy Lockit <i>Soprano</i>	Jemmy Twitcher Harry Paddington
Mrs Trapes <i>Alto</i>	Nimming Ned <i>Tenors/Baritones/Basses</i>

SCORING

fl(=picc), ob(=ca), cl in B flat & A, bn—
hn—perc(timp, trgl, wb, tamb, sd, td, bd,
susp cymb, gong)—harp—
string quintet(2 vn, va, vc, db)

An alternative version, with the role of Macheath sung by baritone, is available on hire



Photo: Ken Jacques Courtesy Lyric Opera San Diego

Scene from the San Diego Lyric Opera production by Leon Natker (2004)

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

op.43 (1948)

Ballad-Opera by John Gay (1728)

realized from the original airs by Benjamin Britten, in three acts

Libretto by John Gay *with additional dialogue by Tyrone Guthrie*

Duration

108 minutes

First performance

24 May 1948 Arts Theatre, Cambridge





Scott Gregory and Megan Weston in the San Diego Lyric Opera production by Leon Natker (2004)

SYNOPSIS

At the den of Peachum, a receiver of stolen goods, he and his wife ponder the value of various rogues in their employ before turning their attention to the highwayman Captain Macheath, on whom their daughter Polly dotes. When Mrs Peachum and her husband charge her with having married Macheath she is forced to admit it. They console themselves with the prospect that he is likely to be impeached soon for his activities (by them, if no-one else) and Polly left a wealthy widow. She, however, is horrified, and confesses all to the Captain: they decide to part temporarily for safety's sake. At a tavern near Newgate Prison, a criminal gang assembles with a view to hijacking a coach on Hampstead Heath. Macheath warns them he must lie low for a while. With the others gone, a bevy of loose women enters to entertain him though, primed by Peachum, they are actually there to betray Macheath, who is handed over to the constables as the act ends. In Newgate, Macheath offers to marry the jailer's pregnant daughter, Lucy Lockit, but her father and Peachum have already hatched a scheme to share the reward due on his execution. The arrival of Polly with her alternative marital claims confuses the issue further: the two women come close to blows. Eventually, Lucy manages to free Macheath with some spare keys, but he is later recaptured and sentenced to death. Having failed to poison Polly, Lucy and her former rival plead with their fathers to get their husband off, but to no avail. Finally, the impresario of the opera, the Beggar, is prevailed upon to grant a reprieve.



Moni Ovadia and Simon Edwards in the Fondazione Lirico Sinfonica Petruzzelli e Teatro di Bari production by Moni Ovadia (2005)

TIME & PLACE

London, early 18th century

RECORDING

Philip Langridge, Anne Collins, Robert Lloyd, Ann Murray, John Rawnsley, Yvonne Kenny, Nuala Willis, Christopher Gillett, Declan Mulholland/Steuart Bedford
Decca 436850-2

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-03073-4 Vocal Score

M-060-09687-7 Study Score (hardback)



Scene from the Fondazione Lirico Sinfonica Petruzzelli e Teatro di Bari production by Moni Ovadia (2005)

THE LITTLE SWEEP op.45 (1949) LET'S MAKE AN OPERA

An entertainment for young people

Libretto by Eric Crozier

Duration

Let's Make An Opera: 85 minutes

The Little Sweep: 45 minutes

The Little Sweep can be performed with or without *Let's Make An Opera*

Alternative versions of the play have been and can be written

First performance

14 June 1949 Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh



Photo: Monika Rüttershaus

Sabina Ermak in the Komische Oper Berlin production by Jetske Mijnsen (2004)

Two of the major preoccupations informing Britten's life and work, opera and music for children, come together in this 'Entertainment for Young People', the first part, Let's Make An Opera, consisting of a play in which we see a group of children and adults write and rehearse an opera; the second part consisting of a performance of the finished opera itself. As such, the work can almost be seen as Britten's operatic counterpart to The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra. Yet despite the light-hearted approach, The Little Sweep is also a morality tale in which Sam the sweep boy is sold into service and bullied by his elders like the apprentice in Peter Grimes. Thus the work embodies an involving theatrical experience, introducing young audiences to the conventions of opera by means of a simple yet affecting story. That Britten succeeded in his aim is demonstrated by the work's universal appeal and popularity.

CAST

Black Bob

A brutal sweep-master *Bass*

Clem

His son and assistant *Tenor*

Sam

Their new sweep boy, aged 8 *Treble*

Miss Baggott

The housekeeper at Iken Hall *Contralto*

Juliet Brook

Aged 14 *Soprano*

Gay Brook

Aged 13 *Treble*

Sophie Brook

Aged 10 *Soprano*

Rowan

The nursery-maid to the Woodbridge cousins *Soprano*

Jonny Crome

Aged 15 *Treble*

Hughie Crome

Aged 8 *Treble*

Tina Crome

Aged 8 *Soprano*

Tom

The coachman from Woodbridge *Bass*

Alfred

The gardener at Iken Hall *Tenor*



SYNOPSIS

The housekeeper Miss Baggott shows the sweepmaster Black Bob, his assistant Clem and the new sweepboy Sam where they must start. Black Bob and Clem send the tearful Sam up the chimney and leave him to it. But he gets stuck, and his cries are heard by the children of the house, Juliet, Gay and Sophie Brook, and their visiting friends John, Hugh and Tina Crome. Having rescued the filthy little boy from the chimney, they decide to rescue him from the sweep too. First they make it look as if Sam has run off, then they hide him from Miss Baggott and the returning sweeps. Afterwards, when the coast is clear, they let the Cromes' kind-hearted nursery-maid Rowan into their secret, and together they wash, feed and clothe Sam and plot how to get him back home. The next morning Rowan and the children hide Sam in the trunk they are taking with them and smuggle him out of the house.



Photo: Monika Rittershaus

Scene from the Komische Oper Berlin production by Jetske Mijnsen (2004)

SCORING

pf(four hands)—perc (timp, bd, sd, gong, cymb, trgl, castanets, large and small wbs)—string quartet

An arrangement for piano duet, with or without percussion is also available

TIME & PLACE

Children's Nursery of Iken Hall, 1810



Photo: Nigel Luckhurst

Charlotte Page in the Suffolk Schools production by William Kerley at the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh (2004)

RECORDING

Robert Lloyd, Robert Tear, Sam Monck, Heather Begg, Mary Wells, Finchley Children's Music Group, Medici String Quartet/ Norman Del Mar

EMI Classics 5651112

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On Sale

M-060-01463-5 Libretto

M-060-01461-1 Vocal Score

M-060-01460-4 Study Score (hardback)

M-060-01462-8 Audience Songs (Eng)

M-2025-1922-6 Audience Songs (Ger)



Photo: Nigel Luckhurst

Scene from the Suffolk Schools production by William Kerley at the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh (2004)

BILLY BUDD

op.50 (1951, rev.1960)

Opera in two acts

Libretto by E M Forster and Eric Crozier *adapted from the story by Herman Melville*

Duration

Original 4-act version: 162 minutes

Revised 2-act version: 158 minutes

First performance of original version

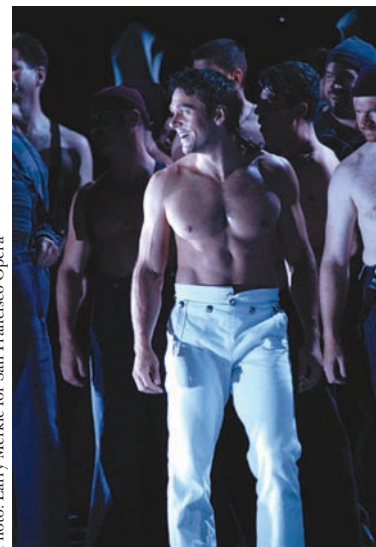
1 December 1951 Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London

First performance of revised version

9 January 1964 Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London



Photo: Larry Merkle for San Francisco Opera



Nathan Gunn in the San Francisco Opera production by Sabine Hartmannshenn (2004)

Billy Budd was completed in 1951 and first performed as part of that year's Festival of Britain celebrations. In 1960 Britten revised the work, contracting the original four acts into two, in which form it is generally performed today (though the original version is now again available for performance). The work is based on Herman Melville's posthumously published novel Billy Budd, Sailor which Britten and his librettists (EM Forster and Eric Crozier) transformed into an opera of great musico-dramatic power and psychological subtlety. Although Billy is the opera's eponymous hero, the real focus of the work is the moral dilemma facing Captain Vere who is confronted with an agonising choice between saving Billy and his sense of duty as the ship's Captain (a theme further explored by Britten in Gloriana). Billy Budd employs the largest orchestra of any Britten opera, capable of unleashing an elemental power when the situation demands it, but in general, the scoring favours the more sharply etched, transparent textures developed in the chamber operas.

