

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Sacred and Profane

SIMON PHIPPS VOKALENSEMBLE



BENJAMIN BRITTEN: SACRED AND PROFANE

BENJAMIN BRITTEN WAS BORN and spent most of his life in Suffolk on the East coast of England. His exceptional musical gifts were nurtured from an early age, and his adoring mother would spur her prodigy to greater efforts with the incantation "Bach, Beethoven, Brahms and BRITTEN!" His very earliest compositions were song-settings of favourite poems, and vocal music, whether solo, choral or operatic, was to remain the pre-eminent medium of his music. The works recorded here span most of Britten's creative life, from *A hymn to the virgin*, a schoolboy work to *Sacred and profane*, written in the year before his death.

A hymn to the Virgin was composed at the age of 16 and perfectly demonstrates the young composer's melodic gift and sensitivity to text – the rapturous climax on the word "Lady" in the third verse is perfectly placed before the calm coda.

The dominating, even overwhelming artistic influence on Britten in the late thirties was the poet W.H. Auden whom Britten met in 1935. They were to collaborate on a huge variety of work over the next five years, culminating in Britten's first major stage-work, the school-opera *Paul Bunyan* in 1940. At the outbreak of war in 1939 Britten, a convinced pacifist, had followed Auden's lead and moved to the USA, with his friend, the tenor Peter Pears. The three-year

stay proved to be the turning point in Britten's life: artistically he was to free himself from Auden's influence and acquire a commission from Koussevitsky for a full-scale opera and, emotionally, he was to find a life-time love in his relationship with Pears.

Britten was born on St Cecilia's day and while Auden's text apostrophises the patron saint of musicians it is in fact Britten himself whom the poet addresses in *Hymn to St Cecilia*. The first of the three poems, "In a garden shady", is set in calmly lilting triads, evoking both music's spiritual purity and its underlying passions. A rapt unison prayer, "Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions", leads to the second poem, "I cannot grow ... I only play". This is a will o' the wisp scherzo, delineating what Auden saw as the limitations of Britten's emotional never-never land. The prayer now returns, richly harmonized, paving the way for the final poem where Auden both refers to Britten's trauma "lost innocence" and suggests a way forward: "O wear your tribulation like a rose". The initial A minor calm, ruffled only by the basses' nagging ostinato "O calm of spaces", turns to A major for a moment of pathos with the soprano solo "O dear white children". Violin, timpani, and flute are evoked by soloists, stressing the futility of shame, while it is the final trumpet fanfare in the tenor which provides a resolution, "Oh wear your tribulation like a rose". A

return to the prayer, now harmonized by the opening triads, sets a seal of serene content on this extraordinary self-portrait.

Shepherd's carol is a whimsical p.s. in the Britten-Auden oeuvre, composed in 1944 with no obvious connection to Christmas. The "pinkie" referred to is a finger.

The triumphant success of the opera *Peter Grimes* in 1945 established Britten as an operatic composer all over the world. The dramatic use of the chorus was widely admired, and *Old Joe has gone fishing* is sung as a rowdy round in the pub at the climax of the first act.

In 1946 Britten launched his own opera company: the English Opera Group, partly funded by a donation from Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst of Dartington. Pioneering educationalists, they were also keen gardeners and Britten composed the *Five flower songs* for their 25th wedding anniversary in 1950. In the first song Herrick's daffodils welcome the Spring as if tossed about on a mad March day. Clare's four sweet months follow, melting into each other in succulent counterpoint. Crabbe's marsh flowers provide a dark contrast – this "contracted flora" is the botanical backdrop to Peter Grimes' tragedy. In Clare's evening primrose the transience of nocturnal beauty is celebrated in lush harmonies, a moment of sublime repose before the finale. The ballad of green broom tells the story of a young man who makes good by marrying into money (perhaps an affectionate dig at the source of the Elmhirst fortune?). After a hesitant start the story is told voice by voice against simple squeeze-box harmonies developing an almost operatic intensity on its way (the lady's imperious summons "go fetch me the boy!" is pure Lady Billows) to a riotous dénouement.

