

Symphony they were led by the Spanish violinist **Felix Ayo** (b 1933), who was a founder member of I Musici and continued to play with them until 1968. He formed the Quartetto Beethoven di Roma and also played with numerous other leading orchestras. He is now a respected teacher and judge in international competitions.

Jennifer Vyvyan (1925-74), whose family originated in Cornwall, studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Roy Henderson and later in Milan and Geneva. She joined the English Opera Group in 1948 and played several roles. She also sang at Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden, where she created the role of Lady Penelope Rich in *Gloriana* (1953). Also with the EOG on tour she became well-known as a concert artist. Over the years she created other Britten roles (Tytania in *Midsummer Night's Dream* - Britten changing the character's spelling in honour of Vyvyan - and Mrs Julian *Owen Wingrave*) and several concert works. She also sang at Glyndebourne and in leading European and American cities. Besides excelling in Britten's works she was an excellent performer of baroque.

Norma Procter (b 1928) also studied with Roy Henderson and made her professional debut singing the contralto in Handel's *Messiah* in 1948. Success quickly led to concert engagements around the country and in 1958 Britten asked her to sing the title role in *Rape of Lucretia* at Aldeburgh. At her Covent Garden debut three years later she sang Orpheus in Gluck's opera. Besides Britten and in oratorio, Procter became associated with the music of Mahler.

Sir Peter Pears (1910-86) began his career as an organist before studying with the great Lieder specialist Elena Gerhardt and at the RC M. He was a Glyndebourne chorister in 1938, sang Hoffmann in London after his return from the USA in 1942 and joined Sadler's Wells in 1943. He co-founded the English Opera Group in 1946, with whom he sang numerous roles over the years in addition to many performances at Covent Garden in the 1950s and at Aldeburgh. Much of Britten's music was composed with his voice in mind but he was also an outstanding Lieder singer and one of the finest of all Evangelists in the Bach Passions. He created roles in works by Walton and Berkeley. His final stage performance was at the Edinburgh Festival (1979)

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Cover image: 'abandoned boat, Aldeburgh' © Damnura / Dreamstime

Design: produced by Imergent Images Ltd (info@imergent.co.uk)

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ALC 1152 Britten Piano Conc (Annette Servadei) and Violin Conc (Sergej Azizian)

ALC 2008 Peter Grimes (2CD complete opera) Pears/Watson/Brannigan/ ROH/ Britten

Benjamin Britten

Simple Symphony Op.4

I Musici directed by Felix Ayo Rec.1959

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|----------------------------------|------|---------------------------------------|------|
| [1] I. <i>Boisterous Bourée</i> | 2.31 | [3] III. <i>Sentimental Sarabande</i> | 7.20 |
| [2] II. <i>Playful Pizzicato</i> | 3.12 | [4] IV. <i>Frollicsome Finale</i> | 2.47 |

Peter Grimes – Four Sea Interludes

Royal Opera House Orchestra conducted Benjamin Britten Rec.1958

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|---------------------------|------|----------------------|------|
| [5] <i>Dawn</i> | 3.36 | [7] <i>Moonlight</i> | 4.21 |
| [6] <i>Sunday Morning</i> | 3.52 | [8] <i>Storm</i> | 4.19 |

Spring Symphony Op.44

Jennifer Vyvyan (Sopr); Norma Procter (Contralto); Peter Pears (Tenor) with the Chorus & Orchestra of the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; Chorus of Boys from Emanuel School, Wandsworth, London (Director of music: Donald Cashmore) conducted by Benjamin Britten Rec.1960

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| [9] Part 1 <i>Introduction: Shine Out (Anon. 16th century)</i> | |
| <i>The Merry Cuckoo</i> (Spenser) <i>Spring the Sweet Spring</i> (Nashe) | |
| <i>The Driving Boy</i> (Peele, Clare) <i>The Morning Star</i> (Milton) | 17.43 |
| [10] Part 2 <i>Welcome Maids of Honour</i> (Herrick) | |
| <i>Waters Above</i> <i>Out on the Lawn I Lie in Bed</i> (Auden) | 11.14 |
| [11] Part 3 <i>When will my May Come</i> (Barnefield) | |
| <i>Fair and Fair</i> (Peele) <i>Sound the Flute</i> (Blake) | 5.53 |
| [12] Part 4 <i>Finale: London, To thee I do Present</i> (Beaumont/Flatcher) | 7.18 |