CAST

Edward Fairfax Vere
Captain of HMS Indomitable *Tenor*

Billy Budd
Foretopman *Baritone*

John Claggart
Master-at-arms *Bass*

Mr Redburn
First Lieutenant *Baritone*

Mr Flint
Sailing Master *Baritone*

Lieutenant Ratcliffe
Bass

Red Whiskers
An impressed man *Tenor*

Donald
A sailor *Baritone*

Dansker
An old seaman *Bass*

A Novice
Tenor

Squeak
A ship's corporal *Tenor*

Bosun
Baritone

First Mate
Baritone

Second Mate
Baritone

Maintop
Tenor

Novice's Friend
Baritone

Arthur Jones
An impressed man *Baritone*

Four Midshipmen
Boys Voices

Cabin Boy
Speaking role

Officers

Sailors

Powder monkeys
Drummers

Marines

TIME & PLACE

On board HMS Indomitable during the French Wars of 1797.



Photo: Larry Merkle for San Francisco Opera

Scene from the San Francisco Opera production by Sabine Hartmannshenn (2004)

SCORING

4 fl (II, III, IV=picc), 2 ob, ca, 2 cl in B flat (II=E flat and bass cl), bass cl (=III cl), alto sax, 2 bn, dbn—
4 hn, 4 tpt (I,II,IV in C, III in D), 3 trbn, tuba—timp,
6 perc (xyl, glock, trgl, wb, tamb, sd, td, bd, whip,
cymb, susp cymb, small gong)—harp—
str/4 drums played by drummers on stage

Photo: Wilfried Hölzl



Scene from the Bayerische Staatsoper production by Peter Mussbach (2004)

SYNOPSIS

The opera is preceded by a prologue in which Captain Vere, as an old man, ponders the significance of events that took place long ago. The main action is set on board the British naval vessel HMS Indomitable in 1797. The crew goes about its tasks driven by the brutality of the ship's Master-at-arms, John Claggart, who rules by violence. Three new sailors, press-ganged from a passing merchant ship, are brought on board. Two of them are meagre specimens, but the third – Billy Budd – is young, strong and handsome. His goodness wins the hearts of all except Claggart, whose dark world is turned upside down by Billy's beauty and grace, and who determines to destroy him. To this end, he has his sidekick Squeak rifle amongst Billy's belongings, and when the young sailor catches him, the old sea

dog Dansker warns Billy that Claggart has it in for him. Claggart then has the Novice – cowed into submission by an earlier beating – try to bribe Billy into supporting mutiny, but to no avail. Nevertheless Claggart takes a complaint to Vere, but he is interrupted in his accusation by a brief skirmish with a French frigate that ends with the enemy escaping. Claggart then accuses Billy, who is called in by Vere to defend himself. His stammer, however, frustrates his attempts to speak and he knocks Claggart down with a single blow that strikes him dead. At the court martial, Vere fails to speak up for Billy, who is then condemned. He goes to his death with Vere's name on his lips. In the Epilogue, we return to the aged Vere, who again scrutinises his role in these events.

RECORDINGS

Peter Pears, Peter Glossop, Michael Langdon, John Shirley-Quirk, Bryan Drake, David Kelly, Gregory Dempsey, David Bowman, Owen Brannigan, Robert Tear, Robert Bowman, Delme Bryn-Jones, Eric Garrett, Norman Lumsden, Nigel Rogers, Benjamin Luxon, James Newby, Ambrosian Opera Chorus, London Symphony Orchestra/Benjamin Britten
Decca 417428-2

Philip Langridge, Simon Keenlyside, John Tomlinson, Alan Opie, Matthew Best, Alan Ewing, Francis Egerton, Quentin Hayes, Clive Bayley, Mark Padmore, London Symphony Chorus, Tiffin Boys' Choir, London Symphony Orchestra/Richard Hickox
Chandos CHAN 9826

Thomas Hampson, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, Eric Halvarson, Russell Smythe, Gidon Saks, Simon Wilding, Martyn Hill, Christopher Maltman, Andrew Burden, William Dazeley, Christopher Gillett, Manchester Boys Choir, Hallé Orchestra and Choir/Kent Nagano
Erato Disques 3984-21631-2
 (original 4-Act version)

Photo: © Wiener Staatsoper GmbH/Axel Zeiminger



Scene from the Wiener Staatsoper production by Willy Decker (2004)

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01397-3 Libretto

M-060-01396-6 Vocal Score

M-060-06554-5 Study Score

GLORIANA

op.53 (1953, rev.1966)

Opera in three acts

Libretto by William Plomer
after Lytton Strachey's 'Elizabeth and Essex'

Duration
148 minutes

First performance
8 June 1953 Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London



Photo: Stephen Vaughan

Josephine Barstow in the Opera North production by Phyllida Lloyd (1999)



Photo: Mark Kiryluk, courtesy of Central City Opera

Joyce Castle and Gran Wilson in the Central City Opera, Denver production by Ken Cazan (2001)



Photo: Mark Kiryluk, courtesy of Central City Opera

Scene from the Central City Opera, Denver production by Ken Cazan (2001)

CAST

Queen Elizabeth the First
Soprano

Robert Devereux
Earl of Essex *Tenor*

Frances
Countess of Essex *Mezzo-Soprano*

Charles Blount
Lord Mountjoy *Baritone*

Penelope (Lady Rich)
Sister to Essex *Soprano*

Sir Robert Cecil
Secretary of the Council *Baritone*

Sir Walter Raleigh
Captain of the Guard *Bass*

Henry Cuffe
A satellite of Essex *Baritone*

A Lady in Waiting
Soprano

A Blind Ballad Singer
Bass

The Recorder of Norwich
Bass

A Housewife
Mezzo-Soprano

The Spirit of the Masque
Tenor

The Master of Ceremonies
Tenor

The City Crier
Baritone

Citizens

Maids of Honour

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Household

Courtiers

Masquers

Old Men

Chorus

Time

Concord

Country Girls

Rustics

Fishermen

Morris Dancer

Dancers

Pages

Ballad-Singer's Runner

Phantom of the Queen

Actors

SCORING

3 fl (II, III=picc), 2 ob, ca, 2 cl in B flat & A, bass cl, 2 bn, dbn—4 hn, 3 tpt in C, 3 trbn, tuba—timp, 4 perc (glock, trgl, wb, tamb, sd, td, bd, cymb, t-t, whip, t.bells in D, E, F, G, A, B flat, C)—harp, cel—str

Stage instruments

Act I sc. 1

On Stage
tpt in multiples of three

Act II sc. 3

On Stage 5
str and/or 5 ww (scored ad lib.),
pipe and tabor (small side drum
without snares)

Act III sc. 2

On Stage
gittern, drum
Off Stage
sd (several)

Act III sc. 3

On Stage
harp
Off Stage
sd, bd, cymb, wind machine

Dedicated by gracious permission to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II', Gloriana was completed in 1953 and first performed as part of that year's Coronation celebrations. The unjust critical furore surrounding the premiere has now passed into history and the work can be seen as a worthy successor to Billy Budd with which it shares a number of important features. However, the opera is unusual for Britten in that the three acts are generally made up of self-contained set-pieces, rather than the continuous narrative he normally preferred. Although there are scenes of ceremony and pageantry (as befits the occasion for which it was written), the work's dramatic core is the unfolding relationship between Elizabeth I and the Earl of Essex, the Queen torn between her private affection for the Earl and her sense of public duty when he is found guilty of treason and condemned to death. The sound-world of the opera has an appropriately Elizabethan atmosphere, the famous Choral and Courtly Dances evoking a period flavour without lapsing into pastiche. The opera has had a chequered history, but it now seems as though Gloriana has finally taken its rightful place in Britten's operatic oeuvre.