The opera *Gloriana* was commissioned to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. It is an intimate portrait of Elizabeth I and her courtiers, in

particular her love for the Earl of Essex. The *Choral dances* are taken from a masque performed when the Queen visits Norwich. The first three dances present the figures of time and concord as the chief components in the peace and plenty which Elizabeth's subjects enjoy. The fourth and fifth dances contrast the country girls' madcap flower-gathering with sturdier yeoman offerings "from fen and meadow". The final dance is one of stately homage to a charismatic monarch.

Sacred and profane belongs to the handful of small-scale masterpieces which Britten composed in the last three years of his life. Given Britten's failing health it is, unsurprisingly, his darkest choral music where suffering and death are constant preoccupations. The eight texts are anonymous lyrics from the 12th to 14th centuries and are arranged in a balanced form (SPPP SSSP).

A deceptively simple C major setting of *St Godric's hymn* opens the work and is followed by three profane lyrics. In *I mon wax wode* the text is divided between the mechanically chirping sopranos' "Fowles in the frith" and the basses, plodding in chains of ghostly thirds "mulch sorrow", leaving the altos to deliver the punch line in increasing desperation. "Lenten is come" is a light-footed welcome to Spring which subsides into sadness. With "The long night" the mood, mirroring the seasons, turns colder and darker as summer gives way to winter. The second half of the suite opens with *Yif ic of luve can*. The first section sets the scene of the crucifixion in a few eloquently halting phrases. When repeated, a soaring soprano is superimposed, gradually freeing itself from the choir to make the impassioned cry "Yif ic of luve can" – it is perhaps the most intensely religious expression in all of Britten's music. *Carol*, a whimsical parody of yule-tide jollity, provides a lightening of mood and intensity before the final sacred lyric, *Ye that passen by*, it too a scene from the passion, a translation of the

familiar text "O vos omnes". The final number, *A death*, is a macabre catalogue of decay, exercising a Bosch-like fascination on the listener through the continual variety of choral texture. At the last minute despair is avoided with the defiant, devil-may-care E major roud "Of al this world ne give I it a pese". Though the key is the same it is a very different leave-taking from Aschenbach's farewell in *Death in Venice* or the concluding question mark of the third quartet, much as though Britten, through his music, was testing the validity of different responses to his own impending death.

If there is one common denominator in this enormously varied repertoire, then it is surely the inspirational response to the texts, a gift which Britten shared with his great artistic forbear Henry Purcell – "a peculiar genius for expressing the energy of English words".

Simon Phipps

SIMON PHIPPS VOCAL ENSEMBLE was founded in 1997 and consists of music teachers, church musicians and students at the Music Academy in Gothenburg. The aim is to have a varied and wide repertoire with a span from renaissance counterpoint to contemporary Scandinavian choral music. However, the heart of the choir belongs to the great works of the baroque and the late 19th century romantic music. This is the first recording by a Scandinavian choir entirely devoted to Britten – hopefully the meeting of two traditions will cast fresh light on this rewarding repertoire.

Simon Phipps was born in London and grew up in the English choral tradition. After graduating from King's College, Cambridge he studied singing in London and conducting in Munich and Manchester. After ten years largely devoted to conducting opera he moved to Sweden in 1994 and has been based in Gothenburg since then. He has conducted most of Sweden's professional orchestras and given concerts all over Europe. In 2001 Simon Phipps was appointed artistic director of Musik i Väst, the state-funded regional music-organization.



I. ST. GODRIC'S HYMN

Sainte Marye Virgine,
Moder Jesu Christes Nazarene,
Onfo, schild, help thin Godric,
Onfang, bring heylich with thee
in Godes Riche.
Sainte Marye, Christes bur,
Maidenes clenhad, moderes flur,
Dilie min sinne, rix in min mod,
Bring me to winne with the self god.

St. Mary, the Virgin,
Mother of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
Receive, defend and help thy Godric,
(and,) having received (him,) bring (him)
on high with thee in God's Kingdom.
St. Mary, Christ's bower,
Virgin among maidens, flower of motherhood,
Blot out my sin, reign in my heart,
(and) bring me to bliss with that selfsame God.

2. I MON WAX WOD

Foweles in the frith,
The fisses in the flod,
And I mon waxe wod:
Mulch sorw I walke with
For beste of bon and blod.

