



Britten Choral Guide

with Repertoire Notes by Paul Spicer



Benjamin Britten

A Guide to the Choral Works

by Paul Spicer



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This Guide to Britten's choral works, compiled by Paul Spicer, has been prepared by The Britten-Pears Foundation in conjunction with Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, Chester Music and Faber Music. For further details about Britten's works, please consult *Benjamin Britten: A Catalogue of the Published Works* (1999), available from Boosey & Hawkes and viewable online at www.brittenpears.org.

This Guide is included as a PDF on a CD audio sampler, with track numbers referred to within the works listing. If you are a choral director and would like to receive a copy, please contact your local office of one of the publishers or distributors listed on page 24.



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PREFACE

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) was a unique force in British music. Of the fine composers among his contemporaries, none wrote such a wide variety of music across such a broad spectrum of genres and for such a range of ages and abilities. In many ways, though he might have been surprised by the comparison, he was the natural successor to Vaughan Williams, whose instincts for community and the nurture of amateur musicians brought him an almost cult-like status in Britain. Britten did not devote himself so wholeheartedly to these things, but a sizeable proportion of his choral music is easily within the reach of a good ordinary choir, another part is well within the grasp of a reasonable church choir, and there is, of course, all the music he wrote specifically for children. Among the 60 or so non-operatic choral works there are also works which are exceptionally demanding and perhaps best left to professionals and outstanding amateurs. The range of this output and the frequency of performance of the better-known works underline Britten's ubiquity in the world of choral singing, not just in the English-speaking community but far beyond.

As with many composers who have devoted themselves to writing a large corpus of music for one particular genre, Britten has suffered from being too well-known for a few familiar pieces. *Rejoice in the Lamb*, *A Ceremony of Carols*, *Hymn to the Virgin*, *Hymn to St Cecilia*, *Jubilate Deo in C* and others have tended to obscure the fuller picture of Britten's choral output and, if nothing else, I hope that this new practical guide will encourage choral directors to look beyond their favourites and explore the rich variety of music which is still almost undiscovered. Schools, or choirs of upper or lower voices, will find music here of wonderful quality which rarely sees the light of day. Similarly, there is a genuine mix of sacred and secular and some useful blurring of the edges where words can be equally appropriate in either context. I hope that this guide will also be of real practical help to those who aim to build programmes which may be structured in specific ways – thematically, by voice type, by religious or non-religious setting, or by the balancing of a well-known piece by a less-familiar or almost unknown work. It is a spirit of discovery and adventure which should fire the use of this guide, and it is a love of all this music which has inspired its writing.

Britten was a practical composer. He knew that the music he wrote was performable because he himself was an accomplished professional musician. This is, again, where the Vaughan Williams analogy holds true. To be there, in among those doing the singing, directing the performance, advising other conductors and acquiring great expertise and experience over a creative lifetime, gave him an unusual insight into what choirs enjoy singing. He discovered what levels were attainable by different types of group, and did much to encourage that sense of ambition which has led to a genuine rise in the quality of amateur choral music-making.

Britten was also a practical composer because he gave his performers all the information they need to deliver a convincing and 'authentic' performance - his scores have clear and unambiguous performance directions throughout. He is known to have remarked that, if musicians follow his instructions to the letter (and can play or sing the notes in an accurate and musical fashion), they will give a performance of which the composer would approve. So, before we get to the guide itself, the principal instruction to choral directors is to prepare the score thoroughly prior to embarking on rehearsals. Read the words in order to understand Britten's setting of them, and mark, learn and inwardly digest Britten's clear instructions about speed, dynamics, phrasing, and, often most importantly, articulation. The mood of a piece so often comes from the composer's approach to the text. Britten tended to choose texts which were not widely set by other composers. But to compare, for instance, his two connected settings of Gerard Manley Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* in *A.M.D.G.* and *The World of the Spirit* with Kenneth Leighton's version is to clearly demonstrate the point. No two responses could be more different and yet each excitingly shows the composer's individual reaction to the poem. To examine Britten's popular *Jubilate Deo in C* alongside Howells' *Collegium Regale* setting of the same words written some fifteen years earlier is, again, to emphasise how their idiomatic interpretations of the text helped shape each piece.

Britten's style grew out of the English choral tradition he knew so well. He had not been a cathedral chorister but had boarded at Gresham's School from the age of 14. There he was exposed to the standard repertoire of the Anglican Church and his earliest well-known piece, *A Hymn to the Virgin*, was written when he was only 16 and still a schoolboy. It unequivocally shows his feeling for the beauty and *potential* of choral sound, so it is no wonder that such precocious talent should develop to the extent it did. While there are pieces from his output which are more stylistically searching, this early gem sets the scene for a choral output that is essentially approachable, tonal, lyrical, and pleasing to both performer and listener. It is a remarkable legacy.

Paul Spicer, Lichfield, 2011

NOTE:

The difficulty level indicated in the Guide is from 1-5 with 1 being the least difficult.

Sales materials are indicated after each entry. Unless listed on sale, scores and parts are available on hire from the publisher.

THE CHORAL WORKS

Mixed Voices unaccompanied

CD track 31

Advance Democracy (1938)

3'

for SSAATTBB unaccompanied

Text: Randall Swingler

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2

Advance Democracy is a piece of unabashed political propaganda commissioned by the London Co-operative Society. At a time of great anxiety in Europe and on the eve of the second World War, this poem by Randall Swingler paints a dark picture of the threat of dictatorship if democracy doesn't 'rise up and cry that what our fathers fought for we'll not allow to die'. It is a strange piece and its overtly political message makes it quite difficult to programme except as a curiosity. Britten, however, paints a very clever picture with a long legato line moving constantly through the texture from soprano to bass and back much in the manner which he had used in *The Three Kings* in *A Boy was Born*. Around this swirling figure the other parts sing sharply punctuated chords which are full of menace. The final section moves into the major (Britten's brightly flag-waving C major) and the ending is forcefully emphatic.