Photo: Ken Howard, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis



Scene from the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis production by Colin Graham (2005)

Photo: Ken Howard, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis



Christine Brewer and Brandon Jovanovich in the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis production by Colin Graham (2005)

SYNOPSIS

At a royal jousting tournament, the ambitious Earl of Essex picks a fight with Lord Mountjoy and is wounded. Queen Elizabeth's punishment is that henceforth they shall always attend court together. They become friends. Cecil warns his monarch about Essex's unruliness, and about the likely threat of an Armada from Spain. Working on her fondness for him, Essex flatters the queen and asks to be appointed her Deputy in Ireland, to quell the rebel Tyrone. Elizabeth temporises, conscious of her position as monarch and wary of his impetuosity. In Norwich, the Queen is welcomed by the citizens and entertained with a masque of Time and Concord. At Essex's London house, the Earl, his sister Lady Rich and her lover Mountjoy plan their advancement to power: his wife counsels caution. At a grand ball in the Palace of Whitehall, the Queen, perceiving the lavish dress of Lady Essex's wife to be an insult, insists the ladies change after a strenuous dance; she reappears wearing the offending dress, which is much too small for her, to shame Lady Essex. Essex is furious, but mollified when Elizabeth announces the appointment he has long craved and sends him to Ireland. His campaign, however, is a failure and on his unexpected return, he insists on admittance to the monarch while she dresses: he confronts an old woman without wig or make-up. He pleads his cause, but she is unconvinced and later Cecil warns her of his scheme to replace her. In London, Essex's supporters fail in their attempt to win the people over to his rebellion. Essex is condemned, and when a deputation of his wife, sister and friend to plead for him goes badly awry, Elizabeth signs the warrant for his execution. In the final scene, the dying monarch recalls the tests she has withstood during her reign.

TIME & PLACE

England, around 1600

RECORDING

Josephine Barstow, Philip Langridge, Della Jones, Jonathan Summers, Yvonne Kenny, Alan Opie, Richard van Allen, Bryn Terfel, Willard White, John Shirley-Quirk, John Mark Ainsley, Orchestra and Chorus of Welsh National Opera/Sir Charles Mackerras

Decca 440213-2

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01442-0 Libretto

M-060-01441-3 Vocal Score

M-060-07457-8 Study Score (hardback)

Photo: David Bachman



Scene from the Pittsburgh Opera production by Sam Helfrich (2005)

Photo: Pascal Gely

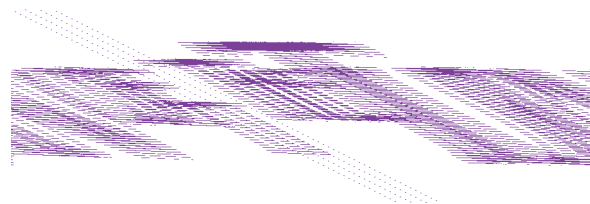


Mireille Delunsch and Adam Berman in the Theatre des Champs-Élysées production by Luc Bondy (2005)

Photo: Catherine Ashmore



Julian Leang and Caroline Wise in the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden production by Deborah Warner (2002)



Regarded by many as the finest of all his stage-works, The Turn of the Screw, Britten's final chamber opera, was written in the incredibly short period of just five months in 1954. The work is based on the novel of the same title by Henry James which Britten had known for many years: a tale of good versus evil, the natural versus the supernatural, possession and exorcism, set within the domestic proprieties of the Essex country house of Bly – ingredients which would have had an obvious appeal for the composer. Above all, the theme of the corruption of innocence must have attracted him more than any other. The story also lends itself to Britten's gifts for apt and distinctive musical characterisation, the relatively pure and uncomplicated music for the opera's mortals contrasting strongly with the alluring, other-worldly music associated with the ghosts. The work is one of the most tautly constructed and tightly-knit of all Britten's operas, the musical material almost wholly derived from the twelve-note 'Screw' theme heard near the work's opening. However, this very concentration helps give the opera its feeling of intense claustrophobia and its dramatic power can have an overwhelming impact in the theatre.

CAST

The Prologue	Mrs Grose
Tenor	The housekeeper <i>Soprano</i>
The Governess	Quint
Soprano	A former man-servant <i>Tenor</i>
Miles	Miss Jessel
Treble	A former governess <i>Soprano</i>
Flora	
Soprano	

SCORING

fl(=picc & alto fl), ob(=ca),
cl in A & B flat(=bass cl), bn—hn—
perc(timp, bd, sd, td, tom-tom, gong,
cymb, trgl, wb, glock, t bells)—
harp, pf(=cel)—
string quintet (2 vn, va, vc, db)

TIME&PLACE

Bly, an English country house, mid-19th Century



op.54 (1954)

Opera in a prologue and two acts

Libretto by Myfanwy Piper *after a story by Henry James*

Duration

101 minutes

First performance

14 September 1954 *Teatro La Fenice, Venice*

SYNOPSIS

In the Prologue, the tenor describes a written account of the action, in which a young woman tells how she accepted a position in a house with two children on the understanding that she would never contact their guardian. The main action sees the Governess travelling to Bly with trepidation but she is welcomed by the housekeeper, Mrs Grose, and takes an instant liking to her young charges, Miles and Flora. A letter, however, arrives from Miles's school, dismissing him as 'an injury to his friends'. She decides not to discuss it with him. Seeing a strange man on the tower in the grounds, the Governess describes him to Mrs Grose, who identifies him as Peter Quint, the guardian's valet, who 'made free' with the former governess, Miss Jessel. She left and died, and Quint subsequently died himself. The Governess fears for Miles. At the lake, she becomes aware of the presence of Miss Jessel and that Flora has pretended not to see her. Quint and Miss Jessel then call to Miles and Flora at night, and though the Governess intervenes she does not question the children. The Governess next sees Miss Jessel in the schoolroom. She decides to write to the guardian, but Miles – lured on by Quint – steals the letter, and distracts the adults with his piano playing so that Flora can go to Miss Jessel. Mrs Grose is unable to see the ghost, but her night spent with Flora convinces her that something is badly wrong and she takes the girl away. When the Governess confronts Miles with her suspicions, Quint approaches and speaks directly to the boy, who suddenly dies in the Governess's arms.



Photo: Catherine Ashmore

Ian Bostridge in *The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden* production by Deborah Warner (2002)

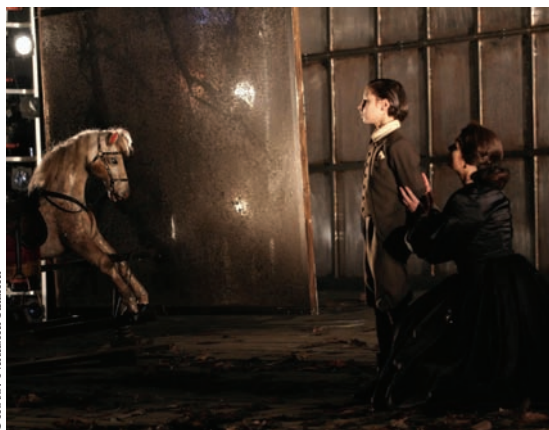


Photo: Natasha Razina

Nikolay Irvy and Irina Vasilyeva in the *Mariinsky Theatre* production by David McVicar (2006)

RECORDINGS

Peter Pears, Jennifer Vyvyan, David Hemmings, Olive Dyer, Joan Cross, Arda Mandikian, English Opera Group Orchestra/Benjamin Britten
Decca 425672-2

Phyllis Cannan, Eileen Hulse, Philip Langridge, Felicity Lott, Sam Pay, Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble/Steuart Bedford
Naxos 8-660109-10

Ian Bostridge, Joan Rodgers, Julian Leang, Caroline Wise, Jane Henschel, Vivian Tierney, Mahler Chamber Orchestra/Daniel Harding
Virgin Classics 5455212