Birds in the wood,
The fish in the river,
And I must go mad:
Much sorrow I live with
For the best of creatures alive.

3. LENTEN IS COME

Lenten is come with love to toune,
With blosmen and with briddes roune,
That all this blisse bringeth,
Dayes-eyes in this dales,
Notes swete of nightgales;
Uch fowl song singeth.
The threstelcook him threteth oo;
Away is huere winter woo,
When woderofe springeth.
This fowles singeth ferly fele
And wlitheth on huere wyne wele,
That all the wode ringeth.
The rose riileth hire rode,
The leves on the lighte wode
Waxen all with wille.
The mone mandeth hire ble,
The lilye is lossom to se,
The fennel and the fille.

Spring has come with love among us,
With flowers and with the song of birds,
That brings all this happiness.
Daisies in these valleys,
The sweet notes of nightingales,
Each bird sings a song
The thrush wrangles all the time.
Gone is their winter woe
When the woodruff springs.
These birds sing, wonderfully merry,
And warble in their abounding joy,
So that all the wood rings.
The rose puts on her rosy face,
The leaves in the bright wode
All grow with pleasure.
The moon sends out her radiance,
The lily is lovely to see,
The fennel and the wild thyme.

Woves this wilde drakes,
Miles murgeth huere makes,
Ase strem that striketh stille.
Mody meneth, so doth mo;
Ichot ich am on of tho
For love that likes ille.

The mone mandeth hire light,
So doth the semly sonne bright,
When briddes singeth breme.
Deawes donketh the dounes,
Deores with huere derne rounes
Domes for to deme.
Wormes woweth under cloude,
Wimmen waxeth wounder proude,
So well it wol hem seme.
Yef me shall wonte wille of on,
This wunne wele I wole forgon,
And wiht in wode be fleme.

4. THE LONG NIGHT

Mirie it is, while sumer ilast,
With fugheles song.
Och nu necheth windes blast,
And weder strong.
Ey! Ey! What this nicht is long!
And ich, with well michel wrong,
Soregh, and murne and fast.

5. YIF IC OF LUVE CAN

Whanne ic se on Rode
Jesu, my lemman,
And besiden him stonden
Marye and Johan,
And his rig iswongen,
And his side istungen,
For the luve of man,
Well ou ic to wepen,
And sinnes for to leten,
Yif ic of luve can.

These wild drakes make love,
Animals (?) cheer their mates,
Like a stream that flows softly.
The passionate man complains, as do more:
I know that I am one of those
That is unhappy for love.
The moon sends out her light,
So does the fair, bright sun,
When birds sing gloriously.
Deaws wet the downs,
Animals with their secret cries
For telling their tales.
Worms make love under ground
Women grow exceedingly proud,
So well it will suit them.
If I don't have what I want of one,
All this happiness I will abandon,
And quickly in the woods be a fugitive.

Pleasant it is, while summer lasts,
With the birds' song.
But now the blast of the wind draws nigh
And severe weather.
Alas! how long this night is,
And I, with very great wrong,
Sorrow and mourn and fast.

When I see on the Cross
Jesu, my lover,
And beside him stand
Mary and John,
And his back scourged,
And his side pierced,
For the love of man,
Well ought I to weep
And sins to abandon,
If I know of love.

Maiden in the mor lay,
In the mor lay,
Sevenight fulle
Sevenight fulle.
Maiden in the mor lay,
In the mor lay,
Sevenightes fulle and a day.

Welle was hire mete:
Wat was hire mete?
The primerole and the,
The primerole and the,
Welle was hire mete:
Wat was hire mete?
The primerole and the violet.

Welle was hire dring:
Wat was hire dring?
The chelde water of the,
The chelde water of the,
Welle was hire dring:
What was hire dring?
The chelde water of the welle spring.

Welle was hire bowr:
Wat was hire bowr?
The rede rose and the,
The rede rose and the,
Welle was hire bowr:
Wat was hire bowr?
The rede rose and the lilye flour.

A maiden lay on the moor,
Lay on the moor;
A full week,
A full week,
A maiden lay on the moor;
Lay on the moor,
A full week and a day.