The best way to perform this piece is to take the words at face value and sing them as Swingler intended, with passion and involvement taking care to really follow Britten's careful performance instructions as to articulation and dynamics.

979-0-060-80035-1 Choral Score

CD track 7

A.M.D.G. (1939)

19'

Ad majorem Dei gloriam

for unaccompanied SATB

Text: Gerard Manley Hopkins

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 5

Prayer I

Rosa Mystica

God's Grandeur

Prayer II

O Deus, ego amo te

The Soldier

Heaven-Haven

This set of pieces was written when Britten was about twenty-five and had just arrived in the USA. It was intended for a quartet which Peter Pears had formed called the *Round Table Singers*. Because of the outbreak of war the pieces were never performed in their entirety and Britten withdrew the work and the opus number (17), giving it many years later to his opera *Paul Bunyan* (1976). The first complete performance did not take place until 1984, as Britten had refused to sanction its publication in his lifetime.

These pieces are seriously demanding and each one presents new challenges. The choir that can perform the complete score successfully is confident, ambitious, has a good sense of humour, and has sopranos and tenors capable of high tessitura work. It helps too if the conductor is something of an amateur psychologist who can interpret these sometimes tortured poems in the light of Gerard Manley Hopkins' Jesuit affiliation (the title is the motto of the Jesuit order), Britten's homosexuality and his deep attachment to his mother. Much time needs to be devoted to teasing out the issues in each of *A.M.D.G.*'s movements: the prayer-like first movement which starts on a second inversion chord as a kind of abject submission to the Deity; the extreme tessitura on 'Paraclete', the 'credo' plainsong-like doxology phrase which follows, and the almost tongue-in-cheek 'Amen'; the mother obsession in *Rosa Mystica* which has an equally obsessional, mantra-like ostinato running through much of the piece (which is extremely beautiful); the almost humorous *God's Grandeur* with its angular subject, its chromatic runs, and its vivid picture-painting; the complex rhythms of *Prayer II* which in performance needs to sound effortless and flowing (the conductor probably has the biggest challenge in this movement); the different rhythmic challenges of *O Deus, ego amo te* and its almost mocking final Amens; the inevitable double entendre for Britten of 'Yes, why do we all, seeing of a soldier, bless him?' in the next movement which is undoubtedly fun to sing; and the final quietly thoughtful *Heaven-Haven* which brings the work to a serene ending.

Pears' quartet would have been seriously challenged by these pieces which really need a multi-voiced group to sing them effectively. Breathing is a big issue, the weight of sound required for various moments, safety in numbers

for the more virtuosic sections, and so on. I can well understand why Britten distanced himself from these pieces. But, having performed them many times, I also know how effective they are and how much listeners enjoy them and are surprised to hear a personal side of Britten's music they didn't know.

Don't underestimate the problems, but enjoy the challenges!

0-571-50816-2 Choral score

CD track 11

A Boy was Born op. 3 (1932-33)

32'

Choral Variations for unaccompanied* SATB with boys' voices

Texts:

Theme	A Boy was Born	Anon. 16th century
Variation 1	Lullay, Jesu	Anon. before 1536
Variation 2	Herod	Anon. before 1529
Variation 3	Jesu, as Thou art our saviour	Anon. 15th Century
Variation 4	The Three Kings	Anon. 15th Century
Variation 5	In the bleak mid-winter	Christina Rossetti
	Lully, lulley, lully, lulley	Anon. before 1536
Variation 6	(Finale) Noel!, Welcome Yule	Anon. 15th century
	Christmas	Thomas Tusser
	A Christmas Carol	Francis Quarles

Publisher: Chester Music

Difficulty level: 5

*an organ part was created by Ralph Downes in 1957-58 which should only be used in extremis.

The extent of Britten's early genius can, to some extent, be measured by this work. Written while a student at the Royal College of Music aged only 19 it demonstrates the most precocious creative gifts. A rock-solid technique is evident, but also the ability to develop ideas over a large span of time (this is a major work) and, while testing even the best of choirs to its limits, Britten nevertheless always writes within the grasp of what is possible, and not only possible but supremely *effective*. Each movement contributes to the developing relationship with the initial theme, while also sitting perfectly within the sense of an unfolding 'Suite' of movements. The conductor needs to realise the tempo relationships and the contrasts of mood, pace and dynamics, and judge the scale of each movement in relation to the others.

One of the issues with this work is that it requires a boys' choir in addition to the main choir. This, of course, can also be a girls' or even a mixed group of upper voices. It does have to be a separate group, however, and in some performances they also have their own conductor, but they should not be placed at a distance due to the intricacy of their part in relation to the whole.

The Theme sets out some of the basic material in a gentle hymn-like manner and connects directly to the first variation which is based on a rocking figure of descending fifths shared initially by the two soprano parts, reminiscent of cooing doves. This is a long and challenging movement though Britten's voice-leading (where parts can get their notes from others) is mostly helpful. The second variation, *Herod*, is predominantly for men's voices. It is an aggressive, gruff play on the slaughter of the innocents and Mary and Joseph's escape to Egypt. Variation III, *Jesu, as Thou art our Saviour*, is a beautiful balancing movement for semi-chorus with a treble solo (which can equally be for a girl's or woman's voice). Variation IV, *The Three Kings*, is a tour-de-force of vocal writing. Cleverly using an undulating quaver figure set up by the basses and shared between the two bass parts initially to present a seamless flow, Britten creates a feeling of the distant procession of the kings on their camels. All parts take over the quaver figure at some point and the climax is reached at the presentation of the gifts after which the music gradually fades away as the kings return home. This is an intensely satisfying movement to perform. Variation V is for upper voices singing the wonderful well-known words of Christina Rossetti *In the Bleak Mid-Winter* with the boys' choir singing the powerfully emotional anonymous words of the *Corpus Christi Carol*. The Finale, Variation VI, is the longest and most testing movement lasting nearly ten minutes. Challenges abound in this variation: rhythm, note-finding, especially for the sopranos in the first section where their 'Noel' figures have seemingly to be plucked out of thin air; the art of the *patter* song at the start of the final section 'Get ivy and hull, woman, deck up thine house, and take this same brawn for to seethe and to souse;' etc; and the sheer relentlessness of the music leading up to the extraordinary and overpowering climax. It may have been all in a day's work for Britten, but it is a north face of the Eiger for most who have to sing it! The ending is suitably culminatory for a programme finale.