Mark Padmore, Lisa Milne, Catrin Wyn Davies, Diana Montague, Nicholas Kirby Johnson, Caroline Wise, City of London Sinfonia/Richard Hickox
Opus Arte DVD

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01550-9 Libretto

M-060-01550-2 Vocal Score

M-060-01459-6 Study Score (hardback)

NOYE'S FLUDDE

op.59 (1957)

The Chester Miracle Play set to music by Britten

for adults' and children's voices, children's chorus, chamber ensemble
and children's orchestra

The text is from 'English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes'

Duration

50 minutes

First performance

18 June 1958 *Orford Church, Aldeburgh Festival*



Photo: *

Hugh Hetherington in the Salisbury Cathedral production by Sonia Woolley (2003)



Photo: Anthony Heazell

Scene from the Jubilee Opera production at Aldeburgh Parish Church (2000)



Photo: *

Scene from the Salisbury Cathedral production by Sonia Woolley (2003)

Noye's Fludde, completed in December 1957 and first performed during the 1958 Aldeburgh Festival, is Britten's most extended and elaborate work for children. In common with Saint Nicolas and The Little Sweep, the work is written in such a way as to combine professional and amateur performers, the music often tailored to take account of the abilities of less accomplished players but with no sense of compromise or writing down. Most of the main vocal parts are written for children (the exceptions being Noye himself, Noye's wife and the Voice of God) and the orchestral forces comprise strings, recorders, bugles, handbells and a large assortment of percussion including such home-made instruments as sandpaper blocks and mugs hung on a line. The congregation also gets the opportunity to participate in three hymn arrangements, 'Lord Jesus, think on me', 'Eternal Father, strong to save' and 'The spacious firmament'. Britten's skill in integrating these various elements with musical invention of a consistently high order is undoubtedly one of his finest achievements, while the church setting and use of procession and ritual clearly point the way forward to the Church Parables of the 1960s.



Photo: Anthony Heazell

Scene from the Jubilee Opera production at Aldeburgh Parish Church (2000)



Photo: *

Scene from the Salisbury Cathedral production by Sonia Woolley (2003)

CAST

The Voice of God

Speaking role

Noye

Bass-baritone

Mrs Noye

Contralto

Sem, Ham and Jaffet

Boy Trebles

Mrs Sem, Mrs Ham, Mrs Jaffet

Girl Sopranos

Mrs Noye's Gossips

Girl Sopranos

Chorus of Animals and Birds

Children (SATB)

The Congregation

SYNOPSIS

After the congregation has sung the hymn 'Lord Jesus, think on me', the Voice of God is heard warning Noye that he has decided to destroy sinful man and all living things, save Noye and his family. They must therefore construct a boat according to God's specifications. Noye and his family start building – all except his wife, who sits drinking with her 'gossips', as she calls her friends. Meanwhile Noye is instructed to collect two of all the animals. The animals duly enter, and since Mrs Noye continues to refuse to enter the ark, her sons carry her aboard just before the water sweeps away her gossips. At the height of the flood all join in the hymn 'Eternal Father, strong to save'. After forty days, Noye sends a raven to seek for dry land but it does not return. Next he sends a dove, which returns with an olive branch in its beak – a sign of peace between God and man. When Noye and his passengers disembark, God sets a rainbow in the sky as a pledge of that he will never flood the earth again. All join in the hymn 'The spacious firmament on high'.

SCORING

Professional ensemble

trbl recorder—timp—pf (four hands)—org—string quintet(2 vn, va, vc, db)

Amateur/children's orchestra

desc rec(2 parts), trbl recs, bugles in B flat(in four parts), 12 handbells in E flat—perc(bd, td, sd, tamb, cymb, trgl, whip, gong, Chinese blocks, wind machine, sandpaper, slung mugs)—str(vn in three parts, va, vc in two parts, db)

RECORDING

Owen Brannigan, Sheila Rex, Trevor Anthony, East Suffolk children's orchestra, English Opera Group Orchestra/Norman Del Mar

Decca 436397-2

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-051-15032-8 Libretto

M-060-01480-2 Vocal Score

M-060-01481-9 Choral Score

M-060-01482-6 Hymn Sheet

M-060-01479-9 Study Score

M-060-01487-9 Full Score

M-060-83664-0 Production Notes

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Photo: Mark Kiryluk, courtesy of Central City Opera



David Walker and Adrian Sarpel in the Central City Opera production by Paul Curran (2002)

A MIDSUMMER

Photo: Liz Lauren



Scene from the Chicago Opera Theater production by Andrei Serban (2005)

Photo: Johan Jacobs



Scene from the La Monnaie, Brussels production by David McVicar (2004)

CAST

Oberon

King of the Fairies *Countertenor*

Tytania

Queen of the Fairies *Coloratura Soprano*

Puck

Acrobat/speaking role

Theseus

Duke of Athens *Bass*

Hippolyta

Queen of the Amazons,
betrothed to Theseus *Contralto*

Lysander

In love with Hermia *Tenor*

Demetrius

In love with Hermia *Tenor*

Hermia

In love with Lysander *Mezzo Soprano*

Helena

In love with Demetrius *Soprano*

Bottom

A weaver *Bass Baritone*

Quince

A carpenter *Bass*

Snug

A joiner *Tenor*

Snout

A tinker *Tenor*

Starveling

A tailor *Baritone*

Cobweb

Peaseblossom

Mustardseed

Moth

Trebles

Chorus of Fairies

Trebles or Sopranos

SYNOPSIS

As twilight falls, fairies attendant upon their queen Tytania enter, followed by Puck, spirit attendant on the fairy-king, Oberon. Soon the royal pair arrives, separately, having fallen out over a little changeling boy. They argue, then Tytania and her fairies leave. Oberon sends Puck to find a certain herb that causes those upon whose sleeping eyelids the juice is dropped to fall in love with the next live creature that he or she sees. Next enter lovers Lysander and Hermia, forbidden by Athenian law to marry (she must wed Demetrius) and so fleeing the city together. They leave as Oberon enters to observe a second Athenian couple, Demetrius (in love with Hermia) pursued by Helena (in love with Demetrius). As they move off Puck returns with the herb, and Oberon instructs him to seek out an Athenian (meaning Demetrius) and anoint his eyes so as to make him fall in love with Helena. Next, a group of Athenian workmen enters, intent on casting a play they hope to perform before Duke Theseus. Most prominent among them is Bottom, cast as Pyramus in *Pyramus and Thisbe*. They agree to return later to rehearse. Now the confusion begins: Puck mistakenly anoints Lysander's eyes, causing him to transfer his allegiance to Helena, while Oberon anoints Tytania's, causing her to fall in love with Bottom, whom Puck has mischievously given an ass's head. The four Athenians are hurled into violent discord, till Puck sends them to sleep and they wake up cured. Bottom too is eventually restored, Oberon and Tytania make their peace, and following the successful performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* before his guests (whom we met earlier in the wood), they bless Theseus and his wife Hippolyta, and their house.

SCORING

2 fl(=picc), ob(=ca), 2 cl in A & B flat, bn—2 hn,
tpt in D, trbn—2 perc(trgl, cymb, tamb, gong, 2 wb,
vibr, glock, xyl, tamburo in F# alto, sd, td, bd, timp,
2 bells in G# and F#)—2 harps, hpd(=cel)—
str(minimum: 4.2.2.2.2)

Stage band

sopranino rec, small cymb, 2 wb

TIME & PLACE

A wood near Athens

In August 1959 Britten decided to compose a full-evening opera for the opening of the refurbished Jubilee Hall in Aldeburgh in June 1960. As this left no time for a libretto to be written anew, he chose to adapt with Peter Pears Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, a play he had always admired and which, as he declared himself, excited him by the various levels of action between the different groups of characters: the fairies, the lovers and the mechanicals. These groups are characterised by strongly differentiated colours: the bright, percussive sounds of harps, keyboards and percussion for the fairy world, warm strings and wind for the pairs of lovers, and lower woodwind and brass for the mechanicals. The opera is faithful to the spirit of the original and must be counted as one of the most successful operatic adaptations of a Shakespeare play. A Midsummer Night's Dream is possibly the most enchanting of all Britten's operas, a work with a spellbinding atmosphere that creates a unique, dreamlike world.

