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BRITTEN

Four Sea Interludes

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra

Jaap van Zweden



Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Four Sea Interludes, Op. 33a

Benjamin Britten occupies an unrivalled position in English music of the 20th century and a place of the greatest importance in the wider musical world. While Elgar was in some ways part of late 19th-century German Romantic tradition, Britten avoided the trap offered by musical nationalism and the insular debt to folk music of his older compatriots, while profiting from that tradition in a much wider European context. He may be seen as following in part a path mapped out by Mahler. He possessed a special gift for word-setting and vocal writing, a facility that Purcell had shown and that was the foundation of a remarkable series of operas that brought English opera for the first time into international repertoire. Tonal in his musical language, he knew well how to use inventively, imaginatively, and, above all, musically, techniques that in other hands often seemed arid. His work owed much to the friendship and constant companionship of the singer Peter Pears, for whom Britten wrote many of his principal operatic roles and whose qualities of voice and intelligence clearly had a marked effect on his vocal writing.

Born in the East Anglian seaside town of Lowestoft in 1913, Britten showed early gifts as a composer, studying with Frank Bridge before a less fruitful time at the Royal College of Music in London. His association with the poet W.H. Auden, with whom he undertook various collaborations, was in part behind his departure with Pears in 1939 for the United States, where opportunities seemed plentiful, away from the petty jealousies and inhibitions of his own country, where musical facility and genius often seemed the objects of suspicion. The outbreak of war brought its own difficulties. Britten and Pears were firmly pacifist in their views, but were equally horrified at the excesses of National Socialism and sufferings that the war brought. Britten's nostalgia for his native country and region led to their return to England in 1942, when they rejected the easy option of nominal military service as musicians in uniform in favour of overt pacifism, but were able to give concerts and recitals, often in difficult circumstances, offering encouragement to those who heard them. The re-opening of Sadler's Wells and the staging of Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* started a new era in English opera. The English Opera Group was founded and a series of chamber operas followed, with larger scale works that established Britten as a composer of the highest stature, a position recognised shortly before his early death by his elevation to the peerage, the first English composer ever to be so honoured.

Peter Grimes had its first performance at the reopened Sadler's Wells Theatre in London in June 1945. In California in 1941 Britten had come across an article by E.M. Forster on the poet George Crabbe, adding to his own feelings of nostalgia for his own part of England. Crabbe's poem *The Borough*, set in Suffolk, provided a source for the opera. The fisherman Peter Grimes, an outsider, suspected by his fellow townspeople of cruelty to his apprentices, is hounded to his death. The drama, and the death of Grimes's last apprentice, the result of the actions of the people of the borough, is set against the sea in its varying moods, elements familiar to Britten from his childhood by the sea in Lowestoft. The *Four Sea Interludes* divide the scenes of the opera. The first of these, *Dawn*, with its seagull cries above the waves, introduces the first act, as fisherfolk mend their nets and prepare their sails for the day to come. The second of the four, *Sunday Morning*, introduces *Act II*, with its church bells and bright sunshine, as townspeople gather before church, their self-righteous hypocrisy in contrast to the genuine emotions that will be played out between Grimes and the schoolmistress Ellen Orford, who tries to protect him. *Moonlight* begins the third act, the shore and village street lit by the moon, as a dance takes place in the Moot Hall, a scene in which the hypocritical character of those who condemn Grimes becomes ever more apparent. *Storm* is taken from earlier in the opera, between the first and second scenes. Balstrode, a fisherman, gives Grimes friendly advice, urging him to marry Ellen, this against the sounds of a rising storm. In what follows people gather in The Boar Inn, where Grimes's arrival, either mad or drunk, the people say, is unwelcome.

Keith Anderson

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra



The Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HK Phil) is regarded as one of the leading orchestras in Asia. The orchestra turned professional in 1974, and is celebrating its 50th anniversary with Joshua Bell, Seong-Jin Cho, Paavo Järvi, Yo-Yo Ma, Lang Lang, Tarmo Peltokoski and Vasily Petrenko during the 2023/24 season. The orchestra collaborates with internationally renowned conductors and soloists, annually presenting more than 150 concerts which attract over 200,000 music lovers. The HK Phil promotes the work of Hong Kong and Chinese composers, commissions new works, nurtures local talent and runs extensive education and community programmes. The HK Phil has toured Europe, Asia, Australia and extensively across Mainland China with music director Jaap van Zweden. Yu Long has been principal guest conductor since the 2015/16 season, and Lio Kuokman was appointed resident conductor in December 2020. In 2019 the HK Phil won the prestigious *Gramophone* magazine Orchestra of the Year Award – the first orchestra in Asia to receive this accolade. The HK Phil is financially supported by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

www.hkphil.org

Jaap van Zweden



Photo: Eric Hong / HK Phil

Jaap van Zweden began his tenure as music director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra in 2012. He has also served as music director of the New York Philharmonic since 2018. He has conducted orchestras on three continents, appearing as a guest with the Orchestre de Paris, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Wiener Philharmoniker, Berliner Philharmoniker and London Symphony Orchestra in Europe, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic in the United States. Among his numerous recordings is the 2020 release of the world premiere of David Lang's *prisoner of the state*, which followed the 2019 release of Julia Wolfe's GRAMMY-nominated *Fire in my mouth*, both recorded with the New York Philharmonic and released on Decca Gold. In 2018 he completed a four-year project conducting Wagner's *Ring* cycle with the HK Phil, which was released on Naxos. His acclaimed performance of *Parsifal* (Challenge Classics) earned him the prestigious Edison Award for Best Opera Recording in 2012.

www.jaapvanzweden.com

Benjamin Britten's unrivalled position in 20th-century music is due in no small part to his operas, and *Peter Grimes*, set on the Suffolk coastline and first staged in 1945, heralded a new and fruitful era in English opera. *Peter Grimes* is an outsider who, suspected of cruelty to his apprentices, is hounded to death by his fellow townspeople. Now a staple of concert halls worldwide, the superbly evocative *Four Sea Interludes* begin peacefully with seagulls crying above the waves at dawn. *Sunday Morning* is characterised by church bells ringing out, in *Moonlight* the shore and village street are lit by a magical and majestic moon, and the suite climaxes with an almost unimaginably violent storm scene.



Benjamin
BRITTEN
(1913–1976)

首席贊助 Principal Patron



Peter Grimes: Four Sea Interludes, Op. 33a (1945)	16:31
1 No. 1. Dawn	4:02
2 No. 2. Sunday Morning	4:02
3 No. 3. Moonlight	3:50
4 No. 4. Storm	4:26

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra
Jaap van Zweden

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