Produced by Tony Watts: Final master by Paul Arden-Taylor www.dinmore-records.co.uk

Britten Centenary 2013

Benjamin Britten

Spring Symphony Four Sea Interludes Simple Symphony

Royal Opera House Orchestra
Benjamin Britten
I Musici

alto

Born in East Anglia, Benjamin Britten (1913-76) learned piano and composed from a young age; at ten he began taking viola lessons. Having been ‘knocked sideways’ by a performance of Frank Bridge’s *The Sea* in Norwich (1924) he was taught by Bridge and entered the Royal College of Music in 1930. Several of his early works received high profile performances (*Phantasy Quartet* at the 1934 ISCM Festival in Florence; *A Boy Was Born* BBC also in 1934) and the song cycle *Our Hunting Fathers* caused a local scandal at its 1936 premiere in Norwich as its text offended the blood sports lobby. In the summer of 1937 his *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* received rave reviews at its Salzburg premiere, followed six weeks later by London.

The earliest work in this collection is the *Simple Symphony, Op. 4*, composed between December 1933 and February 1934. Most of the themes date from much earlier (1923-26), and were taken from piano pieces or songs by Britten from the period when he began taking viola lessons. He dedicated the *Simple Symphony* to his viola teacher Audrey Alston, who had brought Britten to the attention of Frank Bridge. Scored for strings, it is designed to be attractive to all and presents no problems for players; indeed it was an amateur orchestra that gave the first performance in Norwich in 1934. The movements are all given light-hearted alliterative titles: *Boisterous Bourrée*, *Playful Pizzicato*, *Sentimental Sarabande* and *Frolicsome Finale*.

In 1939 Britten moved to America with the tenor Peter Pears, whom he had met two years earlier. Both men were committed pacifists and hoped to settle permanently on the USA’s West coast amongst like-minded artists including W H Auden (with whom Britten had collaborated in *Our Hunting Fathers*) and Christopher Isherwood. In May 1941 Pears and Britten read a copy of *The Listener* containing an article by E M Forster about the Suffolk poet George Crabbe (1754–1832), focussing on his poem *The Borough* (1810). Pears bought a copy of the poem in Los Angeles and together they sketched a scenario for a projected opera *Peter Grimes*. Pears noted in this early version the opposing forces prevalent in the work: Sea versus Land; the ruffian-like Grimes and the gentle, but staunchly Christian widow Ellen Orford; fishermen and churchgoers. Isherwood was approached to fashion a libretto; he declined but gave Britten pointers on how to proceed. The Koussevitsky Foundation commissioned Britten to compose an opera; the \$1000 grant enabled Britten and Pears to return to England in 1942 to start work in earnest.

Britten and Pears settled in Snape (near Aldeburgh) and turned to the left-wing writer Montagu Slater (1902–56) to write the libretto. Slater’s lackadaisical approach irritated Britten and composition only began in early 1944 and was completed in February 1945. When in 1946 Slater published his libretto of *Peter Grimes* it was evident that others (now known to be Britten, Pears, Eric Crozier and Ronald Duncan) had also worked on the text. Once Pears joined the Sadler’s Wells company in 1943, it became

clear the premiere would be held in London, it being the company’s aim to not only stage opera in English but also to promote British opera. *Peter Grimes* went into rehearsal on tour in Sheffield, Birmingham and Wolverhampton but there was considerable opposition to the opera and its creators from within the company, many of whom had seen active service and resented performing a new work by two conscientious objectors and a Communist. Many thought the music too modern and there was also resentment against Joan Cross, whom Britten had chosen to play Ellen Orford. Cross (1900-93) was an ardent advocate of British opera and had sung with Lilian Baylis’ Old Vic company and from 1931 with Sadler’s Wells. Following accusations of cronyism against Cross, Pears and Britten, the soprano left the company in 1946 to form the English Opera Group with Pears and Britten.

Despite all these off-stage shenanigans, the premiere took place as planned on 7 June 1945, a few weeks after the German surrender. Tickets for the much heralded premiere (and the re-opening of the Sadler’s Wells Theatre which had been used as an evacuee centre during the war) had sold out in advance and one performance was broadcast by the BBC. Even bus conductors entered into the spirit of the piece shouting out ‘Next stop, Peter Grimes, the murdering fisherman’ as they approached the theatre. Despite the perceived modernity of the score many of the audience were carried away by the dramatic sweep of the work (doubtless aided by Kenneth Green’s atmospheric and moody designs) and appreciated that it was in many ways a traditional work with recitatives, arias, ensembles and a large chorus. Unprecedentedly for a British opera, within three years *Peter Grimes* had received productions in numerous cities and in several languages: the first American performance, conducted by Bernstein, took place at Tanglewood in August 1946 and it was preceded by the first European performance in Stockholm with Set Svanholm as Grimes.