NIGHT'S DREAM

op.64 (1960)

Opera in three acts

Libretto adapted from Shakespeare's play
by Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears

Duration
144 minutes

First performance
11 June 1960 Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh

25



Photo: Liz Lauren

Scene from the Chicago Opera Theater production by Andrei Serban (2005)

RECORDINGS

Alfred Deller, Elizabeth Harwood, Stephen Terry, John Shirley-Quirk, Helen Watts, Peter Pears, Thomas Hemsley, Josephine Veasey, Heather Harper, Owen Brannigan, Norman Lumsden, Kenneth Macdonald, Choirs of Downside and Emanuel Schools, London Symphony Orchestra/Benjamin Britten

Decca 425663-2

Sylvia McNair, Robert Lloyd, Ian Bostridge, Brian Asawa, Carl Ferguson, John Mark Ainsley, Paul Whelan, Ruby Philogene, Janice Watson, New London Children's Choir, London Symphony Orchestra/
Sir Colin Davis

Philips 454123-2

PUBLISHER

Boosey & Hawkes

On sale

M-060-01468-0 Libretto (Eng)

M-2025-1931-8 Libretto (Ger)

M-060-01467-3 Vocal Score

M-060-01466-6 Study Score (hardback)

The concert tour of the Far East that Britten undertook with Peter Pears in December 1955 had profound consequences for his subsequent work. His encounter with gamelan orchestras on a visit to Bali made an immediate impact on the ballet *The Prince of the Pagodas*, and it was his experience of the austere, stylized ritual of Japanese Noh theatre that provided the main inspiration for the three Church Parables, composed at two-yearly intervals between 1964 and 1968. Of the three, *Curlew River*, the first to be composed, retains the closest link with the original Japanese by being adapted from an authentic Noh play, *Sumidagawa* (*Sumida River*) by Juro Motomasa. In *Curlew River*, however, the action is transferred to mediaeval East Anglia and given a specifically Christian context, symbolised by the use of the plainchant that frames the action, *Te lucis ante terminum*, from which the whole piece stems. The resulting work seems to invent a wholly new operatic experience while also containing some of Britten's most intense and hauntingly beautiful music.

CURLEW RIVER

First parable for church performance
op.71 (1964)

Libretto by William Plomer from the medieval Japanese No-play 'Sumidagawa' of Juro Motomasa

Duration

71 mins

First performance

12 June 1964 Orford Church, Aldeburgh Festival

TIME & PLACE

A church by a Fenland river in early medieval times

Photo: Elisabeth Carecchio



Scene from the Aix-en-Provence Festival production by Yoshi Oida (1998)

CAST

The Madwoman

Tenor

The Ferryman

Baritone

The Traveller

Baritone

The Spirit of the Boy

Treble

Leader of the Pilgrims/The Abbot

Bass

Chorus of Pilgrims

3 tenors, 3 baritones, 3 basses

Three Assistants (Acolytes)

Silent roles

SCORING

fl(=picc)—hn—va, db—harp—

perc(5 small untuned drums,

5 small bells, 1 large tuned gong)—

chamber org

Inset right: Toby Spence in the Edinburgh Festival production by Olivier Py (2005)

Photo: Douglas Robertson



Photo: Thilo Beu



Scene from the Oper Frankfurt production by Axel Weidauer (2005)

Photo: Thilo Beu



John Mark Ainsley in the Oper Frankfurt production by Axel Weidauer (2005)

SYNOPSIS

The Monks enter chanting the plainsong *Te lucis ante terminum*. The Abbot comes forward to address the congregation and introduces the mystery to be enacted. The Monks prepare for the performance. The Ferryman steps forward and reveals that a memorial service is to take place that day at a shrine on the far bank of the Curlew River. A Traveller enters describing his travels and tells of his intention to cross the river. The Ferryman delays departure to listen to the demented singing of a Madwoman who is approaching the boat. The Madwoman enters, singing of her lost child. After some resistance, the Ferryman agrees to take her across the river. During the crossing, the Ferryman relates the story of a stranger who, a year before, had arrived in his boat accompanied by a young boy of noble parentage who subsequently died from illness and exhaustion. The Madwoman weeps. She questions the Ferryman about the event and it becomes clear that the child was her abducted son. On reaching the grave, she sings a lament. The Monks pray with the Madwoman and the voice of the boy's spirit is heard. The spirit then appears in full view above the tomb and the Mother, now cured of her madness, sings an *Amen*. The Monks resume their habits and the Abbot draws a moral conclusion. The Monks process away from the acting area, chanting the plainsong with which the work opened.

RECORDING

Peter Pears, John Shirley-Quirk,
Bryan Drake, Harold Blackburn,
English Opera Group/
Benjamin Britten
Decca 421858-2

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571500943 Libretto
0571500021 Rehearsal score
0571507204 Full Score (cased)

THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE op.77 (1966)

Second parable for church performance

Libretto by William Plomer *after the Book of Daniel, Chapters 1-3*

Duration

64 mins

First performance

9 June 1966 Orford Church, Aldeburgh Festival

28



Photo: Rainer Worms

Scene from the Landestheater Detmold production by Frank Düwel (2005)

After the inward concentration of Curlew River, Britten set out to make his second Church Parable, 'something much less sombre, an altogether gayer affair' as he put it. Based on the Old Testament story of Nebuchadnezzar and the three Israelites, The Burning Fiery Furnace uses the same basic vocal and instrumental forces as its predecessor and retains its most distinctive structural features, but the work makes a strongly contrasted impression. The attempt to write in a generally lighter vein results in a more flexible approach and a greater variety of colour (aided by Britten's imaginative use of the rare alto trombone). Although the work is no less powerful and concentrated, the wider range affords such memorable diversions as the young acolytes' entertainment during the Babylonian feast and the march before the raising of the image of Merodak when the players take up their instruments and process around the church.



Photo: Sylvain Kerecht

Scene from the English Music Theatre production by Colin Graham (1979)



Andreas Jören in the Landestheater Detmold production by Frank Düwel (2005)



Scene from the City of Birmingham Touring Opera production by Sean Walsh (1997)



Scene from the Landestheater Detmold production by Frank Düwel (2005)

SYNOPSIS

The Monks enter chanting the plainsong *Salus aeterna*. The Abbot comes forward to address the congregation and introduces the miracle to be enacted. The Monks prepare for the performance. The Herald steps forward to announce that the king Nebuchadnezzar has commanded a royal feast to be given in honour of three men from Israel - Ananias, Azarias and Misael - who have been appointed to rule over three provinces in Babylon. The king enters accompanied by the obsequious Astrologer. The three Jews are to be given new names: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. During a divertissement given by three young entertainers, the Astrologer notices that the three men are refusing all food. When they decline even to drink the wine offered, the insulted King rises and leaves the feast in confusion. The Herald enters to announce that a golden image of Merodak, the great god of Babylon, is to be set up. Anyone refusing to worship the image shall be cast into a burning fiery furnace. The instrumentalists warm up for their processional march while the Jews pray. While the Courtiers pay homage to Merodak, the three men refuse to serve the image of gold. The furious king demands they be thrown into the fire. The furnace is heated seven-fold, but the men emerge unscathed. The astonished king dismisses the Astrologer and the image of Merodak falls. The King, Courtiers and three Jews sing a Benedicite in praise of the one God. The Monks resume their habits and the Abbot draws a moral conclusion. The Monks process away from the acting area, chanting the plainsong with which the work opened.

TIME & PLACE

Babylon in the Sixth Century B.C.