Good was her food.
What was her food?
The primrose and the,
The primrose and the,
Good was her food.
What was her food?
The primrose and the violet.

Good was her drink.
What was her drink?
The cold water of the,
The cold water of the,
Good was her drink.
What was her drink?
The cold water of the well-spring

Good was her bowr.
What was her bowr?
The red rose and the,
The red rose and the,
Good was her bowr.
What was her bowr?
The red rose and the lilyflower.

7. YE THAT PASEN BY

Ye that pasen by the weiy,
Abidet a little stounde.
Beholdet, all my felawes,
Yef any me lik is founde.
To the Tre with nailes thre
Wol fast U hange bounde;
With a spere all thoru my side
To mine herte is mad a wounde.

You that pass by the way
Stay a little while.
Behold, all my fellows,
If any like me is found.
To the Tree with three nails
Most fast I hang bound;
With a spear all through my side
To my heart is made a wound.

8. A DEATH

Wanne mine eyhnen misen,
And mine heren sissen,
And my nose koldet,
And my tunge foldet,
And my rude slaket,
And mine lippes blaken,
And my muth grennet,
And my spotel rennet,
And mine her riset,
And mine herte griset,
And mine honden bivien,
And mine fet stivien,
Al to late! Al to late!
Wanne the bere is ate gate.
Thanne i schel flutte
From bedde te flore,
From flore to here,
From here to bere,
From bere to putte,
And te putt fordut.
Thanne lyd mine hus uppe mine nose.
Of al this world ne give I it a pese!

When my eyes get misty,
And my ears are full of hissing,
And my nose gets cold,
And my tongue folds,
And my face goes slack,
And my lips blacken,
And my mouth grins,
And my spittle runs,
And my hair rises,
And my heart trembles,
And my hands shake,
And my feet stiffen,
All too late! All too late!
When the bier is at the gate.
Then shall I pass
From bed to floor,
From floor to shroud,
From shroud to bier,
From bier to grave,
And the grave will be closed up.
Then rests my house upon my nose.
For the whole world I don't care one jot.

9. HYMN TO THE VIRGIN (1930)
(ANONYMOUS TEXT, CA 1300)

Of one that is so fair and bright,
Velut maris stella
Brighter than the day is light,
Parens et puella
I cry to thee, thou see to me,
Lady, pray thy Son for me,
Tam pia
That I may come to thee.
Maria!

All this world was forlorn
Eva peccatrice,
Till our Lord was y-born
De te genetrix
With ave it went away
Darkest night, and comes the day
Salutis
The well springeth out of thee.
Virtutis

Lady, flow'r of ev'rything,
Rosa sine spina,
Thou bare Jesu, Heaven's King,
Gratia divina:
Of all thou bear'st the prize,
Lady, queen of paradise
Electa
Maid mild, mother es Effecta.
Effecta

Five Flower Songs OP 47 (1950)

10. TO DAFFODILS
(ROBERT HERRICK, 1591-1674)

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the even-song;
And, having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.
We have short time to stay, as you,
We have as short a spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.

11. THE SUCCESSION OF
THE FOUR SWEET MONTHS
(ROBERT HERRICK, 1591-1674)

First April, she with mellow showers
Opens the way for early flowers;
Then after her comes smiling May,
In a more rich and sweet array;
Next enters June, and brings us more
Gems than those two that went before:
Then (lastly) July comes, and she
More wealth brings in than all those three.

12. MARSH FLOWERS

(GEORGE CRABBE, 1754-1832)

Here the strong mallow strikes her slimy root;
Here the dull nightshade hangs her deadly
fruit:

On hills of dust the henbane's faded green,
And pencil'd flower of sickly scent is seen.

Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,
Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume.

At the walls base the fiery nettle springs,
With fruit globose and fierce with poison'd
stings;

In ev'ry chink delights the fern to grow,
With glossy leaf and tawny bloom below;
The few dull flowers that o'er the place are
spread

Partake the nature of their fenny bed.

These, with our sea-weeds rolling up and down
Form the contracted flora of our town.

13. THE EVENING PRIMROSE

(JOHN CLARE, 1793-1864)

When once the sun sinks in the west,
And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;
Almost as pale as moonbeams are,
Or its companionable star,
The evening Primrose opes anew
Its delicate blossoms to the dew.