In addition to the challenges and problems already mentioned, one of the major issues a choir will face is that of tuning. A piece of this length which has no instrumental support is inevitably going to be prone to tuning problems. This is especially true in the first Variation where the endless falling fifths have to be sung in a relaxed manner whilst keeping the ear keenly attuned to the dangers of going flat. Repeated notes, and figures which keep returning to the same pitch, need always to be kept on a slightly upward trajectory to keep them in tune. There is also a great deal of syncopation in this movement set up by this falling fifth figure. The conductor has to ensure that this does not slow the movement down. Clarity of beat is hugely important. As has been pointed out before, Britten is very careful in his marking of the score. Conductors need to follow his articulation marks in particular, as well as making certain that the dynamic scheme is varied enough. There needs to be a lot of really *piano* singing in a performance of this work.

A Boy was Born is one of the most excitingly satisfying of Britten's choral works. While it should not be undertaken by any but the most ambitious amateur choirs, its challenges are certainly surmountable with a good run of rehearsals.

CH76549 Choral score (revised edition with organ)
CH76670 Choral score

Carry her over the water for SSATTBB unaccompanied see Choral Music from the Operas

Choral Dances from *Gloriana* for SATB unaccompanied see Choral Music from the Operas

Chorale after an Old French Carol (1944) 4'

for SSAATTBB unaccompanied

Text: W H Auden
Publisher: Faber Music
Difficulty level: 2

The background to this piece is the same as the *Shepherd's Carol* but the music couldn't be more different. It is scored for eight part choir with each part divided. The 'chorale' refers to the style of setting of the opening and closing sections and also to the fact that it is based on the old French carol which we know better from its use as the hymn tune *Picardy*, usually sung to the words 'Let all mortal flesh keep silence'.

These initial and final sections are at one and the same time rich and stark. The opening and closing chords lacking thirds give the sound world a bare quality. However, the second phrase soon dispels this image as Britten scores incredibly rich and widely-spaced chords for the choir to sing. Auden's words seem like a parody of the Lord's Prayer and Britten's choral setting seems entirely fitting. The second verse breaks up into counterpoint ('Though written by thy children with a smudged and crooked line'). Britten uses a canonical approach which includes the melody in inversion as if the 'smudged and crooked line' was being enacted in the music. A huge climax is achieved with first sopranos on top B naturals. The third and final verse reverts to the chorale style of the first verse and finishes with a bare fifth.

This is a slightly curious hybrid of a piece and it is not entirely surprising that Britten did not encourage publication in his lifetime. Taken together with the *Shepherd's Carol*, however, they make a fascinating pair of Christmas season pieces for those looking to programme unusual items in a concert which is not devoted exclusively to carols.

0-571-51283-6 Choral score

Christ's Nativity (1931) 17'

Christmas Suite for Soprano, Contralto and SATB,
unaccompanied

Text:

1. Christ's Nativity	Henry Vaughan
2. Sweet was the song	William Ballet's Lute Book
3. Preparations	Christ Church ms.
4. New Prince, New Pomp	Scriptures and Robert Southwell
5. Carol of King Cnut	C W Stubbs

Publisher: Faber Music
Difficulty level: 3-4

This is another tour-de-force of Britten's student years. Written a year before *A Boy was Born* when Britten was only in his second term at the Royal College of Music it was never performed complete in his lifetime. He revived *New Prince, New Pomp* for his Aldeburgh Festival in 1955 and *Sweet was the Song* for the 1966 Festival. As Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed point out in their Preface to the 1994 edition of the work it 'shows very clearly how the young composer's mind was intrigued by the potentialities of a sequence of texts unified by a common poetic theme.' Britten loved Christmas and was drawn to texts about that season of the year. *Christ's Nativity* is very much the product of a young composer, but parts of it are truly lovely and the work, which is not anything like as challenging as *A Boy was Born*, is well worth serious consideration by choirs planning programmes for the Christmas season.

The first movement is a fanfare which galvanises the listener with its choral shouts of 'Awake!' The second, *Sweet was the Song*, is for upper voices with contralto solo and is often performed on its own. This is very much the precursor of *Jesu, as thou art our Saviour* from *A Boy was Born*. A beautiful solo, which really needs a highly competent singer to sing it effectively, is accompanied by seated upper voices singing 'lulla, lullaby'. The third movement, *Preparations*, is scored for double choir and is an excited, relentless and more challenging movement. Highly effective writing and some wonderful vocal sonorities all add to the charged atmosphere. The final section is long and reflective and a complete contrast. *New Prince, New Pomp* uses a soprano soloist with four part choir. The main section of this movement is a lengthy contrapuntal exercise in the manner of a double fugue. Britten was obviously showing his teachers that he could write counterpoint with the best of them. But the result is rather worthy and only comes alive when the soprano soloist rejoins for the final section. It is possible to make this section more dramatic than the notes on the page would seem to indicate, but the conductor needs to take it to heart and work up a head of steam, perhaps allowing a little *piu movimento* which leads the music to a big climax, both emotionally and dynamically, before it subsides into the soprano solo. The finale is an excited setting of the *Carol of King Cnut*. It brings the Suite to a suitably upbeat ending.