CAST

Nebuchadnezzar
Tenor
The Astrologer/Abbot
Baritone
Ananias
Baritone
Misael
Tenor
Azarias
Bass
The Herald and
Leader of the Courtiers
Baritone
Chorus of Courtiers
3 tenors, 2 baritones, 2 basses
Attendants
5 Trebles

SCORING

fl(=picc)—hn, alto trbn—va,
db(=Babylonian drum)—
harp(=little harp)—
perc(5 small untuned drums,
anvil(small untuned steel plate),
2 tuned wb, lyra glock,
Babylonian drum,
multiple whip)—
chamber org(=small cymb)

RECORDING

Peter Pears, Bryan Drake,
John Shirley-Quirk,
Robert Tear, Stafford Dean,
Peter Leeming,
English Opera Group/
Benjamin Britten
Decca 414663-2

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571500889 Libretto
0571500269 Rehearsal score
057150681X Full score

THE GOLDEN VANITY

op.78 (1966)

A vaudeville for boys and piano
after the old English ballad

Libretto by Colin Graham

Duration

17 mins

First performance

3 June 1967 Snape Maltings Concert Hall

The Golden Vanity was written in 1966 in response to a request from the Vienna Boys Choir who had asked Britten for an opera when the composer visited Vienna in October 1964. The resulting vaudeville, as Britten termed it, is designed to be played on a stage or a platform with the simplest of costumes and props and with the action mimed by the cast. The story, based on an old English ballad, tells of a brave and enterprising cabin-boy who, in exchange for the hand of the sea-captain's daughter, succeeds in sinking the enemy ship 'The Turkish Galilee' only to be betrayed by the captain of 'The Golden Vanity' who refuses to keep his promise and lets the boy perish in the water. However, the work is primarily designed as an entertainment and the darker implications of the story are not dwelt on. The music is relatively uncomplicated, though the score does make use of various technical devices that Britten had been developing in the recent Church Parables. There are rousing choruses for the contesting crews, vivid roles for the principals, and the colourful piano part is well within the scope of resourceful teacher/pianists.



Photo: Katrin Schander

Scene from the Oper Frankfurt production by Axel Weidauer (2004)



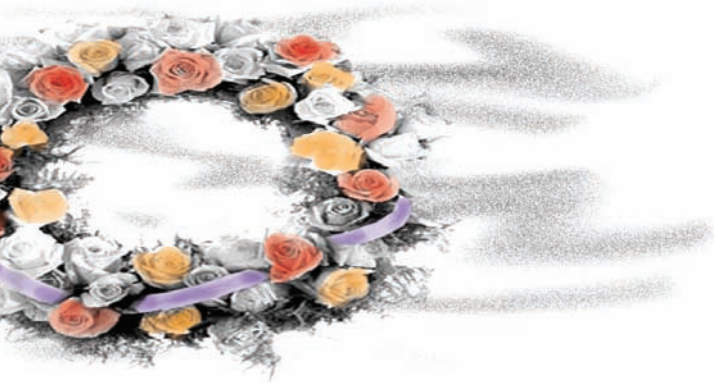
Photo: Jordi Villier

Scene from the Cor Vivaldi: Petits Cantors de Catalunya (Spain) production by Óscar Boada (1999)



Photo: Jordi Villier

Scene from the Cor Vivaldi: Petits Cantors de Catalunya (Spain) production by Óscar Boada (1999)



SYNOPSIS

The boys march on and form two groups, those representing 'The Golden Vanity' and those representing the enemy ship 'The Turkish Galilee'. The Golden Vanity is riding the Lowland Sea with a cargo of silver and gold when it comes across the marauding vessel. The ship floundering and vulnerable from a blast from the pirate ship, the cabin boy asks the captain what his reward would be if he were to sink The Turkish Galilee. The captain offers him the hand of his 'pretty little daughter who lives upon the shore'. The cabin boy dives into the water and swims over to the enemy ship, boring three holes in the side. As The Turkish Galilee begins to sink, the boy returns to The Golden Vanity but the rascally captain and bosun refuse to let him back on and to honour their promise. Finally, the crew throw him a rope, but he dies on reaching the deck. He is buried at sea amid much sorrow and remorse. His voice can be heard evermore over the spot where he died.

RECORDING

The Wandsworth School Boys' Choir,
Russell Burgess/Benjamin Britten
Decca 436397-2

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571501060 Vocal score

0571501079 Chorus part

057155492X Vocal score (French)



Photo: Karim Schander

Scene from the Oper Frankfurt production by Axel Weidauer (2004)

THE PRODIGAL SON

op.81 (1968)

Third parable for church performance

Libretto by William Plomer *after Luke 15:11-32*

Duration

69 mins

First performance

10 June 1968 Orford Church, Aldeburgh Festival

The third of the Church Parables was inspired by Rembrandt's painting The Return of the Prodigal which Britten had seen two years earlier at the Hermitage in Leningrad. Completed in 1968 and, like its two predecessors, set to a libretto by William Plomer, the manner of presentation is consistent with the conventions established in Curlew River and The Burning Fiery Furnace, but the work marks a significant advance. New colours are provided by the mellow tones of the alto flute, primarily associated with the pastoral tranquillity of the father's home, and by the small trumpet in D which accompanies the Tempter's promises of excitement. The theme of an errant young man returning home the wiser from his travels is familiar from Albert Herring and it is perhaps significant that The Prodigal Son is the most traditionally 'operatic' of the three Parables. From here, with the triptych now completed, it was a logical step for Britten to return to the resources of full-scale opera.



Photo: Ryszard Galowski

Scene from the first Polish production (1994)



Photo: Andreas Hartmann

James Daniel Frost and Hanno Harms in the Stadttheater Hildesheim production by Sascha Mink (2004)



Photo: Andreas Hartmann

Uwe-Tobias Hieronimi and Hanno Harms in the Stadttheater Hildesheim production by Sascha Mink (2004)



Photo: Andreas Hartmann

Scene from the Stadttheater Hildesheim production by Sascha Mink (2004)

CAST

Tempter/Abbot <i>Tenor</i>	Chorus of Servants, Parasites and Beggars
Father <i>Bass-baritone</i>	<i>3 tenors, 3 baritones, 2 basses</i>
Elder Son <i>Baritone</i>	Young Servants and Distant Voices
Younger Son <i>Tenor</i>	<i>5 trebles</i>

SCORING

alto fl(=picc)—hn, tpt in D—va, db—harp—
perc (5 small untuned drums,
small Chinese cymb, conical gourd rattle,
large tuned gong (F), 2 tuned wb (A, D#),
high pitch wb)—chamber org

On-stage

small drum (tambour), small cymb, tamb,
sistrum (jingle rattle), small bell-lyra

RECORDING

Peter Pears,
Bryan Drake,
John Shirley-Quirk,
Robert Tear,
English Opera Group/
Benjamin Britten
Decca 425713-2

SYNOPSIS

The Monks enter chanting the plainsong *Jam lucis orto sidere*. The Abbot, disguised as the Tempter, moves through the congregation introducing the parable to be enacted. The Monks to play the Father and two Sons are prepared for the performance. The Father addresses his two sons, warning them of the evils of temptation. While the Elder Son goes off with the labourers to work in the fields, the Younger Son, encouraged by the Tempter, pleads with his father for his share of the inheritance. His portion duly granted, he heads off for the city with the Tempter at his side. The Parasites urge the Younger Son to indulge in whoring, drinking and gambling. After his period of debauchery, he is left penniless and starving. He decides to begin the journey home. On his arrival, his father greets him and orders a feast in celebration. Amid general rejoicing, the Elder Son comes forward to protest at this preferential treatment of the 'waster'. The father reconciles the two brothers: 'He was dead and is alive again, was lost, and is found'. The Monks resume their habits and the Abbot draws a moral conclusion. The Monks process away from the acting area, chanting the plainsong which opened the work.