And, hermitlike, shunning the light,
Wastes its fair bloom upon the night;
Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,
Knows not the beauty he possesses.

Thus it blooms on while night is by;
When day looks out with open eye,
'Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,
It faints and withers and is gone.

14. THE BALLAD OF GREEN BROOM

(ANONYMOUS TEXT)

There was an old man liv'd out in the wood,
And his trade was acutting of Broom, green
Broom.

He had but one son without thought, without
good

Who lay in his bed till t'was noon, bright noon

The old man awoke one morning and spoke,
He swore he would fire the room, that room
If his John would not rise and open his eyes,
Away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom.

So Johnny arose and slipp'd on his clothes,
And away to the wood to cut Broom, green
Broom

He sharpen'd his knives, and for once he
contrives

To cut a great bumble of Broom, green Broom.

When Johnny pass'd under a Lady's fine house,
Pass'd under a Lady's fine room

She call'd to her maid: "Go fetch me," she said,
"Go fetch me the boy that sells Broom, green
Broom!"

When Johnny came in to the Lady's fine house,
And stood in the Lady's fine room, fine room

"Young Johnny" she said, "will you give up
your trade

And marry a lady in bloom, full bloom?"

Johnny gave his consent, and to church they
both went,

And he wedded the Lady in bloom, full bloom
At market and fair, all folks do declare

There's none like the Boy that sold Broom,
green Broom.

15. SHEPHERD'S CAROL (1962)
(W H AUDEN, 1907-77)

O lift your little pinkie,
And touch the winter sky.
Love's all over the mountains
Where the beautiful go to die.
If Time were the wicked sheriff,
In a horse opera,
I'd pay for riding lessons
And take his gun away.
O lift...
If I were a Valentino
And Fortune were a broad,
I'd hypnotise that iceberg
Till she kissed me of her own accord.
O lift...
If I'd stacked up the velvet
And my crooked rib were dead,
I'd be breeding white canaries
And eating crackers in bed.
O lift...
But my cuffs are soiled and fraying.
The kitchen clock is slow,
And over the Blue Waters
The grass grew long ago.
O lift...

Choral Dances FROM *Gloriana*
OP 53 (1952-53) (WILLIAM PLOMER, 1903-73)

16. TIME
Yes he is Time,
Lusty and blithe,
Time is at his apogee!
Although you thought to see
A bearded ancient with a scythe.
No reaper he
That cries "Take heed!"
Time is at his apogee!
Young and strong in his prime!
Behold the sower of the seed

17. CONCORD
Concord, Concord is here.
Our days to bless.
And this our land to endue
With plenty, peace and happiness.
Concord, Concord and Time,
Each needeth each:
The ripest fruit hangs where
Not one, but only two can reach.

18. TIME AND CONCORD
From springs of bounty
Through this county,
Streams abundant,
Of thanks shall flow.
Where life was scanty,
Fruits of plenty,
Swell resplendent,
From earth below!
No Greek nor Roman Queenly woman.
Knew such favour, from heav'n above.
As she whose presence
Is our pleasure.
Gloriana.
Hath all our love.

19. COUNTRY GIRLS

Sweet flag and cuckooflower,
Cowslip and columbine,
Kingcups and sops-in-wine,
Flowerdeluce and calaminth,
Harebell and hyacinth,
Myrtle and bay with rosemary between,
Norfolk's own garlands for her Queen.

20. RUSTICS AND FISHERMEN

From fen and meadow,
In rushy baskets,
They bring ensamples of all they grow.
In earthen dishes
Their deep-sea fishes;
Yearly fleeces,
Woven blankets,
New cream and junkets,
And rustic trinkets
On wicker flasks,
Their country largess,
The best they know

21. FINAL DANCE OF HOMAGE

These tokens of our love receiving,
O take them, Princess great and dear.
From Norwick city you are leaving,
That you afar may feel us near.