Christ's Nativity has many challenges for a choir, but should be perfectly well within the grasp of a good amateur choral society or chamber choir. A conductor considering performing the work will need to consider the two solo movements and whether he or she can field soloists from within his own ranks to do justice to these movements.

0-571-51513-4 Choral score

Deus in adjutorium meum... (1944-45) 4'

for SATB unaccompanied

Text: Psalm 70
Taken from *This Way to the Tomb* (incidental music to the 'Masque and Anti-Masque')
Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes
Difficulty level: 2

This setting of Psalm 70 (Haste thee O God to deliver me) is a fine, passionate and almost completely overlooked anthem which ought to be in the repertoire of most cathedrals and ambitious church choirs. The psalm is a dramatic one and Britten reflects the words in a wide-ranging setting which includes extended sections for tenors/basses and sopranos/altos. He also sets the Gloria.

This is not a difficult work but it is not entirely straightforward either. There is no translation in the printed score and conductors need to take a Psalter and annotate the score with a translation so that the words can be fully appreciated and a colourful performance created to reflect them. It is well worth the effort.

979-0-060-01424-6 Choral score

CD track 4 Five Flower Songs op. 47 (1950) 12'

for unaccompanied SATB

Texts:

1. To Daffodils	Robert Herrick
2. The Succession of the Four Sweet Months	Robert Herrick
3. Marsh Flowers	George Crabbe
4. The Evening Primrose	John Clare
5. The Ballad of Green Broom	Anon.

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3-4

These lovely, classic part-songs were written as a 25th wedding anniversary present for Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst of Dartington Hall. Apparently Britten chose the subject matter because they were keen botanists. Whatever the reason for the choice, it was a supremely happy one and brought from Britten a set of pieces which, while in a direct line of descent from the classic part-songs of Elgar, Stanford and Parry, are entirely original.

These songs are designed as a set. The mood-scape shows that Britten was keenly aware of the variety needed to satisfy performers and audience between bookends. The unsentimental originality of *To Daffodils* with its tempo marking of 'Allegro impetuoso' focusing on the speedy demise of the flower which is of course a metaphor for the passing of life; the clever division into four voices for the four months in *The Succession of the Four Sweet Months* and that beautifully simple device at the end where each month is named and forms a lovely cadence; the bitter-sweet *Marsh Flowers* to its poem by George Crabbe and the way Britten makes a slightly menacing atmosphere relieved only by the description of gentler plants; the ever-so-slightly sentimental *Evening Primrose*, the 'slow movement' of the set; and finally *Green Broom*, a tour-de-force of humour which is crowned, at its heart, by Britten's slightly hysterical altos singing 'Go fetch me the boy!' The gradual *accelerando* throughout this piece leading to the final flourish makes this a wonderful and exciting finale to a set of part-songs which should be at the heart of any choir's repertoire.

Points for choral directors to look out for include the tempo of *To Daffodils*. The key is in the direction *Allegro impetuoso*. Somewhere in the region of crotchet = 116 should be the aim. Within that tempo use the words to colour the interpretation. Look out, as always, for Britten's carefully marked articulation and watch out for the big dynamic contrasts and colours. Tuning is the issue in both No.2 and No.3. In the opening of *Marsh Flowers* be careful of the size of intervals and in the second bar use the two 'anchors' of F and C# to try to ensure that pitch doesn't slip. The return to a note which has already been sung should always be fractionally higher (masked by the change of vowel) thus ensuring that the pitch is always kept in place. In *Green Broom* it is issues of ensemble more than anything which provide the major challenge. This, and the stepping of increases in speed which should be measured so that the end does not become dangerously out of hand!

979-0-060-09511-5 Choral score

Hymn to St. Cecilia op. 27 (1942, rev.1966)

for unaccompanied SSATB with SSATB solos

also version for solo voices

Text: W.H.Auden

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 4

This work had a long gestation as Britten had problems finding a suitable text. Auden was eventually asked and produced the poem in 1940. Britten's setting was immediately recognised as a major addition to the choral repertoire and has since become one of his most enduringly popular choral works. It is a nice coincidence that Britten was born on St. Cecilia's day (22 November). Cecilia is, of course, the Patron Saint of musicians who is supposed to have sung praises to God as she was being martyred. The story of her manner of death makes gruesome reading and the act of singing *in extremis* something of a miracle!

Britten responds to Auden's extraordinary imagery with relish. The poem's division into three 'movements' gives Britten his musical structure, and the provision of a refrain ('Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions to all musicians, appear and inspire...') gives a point of reference marking the end of each section, and of the work. The three 'movements' are completely different from each other. The first has a kind of 'ground bass' moving through it started by the tenors in the first bar and passing between them and the basses. Over this bass, the upper parts sing flowing compound time phrases which are almost hymn-like. The refrain at the end of the verse is a unison version of the initial flowing melody sung by the sopranos.

The second section is a scherzo which gives Britten his 'middle movement' contrast. This is marked to be sung extremely quickly. Dotted crotchet 152-160 is almost frighteningly fast! It needs also to be *pianissimo* and have absolute clarity of words. A feeling of the 'ground bass' from the first section returns as a binding motif throughout this section in long notes. All highly effective if well sung. The refrain is a slightly different form of the same melody as before.

The final section is more extended and begins with an *ostinato* bass which feels slightly menacing. Over this, Britten builds contrapuntal phrases in the upper parts with longer note values. Four solo voices are featured in the next section, most of which are *recitative*-like to be freely declaimed over held choral chords. The final refrain uses the familiar melody from the opening and brings the work to its quiet end through some challengingly low notes for second basses.