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571502709 Libretto
0571502318 Rehearsal score
0571506828 Full score

OWEN WINGRAVE

op.85 (1970)

Opera in two acts

Libretto by Myfanwy Piper *after the story by Henry James*

Duration

106 mins

First performance

16 May 1971 *BBC2 TV*

34



Photo: Alain KAISER

Philippe Le Chevalier in the Opéra national du Rhin, Strasbourg production by Pierre Barrat (1996)



Photo: Mike Hoban

Gerald Finley in the Glyndebourne Festival Opera production by Daniel Dooner (1997)

CAST

Owen Wingrave

The last of the Wingraves *Baritone*

Spencer Coyle

Who runs a military cramming establishment *Bass-baritone*

Lechmere

A young student with Owen at Coyle's establishment *Tenor*

Miss Wingrave

Owen's aunt *Dramatic soprano*

Mrs Coyle

Soprano

Mrs Julian

A widow and dependant at Paramore *Soprano*

Kate

Her daughter *Mezzo-soprano*

General Sir Philip Wingrave

Owen's grandfather *Tenor*

Narrator

The ballad singer *Tenor*

Colonel Wingrave

An apparition *Silent role*

Young Wingrave

His son, an apparition *Silent role*

Distant Chorus

Trebles

SCORING

2 fl (=picc), 2 ob, 2 cl in A & B flat (II=cl in E flat and bass cl), 2 bn (II=dbn)—
2 hn, 2 tpt in C, 2 ten trbn, tuba—timp (=tom-tom, susp cymb, vibr),
3 perc (sd, td, bd, 2 wb, 2 whip, 2 large susp cymb, small susp cymb,
cymb, small gong, tom-tom, xyl, vibr, glock, large gong (t-t), bell in A,
tamb)—harp—pf—str

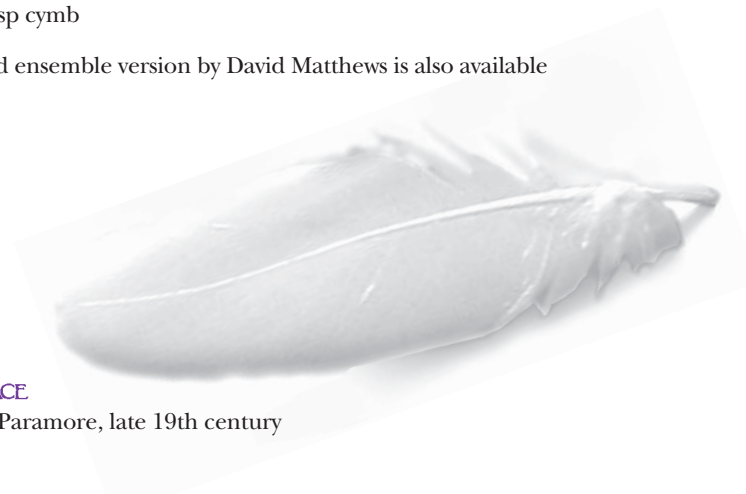
Off-stage

sd, bd, susp cymb

A reduced ensemble version by David Matthews is also available

TIME & PLACE

London, Paramore, late 19th century



Owen Wingrave was specifically conceived and composed as an opera for television. Although Britten had expressed reservations about the viability of opera on the small screen, it was the highly successful filming of Peter Grimes for BBCTV in 1969 that convinced him of its possibilities and he subsequently took up the challenge. First broadcast in May 1971, the work makes use of several televisual techniques such as cross-cutting, montage and flashback. Subsequent stage productions have, however, proved the work to be no less viable in live performance than any other of Britten's operas. Like *The Turn of the Screw*, the work is based on a story by Henry James. The story of a young man who, groomed for a military career, rebels against his family for whom soldiering is a way of life provided Britten with an ideal opportunity to make a public statement of his deeply held pacifist beliefs. Far from being mere propaganda however, *Owen Wingrave* is a characteristically rich and multi-layered work, the supreme irony of Owen's predicament being that in his battle with his own family, he shows himself to be just as much of a fighter as any of his warmongering ancestors. The opera's scoring too is highly distinctive, with the symbolic prominence given to the large and varied percussion section clearly pointing the way forward to Britten's final opera, *Death in Venice*.



Photo Alain KAISER

Scene from the Opéra national du Rhin, Strasbourg production by Pierre Barrat (1996)



Photo: MJW PRODUCTIONS

Scene from the MJW PRODUCTIONS film for Channel 4 directed by Margaret Williams and produced by Anne Beresford (2001)

SYNOPSIS

At Coyle's cramming establishment in London, Owen and his friend Lechmere are learning the strategy of battle. At the end of the lesson, Owen declares that he cannot go through with a military career. Coyle is angry but agrees to break the news to the Wingrave family for whom soldiering has been a way of life for generations. At the haunted country house at Paramore, Owen is rounded on by his aunt Miss Wingrave, his fiancée Kate Julian and her mother. The elderly head of the family, Sir Philip Wingrave, who fought at Bhurtpore, is similarly outraged. In the Prologue to Act Two, a ballad singer narrates the tale of the young Wingrave boy killed by his brutal father for refusing to fight over an argument with a friend. Sir Philip disowns Owen, depriving him of his inheritance. Kate humiliates Owen by flirting with Lechmere. After everyone has gone to bed, Owen, left alone, reflects on his predicament and reaffirms his passionate belief in peace. Kate comes looking for him. She taunts him with cowardice and dares him to sleep in the haunted room. Owen agrees and Kate locks him in. Lechmere is concerned for Owen's welfare and alerts Coyle. Kate is heard sobbing from the doorway of the haunted room. The family rush to the scene. Sir Philip pushes the door open to find Owen dead on the floor. The ballad singer's voice is heard once more.

RECORDINGS

Benjamin Luxon, John Shirley-Quirk, Nigel Douglas, Sylvia Fisher, Heather Harper, Jennifer Vyvan, Janet Baker, Peter Pears, Wandsworth School Boys' Choir, English Chamber Orchestra/Benjamin Britten
Decca 433200-2

Peter Coleman-Wright, Alan Opie, James Gilchrist, Elizabeth Connell, Janice Watson, Sarah Fox, Pamela Helen Stephen, Robin Leggate, Tiffin Boys Choir, City of London Sinfonia/Richard Hickox
Chandos CHAN 10473(2)

Gerald Finley, Peter Savidge, Hilton Marlton, Josephine Barstow, Anne Dawson, Elizabeth Gale, Charlotte Hellekant, Martyn Hill, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin/Kent Nagano
Arthaus Musik DVD

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571502997 Libretto
0571505023 Vocal Score
0571515428 Full Score

DEATH IN VENICE

op.88 (1973)

Opera in two acts

Libretto by Myfanwy Piper *after the novella by Thomas Mann*

Duration

145 mins

First performance

16 June 1973 *Snape Maltings Concert Hall*



36

Death in Venice was composed during a time of great physical and psychological stress for Britten: aware that he was in urgent need of major heart surgery, he postponed the operation until he had completed the work which was, in part, intended as a supreme vehicle for and tribute to the voice and artistry of Peter Pears, to whom it is dedicated. However, in choosing a story that embodied so many of the underlying dramatic themes that had characterised his entire output, Britten also seemed to be making his final opera a conscious summation of his life's work. He is likely to have strongly identified with the opera's hero, the writer Gustav von Aschenbach who, aware of failing powers, seeks inspiration by travelling to Venice where he falls in love with the young Polish boy Tadzio. Aschenbach, however, has no actual contact with the boy, his family or companions, and it was an inspired idea of Britten's to cast them in non-singing roles as dancers, accompanied by the colourful, glittering sounds of tuned percussion to emphasize their remoteness. The music of Death in Venice is generally restrained and the textures subtle and economical, but the work inhabits a very distinctive and evocative atmosphere and is a gloriously fitting culmination to Britten's operatic career.