The *Sea Interludes* quickly became a popular concert item and helped audiences to become familiar with the opera as a whole. The first interlude *Dawn*, occurs in the opera between the Prologue and Act 1 and in it one can feel the gusting wind, the crash of the waves on the shingle and the cry of the sea-birds. The second interlude *Sunday Morning* is the prelude to Act 2. Against the tolling of church bells a jagged rhythm depicts the flickering early morning sunlight on the waves, leading into Ellen Orford’s aria ‘Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight’. However the atmosphere darkens with the introduction of a deep tolling bell, suggestive perhaps of a funeral bell. The third interlude *Moonlight*, which opens Act 3, captures the mood of the North Sea at night as the tide comes in. The fourth interlude *Storm*, which separates the two scenes in Act 1, is one of the most famous pieces of elemental writing in the orchestral repertoire. The music depicts not only the raging storm outside the pub where the villagers are taking shelter but also the storm raging inside Grimes’ mind. A brief lull recalls Grimes’ attempt to find peace with Ellen ‘What harbour shelters peace away from tidal waves, away from storms?’ before the lashing rain and wind bring the interlude to a shattering close.

Benjamin Britten’s choral *Spring Symphony* was composed in 1948-9 and was first performed at the Holland Festival in July 1949. The conductor was Eduard Van Beinum and soloists were the Dutch soprano Jo Vincent and the English contralto Kathleen Ferrier and tenor Peter Pears. Van Beinum also conducted the British premiere at the Royal Albert Hall in March 1950. However Britten dedicated the piece to Serge Koussevitsky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra who gave the first performance in America in August 1949. For inspiration, Britten tapped into his immense knowledge of British verse, choosing for this symphony largely pre-18th century texts by Edmund Spenser (c1552-99), Thomas Nashe (1567-1601), George Peele (1556-96), John Milton (1608-74), Robert Herrick (1591-1674), Henry Vaughan (1621-95), Robert Barnfield (1574-1627), and a lengthy passage from Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c1610 - the Maylord’s address). Besides some anonymous verses, other writers were John Clare (1793-1864), W H Auden (1907-73) and William Blake (1757-1827).

This piece, which Britten said charts ‘the progress of Winter to Spring and the reawakening of the earth and life which that means’, follows the traditional form of the four-movement symphony with the slow movement placed second and the scherzo third. The huge forces (children’s and adult choruses, soloists and an orchestra with extensive percussion and a cow-horn) are used with great skill and on the rare occasions when everyone is involved, the momentum seems unstoppable. The opening movement begins with the orchestra’s depiction of a land under ice and snow before the chorus sings ‘Shine out, fair sun, with all your heat’. Spring arrives with the tenor soloist’s ‘The Merry cuckoo’ and other birds are imitated by all the singers in ‘Spring, the sweet spring’. Soprano and children (at one point whistling their line) anticipate the pleasures of summer (‘strawberries swimming in cream’) and of work in the fields before the chorus, with full brass and chiming bells salute and welcome in ‘flowery’ and ‘bounteous May’. The second movement demonstrates Britten’s skill at using the orchestra in small groups. Selected verses from Auden’s ‘Out on the lawn I lie in bed’, written a few months after Hitler’s rise to power, give this movement an unsettling atmosphere as the singer suggests that we in England ‘feel secure’ and ‘do not care to know’ what lies in store for others elsewhere who share the same moonlight. All this is swept aside in the playful third movement. Here springtime is all about courtship and merry-making. The high-spirited final movement continues in the same vein as a joyous waltz sweeps all before it; chorus and orchestra (joined by the cow horn) invite the listener to join in the fun. After the joyous procession has faded into the distance the tenor brings the work to a close.

I Musici was formed in 1951 in Rome and quickly became an internationally acclaimed chamber ensemble. Many of their players past and present, including Salvatore Accardo, Federico Agostini, Roberto Michelucci, Felix Ayo and Pina Carmirelli have simultaneously pursued successful solo careers. Their huge discography contains many ground-breaking recordings. In this recording of *Simple*