This is a challenging work which should not be undertaken lightly. It needs sympathetic and careful preparation, understanding of the words, a readiness to accept the issues raised by the speed of the 'scherzo' movement and an ability to maintain pitch over this time-scale so that the very low notes at the end of the work are not made even lower through a general flattening. Having said all this, it is perfectly approachable by an amateur choir of reasonable attainment providing that enough rehearsal time is allowed for its preparation. The choir also needs to be able to field five confident soloists. Short as the solos are (except for the first soprano one which is more extended and different from the subsequent ones) they present issues which can test a less-confident singer.

CD tracks 16

The hard work is always worth it as a successful performance of this work is rewarding and memorable.

979-0-060-01449-9 Choral score

A Hymn to the Virgin (1930, rev.1934)

for unaccompanied SATB with solo or semi-chorus SATB quartet

Text: anon (circa 1300)

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2

As young as he was, aged only 16, Britten produced in this carol a tiny masterpiece. This is one of the most well-known and best-loved of his choral pieces. Understandably so, too. It has all the ingredients which make for a really satisfying choral experience. The use of a solo quartet or small semi-chorus, best placed at a distance, brings a dramatic element to the essential simplicity of the carol. The Latin responses of the semi-chorus to the medieval English words of the main chorus give these responses a further element of mystery which adds another layer of spiritual drama. The ratcheting up of the intensity in the final verse by increasing the tempo, by the ATB of the main chorus singing continuous rising phrases and by the sopranos singing a short phrase which is answered by the semi-chorus brings the piece to its climax. The final *tranquillo* page leads the carol to its conclusion in a mesmerizingly beautiful final phrase sung by the semi-chorus.

Care needs to be taken with the speed, the semi-chorus placing, and the creation of an atmosphere which demands attention from the listener. Speed: be careful to note Britten's marking of quaver (1/8th note) = 69-72. This is very slow indeed. Try it with a metronome. Many conductors perform this piece at crotchet (1/4 note) = 69! Frankly, I find the original speed too slow to make this piece flow. I see that when I recorded this with the Finzi Singers we made a tempo of crotchet = c50. Purists may be dismayed at this wilful ignoring of a composer's intentions (especially given the strictures outlined in the Preface to this Guide). I think if I were to re-record this now, I would choose a tempo of about quaver = 88. Note that for the quicker final verse Britten suggests a *crotchet* tempo. This means he did think about the issues of speed very carefully.

Placing: Some choirs choose to put the semi-chorus at the other end of the church, or in a gallery for dramatic effect. Directors, however, have to remember that while this might work in the first two verses, in the last verse the two groups sing together and have to balance to some degree. Thought should also be given to the fact that if the semi-chorus is placed at the other end of a church *behind* the audience, the audience sitting near the back will hear them more strongly than the main choir. It is best to place the semi-chorus *behind* the choir but still quite close, perhaps by the altar if the main choir is in the choirstalls, or just in front of the altar. Always make sure that the semi-chorus can see the conductor!

979-0-060-01451-2 Choral score

Philip's Breeches (1936)

for SATB unaccompanied

Text: Mary and Charles Lamb

Publisher: EBB Music Publishing (www.brittenpears.org)

Difficulty level: 2

This work from Britten's early twenties was written while on holiday with Lennox Berkeley in Cornwall in July 1936. The strange thing about its composition is that the words were only added some months later on the last day of the year. Quite how he wrote it in the first place not knowing what the words were to be is not clear. The part song has only recently been published online by the Britten-Pears Foundation under its EBB Music Publishing imprint.

The poem tells of the growth from boy to man as represented by the change from short to long trousers (or breeches). It is a very lively piece with the tempo marking *Presto vivace* and for the first half of the song it is entirely chordal and based on rising and falling fourths. Later a slightly regretful falling chromatic figure marks his feelings at leaving certain childish things behind. But the mood picks up and the ending romps home with a sense of wild triumph at the completion of such a rite of passage.

A bit of sheer good fun which is very straightforward to sing and which would be thoroughly enjoyed by an audience either as an encore or in a group of varied part songs perhaps by a variety of composers.

BTC807 Choral score

CD tracks 33

11'

4'

3'

Sacred and Profane op. 91 (1974-75) 16'

Eight medieval lyrics for unaccompanied voices (SSATB)

Texts: Anon. Early English

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 5

1. St. Godrick's hymn (mid 12th century)
2. I mon waxe wod (later 13th century)
3. Lenten is come (14th century)
4. The long night (earlier 13th century)
5. Yif ic of luve Can (earlier 14th century)
6. Carol (earlier 14th century)
7. Ye that pasen by (mid 14th century)
8. A death (13th century)

This fascinating and brilliant concert work was written for Peter Pears' *Wilbye Consort* and was therefore written with one voice for each of the five parts in mind. In reality, rather like *A.M.D.G.*, this is a tall order for the singers and it also creates a very different kind of performance from a carefully directed choral performance. The greater freedom and flexibility which a 'chamber music' format allows does not necessarily suit such a highly detailed score. There is the further complication of the requirement to sing properly pronounced medieval words, so overall this work is not for the faint-hearted. It requires and repays serious effort, detailed preparation for the pronunciation issues and decisions about what to do, for instance, in number 5 where the first soprano(s) is/are given a completely free part, differently barred and notated from the rest of the choir. This is where a one-voice-to-a-part performance will be much easier to achieve a natural sounding result than with a multi-voiced group which then has to be directed to achieve true unanimity of ensemble.

The score has a detailed Preface with helpful tips for pronunciation, and it also gives all the poems which Britten sets in the original early English and with a modern translation. Additionally, and very helpfully, Britten gives a phonetic guide to each word in italics in the musical score.