22. OLD JOE HAS GONE FISHING

FROM *Peter Grimes* OP 33 (1944-45)
(MONTAGU SLATER, 1902-56)

Old Joe has gone fishing
And Young Joe has gone fishing
And You Know has gone fishing
And found them a shoal
Pull them in in han'fuls
And in canfuls
And in panfuls
Bring them in sweetly
Gut them completely
Pack them up neatly
Sell them discreetly
O haul away!

23. HYMN TO SAINT CECILIA OP 27 (1941-42)

(W H AUDEN, 1907-77)

In a garden shady this holy lady
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
Like a black swan as death came on
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
And notes tremendous from her great engine
Thundered out on the Roman air.
Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
Moved to delight by the melody,
White as an orchid she rode quite naked
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
Came out of their trance into time again,
And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

I cannot grow: I have no shadow
To run away from, I only play.
I cannot err; There is no creature
Whom I belong to, whom I could wrong.
I am defeat when it knows it
Can now do nothing but suffering.
All you lived through, dancing because you
No longer need it for any deed.
I shall never be different.
Love me.

Blessed Cecilia, appear ...

O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,
O calm of spaces unafraid of weight,
Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all
The gauchness of her adolescent state,
Where Hope within the altogether strange
From every outworn image is released,
And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
Into a world of truths that never change:
Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.
O dear white children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
Lost innocense who wished your lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

O cry created as the bow of sin
Is drawn across our trembling violin.
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.
O law drummed out by hearts against the still
Long winter of our intellectual will.
That what has been may never be again.
O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving breath
Of convalescents on the shores of death.
O bless the freedom that you never chose.
O trumpets that unguarded children blow
About the fortress of their inner foe.
O wear your tribulation like a rose.

Blessed Cecilia, appear ...



BENJAMIN BRITTEN FÖDDES och tillbringade större delen av sitt liv i Suffolk på Englands östkust. Hans exceptionella musikaliska gåvor uppmuntrades redan i tidig ålder. Modern uppmuntrade till och med sitt underbarn till än större ansträngningar med sin ramsa »Bach, Beethoven, Brahms och BRITTEN«!. De första verken blev sånger, tonsättningar av favoritpoem. Vokalmusik för solo, kör eller operascenen skulle sedan förbli den mest framstående formen för hans musik. De verk som spelats in på denna skiva täcker större delen av Brittens kreativa gärning, från »A Hymn to the Virgin«, en skolpojkes verk, till »Sacred and Profane« som skrevs året innan hans död.

A Hymn to the Virgin skrev Britten vid sexton års ålder. Sången visar tydligt den unge kompositörens melodiska gåvor och känslighet för innehållet i texten - den hänförande höjdpunkten på ordet »Lady« i den tredje versen är perfekt placerad innan den lugna avslutningen.

Det dominerande, ja till och med överväldigande konstnärliga inflytandet på Britten i slutet av trettio-talet stod poeten W H Auden, som Britten träffade 1935, för. De kom att samarbeta i föreställningar, filmer och radioprogram under de kommande fem åren, ett samarbete som kulminerade i Brittens första större musikdramatiska verk, skoloperan *Paul Bunyan* 1940. Vid krigsutbrottet 1939 hade Britten, en övertygad pacifist, följt Audens exempel och flyttat till USA tillsammans med sin vän, tenoren Peter Pears. Den tre år långa vistelsen visade sig bli en vändpunkt i Brittens liv. Konstnärligt skulle han slå sig fri från Audens inflytande och skaffa sig ett uppdrag från Koussevitsky att komponera en helfonopera, och emotionellt skulle han finna en livslång kärlek i sin relation till Pears.

Britten föddes på Sankta Cecilias dag och även om Audens text på ytan handlar om detta musikens skyddshelgon, är det i själva verket Britten som poeten syftar på i *Hymn to St Cecilia*. Verket är

indelat i tre delar, den första, »In a garden shady« är tonsatt i lugna, rikt modulerade treklanger, som tar fram både musikens spirituella renhet och dess underliggande temperament. En unison bön, »Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions«, leder till den andra delen, »I cannot grow ... I only play«. Det ostyriga scherzo tecknar konturerna av vad Auden såg som begränsningen i Brittens emotionella ingenmansland. Bönen återkommer nu, rikt harmoniserad, och banar väg för det avslutande stycket där Auden både knyter an till Brittens trauma »förlorad oskuldshelhet« och pekar på en väg framåt: »O wear your tribulation like a rose«. Det inledande lugnet i a-moll som störs endast av basarnas envisa ostinato »O calm of spaces«, förändras till A-dur för ett ögonblicks patos i sopransolot »O dear white children«. Violin, pukor och flöjt gestalts av solisterna, understryker skammens tomhet, medan tenorens avslutande trumpetfanfar visar på vägen framåt »O wear your tribulation like a rose«. Bönen återigen, nu harmoniserad med öppningens treklanger, avslutar med tillfredsställelse och förnöjsamhet detta säregna självporträtt.