Photo: Branco Gaica

Philip Langridge in the Opera Australia production by Jim Sharman (2005)



Photo: Liz Lauren

Scene from the Chicago Opera Theater production by Ken Cazan (2004)

CAST

Gustav von Aschenbach

Tenor

The Traveller/Elderly Fop/Old Gondolier/Hotel Manager/
Hotel Barber/Leader of the Players/Voice of Dionysus

Bass-baritone

The Voice of Apollo

Counter-tenor

Solo chorus parts:

Danish lady, Russian mother, English lady, French girl,
Strawberry seller, Lace seller, Newspaper seller, Strolling player

Sopranos

French mother, German mother, Russian nanny, Beggar woman

Contraltos

Hotel porter, two Americans, two Gondoliers, Glass maker,
Strolling players

Tenors

Ship's steward, Lido boatman, Polish father, German father,
Russian father, Hotel waiter, Guide in Venice, Restaurant waiter,
Gondolier, Priest in St Mark's, English clerk in the travel bureau

Baritones and basses

Youths and girls, hotel guests and waiters, gondoliers and boatmen,
street vendors, touts and beggars, citizens of Venice,
choir in St Mark's, tourists, followers of Dionysus

Chorus

The Polish Mother, Tadzio (her son), her two daughters,
their Governess, Jaschiu (Tadzio's friend), other boys and girls,
strolling players, beach attendants

Dancers

SCORING

2 fl(=picc), 2 ob, 2 cl in B flat & A(II=cl in E flat and bass cl),
2 bn(II=dbn)—2 hn, 2 tpt in C, 2 trbn, tuba—timp, 5 perc (2
sd, 2 td, 2 bd(1 large), 3 tom-toms, 3 Chinese drums, small
drum, tuned drum in C, cymb, small cymb, 2 susp cymb,
tamb, wb, trgl, 2 whips (large and small), 2 tuned gongs,
2 t-t(large and small), wind machine, bells, bell-tree, crotales,
vibr, 2 glock, 2 xyl(1 small), mar)—harp—pf—
str (minimum: 6.4.3.3.2)



Peter Pears in the original English Opera Group production by Colin Graham (1973)



Left: Nigel Robson in the Teatro Colón production by Alfredo Arias (2004)



Anthony Peyla in the Chicago Opera Theater production by Ken Cazan (2004)

SYNOPSIS

Writer Gustav von Aschenbach is seen wandering the streets of Munich, seeking the inspiration that seems to have deserted him. He becomes aware of a mysterious Traveller who conjures up visions of an exotic landscape, rousing in Aschenbach the urge to travel. On the boat to Venice, Aschenbach is disconcerted by the grotesque appearance of a rouged Elderly Fop. A Gondolier rows Aschenbach towards the Lido, contrary to his intentions. On disembarking, the Gondolier mysteriously disappears leaving Aschenbach to reflect on the gondola as a symbol of death. On his arrival at the hotel, the Hotel Manager leads Aschenbach to his room and shows him the splendid view of the beach. As the Hotel Guests assemble for dinner, Aschenbach becomes aware of a Polish family, particularly the beautiful young boy Tadzio. Aschenbach ponders on the artist's predilection for beauty. Next day on the beach, Aschenbach is troubled by the heavy atmosphere and greying skies, but the games of Tadzio and his friends offer distraction. Unable to fight off the oppressive mood, he decides he must leave Venice but a misunderstanding over his luggage provides a pretext for returning to the hotel. In an idyllic interlude, we see Tadzio and his companions competing in games and other athletic events - Tadzio is the victor in all. Aschenbach

intends to speak to the boy, but at the crucial moment turns away. He realises the truth of his feelings in the anguished cry, 'I love you'. Aschenbach is troubled by rumours of a cholera outbreak in Venice. He sees the Polish family and begins distractedly following them. In a travel bureau, the English clerk advises Aschenbach to leave the city. In a dream interlude, the competing voices of Apollo and Dionysus are heard, culminating in a dark orgy. All restraint cast aside, Aschenbach attempts a winning rejuvenation at the Barbers, ironically recalling the Elderly Fop that so disgusted him earlier. He starts to follow the family again, but sinks down, exhausted, by a well-head where he traces his path to the abyss via Socrates' words to Phaedrus. Back at the hotel, Aschenbach learns that the Polish family is due to leave. Out on the beach, Tadzio wrestles with Jaschiu but is overcome. Aschenbach cries out as if to defend him. Tadzio begins a slow walk out to sea as Aschenbach slumps dead in his chair.

TIME & PLACE

Munich, Venice and The Lido, 1911

RECORDINGS

Peter Pears, John Shirley-Quirk, James Bowman, Kenneth Bowen, English Chamber Orchestra/ Stuart Bedford
Decca 425669-2

Philip Langridge, Alan Opie, Michael Chance, BBC Singers, City of London Sinfonia/Richard Hickox
Chandos CHAN 10280



Scene from the Chicago Opera Theater production by Ken Cazan (2004)

PUBLISHER

Faber Music

On sale

0571514537 Libretto

0571505147 Vocal Score

0571505333 Full Score (cased)

HENRY PURCELL DIDO & AENEAS

Opera in three acts

by Henry Purcell (1689)

edited by Benjamin Britten and Imogen Holst
(1951, rev. 1958-59)

Libretto by Nahum Tate

Duration

50 mins

First performance

1 May 1951 *Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London*



Britten's realisation of Purcell's only through-composed opera Dido and Aeneas was originally made for a production with the English Opera Group in 1951. Britten had already revealed his sympathy for Purcell's music in his 1948 arrangement of the Chacony in G minor, not to mention the clear Purcellian influence found in such original works as The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, The Holy Sonnets of John Donne and the Second String Quartet. The idea was to establish a practicable performing version of Purcell's masterpiece in the absence of the autograph manuscript and, hence, an authentic edition. In this task, Britten and Imogen Holst consulted the two known extant copies of the score (both prepared by copyists) to produce as close an approximation to Purcell's intentions as possible. Prior to the Britten-Holst version, the work had been known in a worthy but somewhat 'safe' edition by Edward Dent (1925) which had smoothed out many of Purcell's more surprising harmonic progressions and other unusual textural details. While accepting that no version can ever be definitive, Britten's edition, based on practical performing knowledge of Purcell's style, comes closer to the spirit of the composer. Moreover, Britten's own experience as an opera composer helps him to see the work as a whole, helping to bind Purcell's short forms together with an imaginative and resourceful realisation of the continuo part, thus shaping the work into a convincing musico-dramatic entity.



Photo: Zoë Dominic

Janet Baker and Jeanette Sinclair in the English Opera Group production by Colin Graham (1962)



Photo: Merit Esther Engelke

Scene from the Stadttheater Giessen production by Roberto Galván (2001)

Photo: Merit Esther Engelke



Scene from the Stadttheater Giessen production by Roberto Galván (2001)

CAST**Dido**Queen of Carthage *Soprano***Aeneas**A Trojan Prince *Tenor (or Baritone)***Belinda**A Lady in Waiting *Soprano***Second Woman***Soprano***Sorceress***Mezzo Soprano***First Witch***Mezzo Soprano***Second Witch***Mezzo Soprano***Spirit***Soprano***First Sailor***Soprano (or Tenor)***Courtiers, Witches and Sailors***Chorus***SCORING**

Strings and continuo

TIME & PLACE

Carthage in ancient times

SYNOPSIS

Queen Dido's lady-in-waiting Belinda attempts to cheer the lovelorn queen: surely the Trojan hero Aeneas returns her love. Dido admits her infatuation, and Aeneas enters to renew his love-suit. Belinda and the chorus encourage Dido's acquiescence and predict a happy outcome. At their cave, however, witches plot the downfall of both the Queen and Carthage. Their spirit, dressed as Mercury, will impress upon Aeneas the need for him to leave immediately and complete his destiny to found Rome as the new Troy. During a hunt, a storm sends Dido and the courtiers back to the city, but Aeneas is held back by Mercury and submits to his commands. The following day, Aeneas's sailors prepare to leave port. The witches are thrilled, but Dido is distraught and angry. Even Aeneas's offer to disobey the gods and stay does not move her: she rejects him. He leaves, and before taking her own life she asks Belinda to remember her, but not her fate. The chorus calls on cupids to scatter roses on her tomb.

RECORDINGS

Dame Janet Baker, Norma Burrowes, Peter Pears, Felicity Lott, Alfreda Hodgson, Robert Tear, London Opera Chorus, Aldeburgh Festival Strings/Steuart Bedford
Decca 4685612

Claire Watson, Peter Pears, Jeanette Sinclair, Arda Mandikian, Patricia Clark, Rosemary Philips, John Hahessy, Michael Ronayne, Purcell Singers, English Opera Group/Benjamin Britten
BBC Legends BBCB 8003-2

Photo: Merit Esther Engelke



Scene from the Stadttheater Giessen production by Roberto Galván (2001)

PUBLISHER

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