The music is a wonderful mix of styles and moods. This is very late Britten, completed only a year before his death. Here, therefore, is a composer absolutely on the top of his game, hugely experienced, and writing for a group of professionals for whom he knew he could be as challenging as he liked. One of the most satisfying elements of *Sacred and Profane*, to my mind, is the humour and boundless good nature which Britten lifts from these earthy poems. But everything is not always as it might appear. Number 2, for instance, with its *ostinato* rhythm set up by the two soprano parts in the first bar, may seem an amusing song all about birds in the wood and fish in the river – but then the alto(s) sing 'and I must go mad, much sorrow I live with...'. Suddenly the whole picture changes and that *ostinato* becomes a little drumming obsession for a simple medieval peasant. But then look at number 8 and see the *real* humour which brings this extraordinary cycle to its upbeat conclusion. This poem recounts the stages leading to a death which doesn't worry the subject at all: 'Then I shall pass from bed to floor, from floor to shroud, from shroud to bier and the grave. Then rests my house upon my nose. For the whole world I don't care a jot!'

This work is regularly performed by professional ensembles but rarely attempted by amateurs. It is the preserve of the best but is certainly manageable by really ambitious and high-achieving amateur choirs as long as sufficient time is given to mastering the complexities and dealing with the text. It repays careful work with dividends.

0-571-50086-2 Choral score

Shepherd's Carol (1944) 4'

for SATB unaccompanied (including SATB solos)

Text: W. H. Auden

Publisher: Novello (published in *Sing Nowell* carol collection)

Difficulty level: 1

While Britten and Auden were living in the United States Auden wrote the text for a *Christmas Oratorio* which he later re-titled *For the Time Being*. It was always intended that Britten would set the poem to music. In the end, however, Britten returned to the UK and only set two brief portions of the text when asked to contribute to a BBC radio programme called *A Poet's Christmas*. Britten then set the *Shepherd's Carol* and *Chorale after an Old French Carol*. Auden had remarked that the text for *The Shepherd's Carol* should be set as either 'jazz or Folk-song'. Britten's rather lovely easygoing setting seems to show that he had listened to Auden's advice.

The format of this beautifully simple carol is a repeated refrain sung by the choir ('O lift your little pinkie, and touch the winter sky...') interspersed by a verse each for the four soloists. It is one of Britten's most touchingly direct settings. It seems odd that he chose to withdraw it after its first performance.

NOV401436 Choral score

The Sycamore Tree (1930, rev.1934/67) 3'

for SATB unaccompanied

Text: Traditional

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2

This is a delightful carol which any choir should be happy to include in its Christmas programmes. It is a setting of the famous 'I saw three ships' text and indeed it was originally called by the more well-known title. Britten gives us an uncomplicated but wonderfully joyful setting based on a melody with which the carol begins and which has all the elements of a folk-melody. It is the kind of melody we think we have always known which adds to the carol's approachability. The texture develops as the words dictate until, at the end 'all the bells on earth did ring' and Britten has the voices pealing in scales.

This is a straightforward piece and a choir really only needs a good store of enthusiasm, energy and the ability to put across a story in words to produce a good performance (providing they have the notes right in the first place!).

0-571-50096-X Choral score

We are the darkness in the heat of the day (1956) 2'(from *The Heart of the Matter*)

Song for five-part chorus (SMezATB) unaccompanied

Text: Edith Sitwell

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1-2

This short unaccompanied setting formed part of a programme of Edith Sitwell's verse put together for the Aldeburgh Festival in 1956. Britten had set her words to music in his *Canticle III 'Still Falls the Rain*. After the performance Imogen Holst suggested to Britten that he might consider the setting of *We are the darkness in the heat of the day* as a separate piece. She prepared the score for her Purcell Singers but it was never performed in Britten's lifetime.

The short song is almost madrigalian in character, entirely homophonic (chordal) and leading to a beautiful and gentle conclusion. This is another of Britten's rarities which would add interest to a concert programme featuring his music or even recreating the spirit of that Aldeburgh programme around the poetry of Edith Sitwell – and perhaps others.

979-0-060-10585-2 Choral score

Whoso dwelleth under the Defence of the Most High (1937) 4'(from *The Company of Heaven*)

Anthem for SSAATTBB unaccompanied

Text: Psalm 91 (Myles Coverdale)

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 3

This is the only unaccompanied movement (9th) in *The Company of Heaven*, (see Choir and Orchestra) which was written as a radio feature for the BBC on the subject of St. Michael and all Angels and broadcast on that feast day (29 September) in 1937 when Britten was 23 years old.

This movement is based on the fifth psalm tone which is sung in unison at the start and features in many of the phrases which follow. It makes an interesting and unusual anthem for St. Michael's day and has a particularly lovely ending. Although every voice part divides into two (see above) at some points the piece is not scored for double choir and much of it is in single lines.

0-571-51138-4 Choral score

Mixed Voices with keyboard

CD track 3

Antiphon op. 56b (1956)

6'

for SATB with three treble/soprano solos (which Britten indicates can be reduced to one soloist or a semi-chorus) and organ

Text: George Herbert

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3

This work was written for the centenary of St. Michael's College, Tenbury. As so often, Britten uses treble or soprano solos which he indicates should be sung 'preferably in a gallery apart from the choir.' Ever the practical composer, however, he also allows that these solo parts can be reduced to one voice or be sung by a small group of voices.

The anthem is an interesting conception and its structure takes its cue both from the early part of Herbert's text which says: 'Praise be the God of Love, Here below And here above...', and the end of the poem which says: 'Praise be the God alone, Who has made of two folds one.' It is this division into two which led him into the idea of two groups of singers. It is more than this, though, as the first group, the main choir, has two roles, the singing of energetic phrases in a quicker tempo, and the quiet response to a slower solo line. Having moved backwards and forwards between these two 'characters' the choir eventually sings an uplifting 'fugato' which builds up a terrific head of steam with the organ part growing into crashing alternate hand chords and the pedals taking wing from the bottom to the top (literally) of the pedal board. A brief silence, and a chorale-like line subsides into a magical quiet ending where the three soloists sing triads to the word 'one' whilst the chorus responds with a lower triad on the word 'two'. The whole thing resolves onto a widely-spaced chord of F major and everyone singing the word 'one'. A slightly sentimental or glib touch? No, take it at face value after all that has gone before and appreciate Herbert's imagery. It is a wonderful resolution of the two elements played out through the piece.