Shepherd's carol är ett besynnerligt post scriptum på Britten-Auden-eran, komponerad 1944 utan någon som helst uppenbar anknytning till julen. »The pinkie« som nämns i sången är lillfingeret.

Den triumfartade succén med operan *Peter Grimes* 1945 gjorde Britten till en etablerad och världsberömd operakompositör. Det dramatiska uttrycksjandet av kören beundrades mycket. *Old Joe has gone fishing* sjungs under en stökig runda på puben i första aktens höjdpunkt.

1946 startade Britten sitt eget operakompani, The English Opera Group, delvis finansierat av en donation från Leonard och Dorothy Elmhirst of Dartington. Förutom framstående pedagoger var de också hängivna trädgårdstaster, och Britten skrev *Five Flower Songs* till deras 25-åriga bröllopsdag 1950. I den första sången välkomnar Herricks påskliljor

våren, kringströdda i yrvädet en marsdag. I Clares efterföljande *Four sweet months* smälter månaderna in i varandra i en saftig kontrapunkt. Crabbes *Marsh flowers* står för en mörk kontrast - denna »komplexa flora« är en botanisk syftning på tragedin för Peter Grimes. I Clares *Evening primrose* hyllas aftonens förgängliga skönhet i frodiga harmonier, ett ögonblicks sublim vila innan finalen. *The ballad of green broom* är berättelsen om en ung man som ser chansen att gifta sig till rikedom (kanske en kärleksfull pik åt grunden till paret Elmhirsts levnadsöde?). Efter en tveksam start berättas historien av den ena stämman efter den andra till ackompanjering av enkla ackord. En nästan operamässig intensitet utvecklas (damens högrädna uppfordran »Gå och hämta mig den där pojken!« är rätt och slätt Lady Billows) på väg mot den stormiga upplösningen.

Operan *Gloriana* beställdes för att fira Drottning Elizabeth II:s kröning 1953. Den är ett intimt porträtt av Elizabeth II och hennes hovmän, särskilt hennes kärlek till earlen av Essex. *Choral dances* är hämtade från ett skådespel som framförs när drottningen besöker Norwich. I de tre första dansar tid och endrätt som symboler för den frid och rikedom som drottningens undersåtar åtnjuter. Fjärde och femte dansen ställer bondflickornas yra blomstersamlande mot mera robusta bondiska gåvor »från kärör och ängar«. Den sista dansen är en storslagen hyllning till en karismatisk monark.

Sacred and profane tillhör den handfull mästerverk i mindre format som Britten komponerade under de tre sista åren av sitt liv. Med tanke på Brittens vacklande hälsa är det föga förvånande hans mörkaste körmusik, där lidande och död ständigt är närvarande ingredienser. De åtta texterna är anonym lyrik från 1100-1300-talen, arrangerade i spegelform (SPPP SSSP).

Sviten öppnas med *St Godrick's hymn*, ett bedrägligt enkelt arrangemang i C-dur. Den följs av tre profana dikter. I *I mon wax wode* delas texten mellan de meka-