As with many other such works, the *Antiphon* requires an accomplished organist. The choir also needs to be confident both in their notes and rhythm. This is a rarely performed work which should really be much better known and more often performed than at present. It is certainly within the grasp of a reasonably competent choir looking for less well-known music by a great composer.

979-0-060-01390-4 Organ score

CD track 8

The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard (1943)

10'

for male voices (T Bar B) and piano (Britten notes that this should be two pianos if performed by a large chorus)

Text: anon: from the *Oxford Book of Ballads*

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2-3

This work had a curious genesis. Britten's stance as a conscientious objector in World War II is well known but his sympathies for those caught up in its ramifications were as deeply felt as anyone's. Written in the middle of the war years, this ballad was composed 'For Richard Wood and the musicians of Oflag VIIb - Germany'. Wood had organised a music festival at this officers' POW camp at Eichstätt, Bavaria between February and March 1943 and Britten's work was performed at seven of the concerts.

The story tells of an unfaithful wife and her lover (Lady Barnard and little Musgrave) being discovered *in flagrante delicto* and murdered by the cheated husband, Lord Barnard. The music is wonderfully descriptive of the tale beginning with a plodding piano part and the prosaic opening of the tale. As the baritones and then the tenors join the fray, so intensity grows as the liaison between the two lovers is laid bare. A 'little tiny page' - Lady Barnard's footman - overhears the assignation made between the two, and he dashes off to spill the beans to his master who hastens to catch them red-handed. Musgrave thinks he hears Lord Barnard's hunting horn urging his horses to speed on. His mistress, however, encourages him to lie longer, thinking it is just a shepherd's horn. And so the die is cast. The ending is a moving slow threnody as Barnard laments the death of his wife, urging the gravediggers to put her on top of Musgrave as 'she comes from nobler kin'.

This is a wonderfully dramatic work which will be well within the capabilities of most reasonable choirs. It needs a group of singers who can sustain longish lines in the slower passages, and counter a possible tendency to flatness in these sections as well. Care should be taken over the balance between the three parts and especially over the division between the two bass parts. The

ability (desire) to tell the story with a sense of involvement and of passion will make all the difference to a successful performance.

979-0-060-01394-2 Choral score

A Ceremony of Carols

for SATB and harp

see *Children's and Upper Voices*

CD track 10

Festival Te Deum op. 32 (1945)

7'

for SATB (with treble/soprano solo) and organ

Text: Book of Common Prayer: liturgy of Morning Prayer

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2-3

Britten's second setting of the *Te Deum* is completely different from the C major one he wrote eleven years earlier. It was composed for the centenary Festival of St. Mark's Church in Swindon - an Anglo-Catholic church with a strong choral tradition which continues to this day. The structure of the piece is also different from the earlier work. A lengthy first section in unison which, while carefully notated in a variety of time signatures so that it feels as if it has the freedom of Gregorian chant, is accompanied by static organ chords in a regular 3/4 metre. It is a really imaginative approach, and is actually very simple to perform. While the organ chords continue, the choir breaks up into simple imitative phrases at 'The glorious company of the Apostles praise Thee' but soon returns to the unison lines of the opening. The central section ('Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ') has fanfare-like phrases from the choir interspersed by short dramatic outbursts from the organ which then subside into a rhythmic *piano* section with an important *ostinato* pedal part for the organ. These two ideas are then mixed together before the opening organ chords return and a treble/soprano soloist sings a lovely line. The choir joins and takes the canticle to its gentle conclusion with the soloist having the last word.

This setting is more straightforward than the earlier one. It does, however, have rhythmic issues which have to be mastered fully to do it justice. The choir, for instance, must not be pulled off course by the different time signature for the organ part in the opening and closing sections. It is all very straightforward in reality, it just looks complicated. Britten has thoughtfully annotated the vocal rhythm throughout the organ part for safety. The organist needs to be a confident musician. Where Britten may write eminently practically for the abilities of a parish church choir, he does not make similar allowances for the organist and the accompaniment is key to the success of a performance of this and many other such works.

979-0-060-01426-0 Organ score

CD track 26

A Hymn of St. Columba (1962)

3'

for SATB and organ

Text: attributed to St. Columba (in Latin)

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2

This short work was commissioned for the 1400th anniversary of the voyage Columba made from Ireland to the island of Iona. Rather bizarrely, the first 'performance' was given outdoors at Churchill, Co. Donegal where St. Columba was said to have preached and was apparently inaudible because of the strength of the wind!

The anthem is wonderfully effective and is a very good example of Britten's ability to create an original canvas within the traditions of the Anglican Church. The piece is all about the fire in Columba's belly for his missionary task. The words are almost a variation on the *Dies Irae*: 'King of Kings and Lord most high, his day of judgement comes near, Day of wrath and vengeance, Day of shadows and dark clouds...' etc. Britten brilliantly sets the mood with a disturbing pedal *ostinato* which keeps returning throughout the piece sometimes in the manuals and often in the pedals. The broad unison melody which begins the anthem returns at the end briefly as a canon between sopranos/tenors and altos/basses before closing, without slowing down, with two almost menacing, but ever-quietening repetitions of the word 'domini'.

Don't let the brevity of this work put you off from programming it. In fact, Britten wrote four 'Hymns' (Virgin/St. Peter/St. Columba/St. Cecilia) which work very well together in a concert and around which an imaginative programme can be built. Its brevity also makes it either suitable as an introit for a service

commemorating Columba, or perhaps, at All Souls or even Remembrance. It would serve equally as an anthem.