nisk kvittrande sopranernas »Fowles in the frith« och basarna som knogar sig fram i en kedja av spöklika treklanger: »much sorrow«. Altarna får med ökande desperation leverera sluklämnen. *Lenten is come* är en inledningsvis långsam inbjudan till våren som sedan tungsint slår sig till ro. I *The long night* speglar stämningen årtidernas skiftning, den blir kallare och mörkare allteftersom sommaren får ge upp inför den annalkande vintern. Sviten andra hälft inleds med *Yif ic of luve can*. Den första delen av stycket målar bilden av korsfästelsen i några få uttrycksfullt tvekanande fraser. När musiken upprepas utgör stämorna ackompanjering till en sopran i högt tonläge, som gradvis frigör sig från kören inför det lidelsefulla ropet »Yif ic of luve can« - kanske det mest intensivt religiösa uttrycket överhuvudtaget i Brittens musik. *Carol*, en lustig parodi på jultidens munterhet lättar upp sinnesstämmningen och intensiteten inför den avslutande sakrala dikten *Ye that pasen by*, en scen ur passionsberättelsen (en översättning av den välbekanta texten *O vos omnes*). Finalen, *A death* är en makaber uppräknning av stadier av kroppsligt förfall som väcker en Bosch-liknande fascination hos lyssnaren genom den konstant föränderliga strukturen. I sista sekunden kastas hopplösheten och uppgivenheten åt sidan med det trotsiga konstaterandet »Vem bryr sig?« i E-dur (»Of al this world ne give I it a pese«). Även om tonarten är densamma är det ett mycket annorlunda avsked jämfört med Aschenbachs farväl i *Döden i Venedig* eller den sammanfattande frågan i den tredje kvartetten, eftersom Britten genom sin musik ville utforska giltigheten i olika uttryck inför sin egen annalkande död.

Om det finns en gemensam nämnare i denna enormt varierade repertoar, är det med all säkerhet Brittens inspirerade gensvar på texterna, en gåva som han delade med sin stora konstnärliga förebild Henry Purcell - »ett enastående geni på att gestalta energin i det engelska språket«.

Simon Phipps

SIMON PHIPPS VOKALENSEMBLE bildades 1997 och består av musikpedagoger, kyrkomusiker och studenter vid Musikhögskolan i Göteborg. Målet är att ha en så varierad och bred repertoar som möjligt, en repertoar som spänner från renässansens kontrapunkt till nutida skandinavisk körmusik. Hjärtat har kören dock hos barockens stora mästerverk och den romantiska musiken från 1800-talets senare hälft. Detta är den första inspelningen av en skandinavisk kör som helt ägnas Britten och hans musik. Förhoppningsvis kommer mötet mellan två traditioner att kasta nytt ljus på denna tacksamma repertoar.

Simon Phipps föddes i London och växte upp i den engelska körtraditionen. Efter examen vid King's College, Cambridge, studerade han sång i London och dirigering i München och Manchester. Efter tio år som operadirigent flyttade han till Sverige 1994 och har bott i Göteborg sedan dess. Han har dirigerat de flesta av Sveriges professionella orkestrar och varit inbjuden som gästdirigent till orkestrar i hela Europa. Sedan 2001 är Simon Phipps konstnärlig ledare vid Stiftelsen Musik i Väst.



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Soprano solo on *Hymn to Saint Cecilia* and *Yif ic of luve can*: Nina Åkerblom Nielsen

Photograph of Simon Phipps and Benjamin Britten, Aldenburgh, 1969, by Jack Phipps

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BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Sacred and Profane SIMON PHIPPS VOKALENSEMBLE

Sacred and Profane

- 1 St. Godric's Hymn 1.37
- 2 I mon wax mod 0.44
- 3 Lenten is come 2.23
- 4 The long night 1.29
- 5 Yif ic of luvē can 2.36
- 6 Carol 1.49
- 7 Ye that pasen by 2.14
- 8 A death 2.43
- 9 A Hymn to the Virgin 3.15

Five Flower Songs

- 10 To Daffodils 1.47
- 11 The Succession of the Four Sweet Months 1.54
- 12 Marsh Flowers 2.21
- 13 The Evening Primrose 2.59
- 14 The Ballad of Green Broom 2.04
- 15 Shepherd's Carol 3.55

Choral Dances from Gloriana

- 16 Time 1.17
- 17 Concord 2.05
- 18 Time and Concord 1.21
- 19 Country Girls 1.03
- 20 Rustics and Fishermen 0.57
- 21 Final Dance of Homage 1.52

From *Peter Grimes*

- 22 Old Joe has gone Fishing 1.39
- 23 Hymn to Saint Cecilia 11.02

Total time 56.34