In performance it is Britten's direction that it should be sung 'with fire' which should underpin the interpretation. As always, making the most of dynamic variation will give the work some of its colour. The wonderful moment when, after a *diminuendo*, the first theme returns *pianissimo* and with a *crescendo* (...maeroris ac tristitiae, Regis regum rectissimi,) where the words 'King of Kings' are uttered with hushed awe needs special care and thought about tone quality.

979-0-060-01448-2 Choral score

CD track 27

Hymn to St. Peter op. 56a (1955)

6'

for SATB, treble/soprano solo or semi-chorus/organ

Text: from the Gradual of the Feast of St. Peter and St. Paul with Alleluia

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3

Written for the Quincentenary of St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich in 1955 and based on the plainsong 'Tu es Petrus' which is loudly declaimed on the organ in unison before the choir's first entry. This more extended anthem picks up on elements which Britten had used in his *Hymn to St. Cecilia* thirteen years earlier. The broad unison melody with which the choral parts start is similar, however, to the opening of the *Hymn of St. Columba*. It is the middle section written as a *scherzo* which is reminiscent of the section in the *St. Cecilia* hymn at figure 8 ('I cannot grow; I have no shadow to run away from...'). This is also the part of this anthem which might give less able choirs some trouble. It needs to be sung 'quickly and lightly' as Britten indicates and his metronome mark at dotted crotchet = 112 is indeed fast! But the notes are not difficult and they certainly reward detailed work. The next section is a reprise of the opening which moves into a dying Alleluia. The final section has lovely solo (or semi-chorus) phrases in Latin separated by very soft choral interjections translating these phrases into English.

It makes a very effective concert or liturgical work (see comments in *Hymn to St. Columba* about programming).

979-0-060-01450-5 Choral score

CD track 29

Jubilate Deo in C (1961)

3'

for SATB and organ

Text: Psalm 100 (Book of Common Prayer; Morning Prayer)

Publisher: Chester Music

Difficulty level: 1-2

This is another of Britten's best-known and most often performed short choral works. With its lively and spirited organ accompaniment and its simple and direct vocal phrases it positively bubbles with the joyful mood of the words. Short and to the point, it is also straightforward and well within the reach of most choirs. It does need a competent organist who can perform rhythmically, and play scales!

CH76560 Choral score

Jubilate Deo in E \flat (1934)

3'

for SATB and organ

Text: Psalm 100 (Book of Common Prayer: Morning Prayer)

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2

This early work was withdrawn by Britten for some reason and was not published until 1984. It was written as a companion piece for the C major *Te Deum* for St. Mark's, North Audley Street, London, though intriguingly he wrote it in E \flat major rather than C major. It may not have the same spark of genius as many of his other choral works, but it is a perfectly serviceable setting with broad singable lines and a straightforward organ part. An interpretation with some imagination can make the piece work well and leave a strong impression of these uplifting words.

0-571-50724-7 Choral score

Old Joe has gone fishing

for SATB and piano

see **Choral Music from the Operas**

CD track 2

Rejoice in the Lamb op. 30 (1943)

17'

for SATB with SATB solos and organ

Imogen Holst orchestrated the work for wind quintet, percussion, organ (ad lib) and strings (1952), and there is also a version for SSAA and organ arranged by Edmund Walters (1966)

Text: Christopher Smart

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3

One of Britten's most popular and performed works in this genre, *Rejoice in the Lamb* was written for the 50th anniversary of St. Matthew's church, Northampton in 1943. The remarkable vicar, Walter Hussey, was a great patron of the arts. His vision for St. Matthew's and later for Chichester Cathedral, where he moved to become Dean, is one of the most fascinating stories in the history of the Anglican Church in the last century.

Britten called his work a *Festival Cantata* and it is structured with choral and solo movements. The text by the supposedly mad Christopher Smart (1722-1771) is part of a poem called *Jubilate Agno* which he composed in a mental asylum having been committed there by his father-in-law for apparent religious mania. He died in a debtors' prison. It was W.H. Auden who brought the poem to Britten's attention. It is easy to see why Britten was so attracted to Smart's poem. It has great colour, drama, bizarre imagery, and the central issue of the individual against the crowd, or against authority, was one to which Britten was to return repeatedly in his works. Britten had developed a deep interest in Purcell's music at this time and had made keyboard realisations of accompaniments for a number of songs which he performed with Peter Pears. Purcell's influence can easily be heard in the *Hallelujah* sections.

The challenges in this work are many and varied though the difficulty level is not great overall. It is an ideal concert work and is popular with performers and audiences alike. Practical issues include really quiet singing while projecting the voice at the start; dealing with the rhythmic complexities of the first quick section ('Let Nimrod the mighty hunter') and getting the most out of the words and the dynamic contrasts here; the unanimity of the dotted rhythms in the *Hallelujah* sections; the fielding of four soloists who can put across the character of these zany movements (the cat, the mouse, flowers); the realisation of the depth of passion in the 'For I am under the same accusation as my Saviour' section; the brilliance of the final quick section with all the bizarre musical instrument rhymes; and finally realising the 'stillness and serenity' of the slow music before the final *Hallelujah*. There is much to consider and much devil in the detail. However, the work is emphatically worth any amount of effort to realise Britten's inspiration.

979-0-060-01512-0 SATB Choral score

979-0-060-82982-6 SSAA Choral score

Song of the Fishermen

for SATB and piano

see **Choral Music from the Operas**

Tallis's Canon

for SATB chorus, unison voices and organ or piano accompaniment.

see **Choral Music from the Operas**

Te Deum in C (1934)

9'

for SATB/treble or soprano solo/organ or orchestra (harp or piano and strings)

Text: Book of Common Prayer: liturgy of Morning Prayer

Publisher: Chester Music

Difficulty level: 3

Britten wrote few canticle settings, only two *Te Deums*, two settings of the *Jubilate* and a *Venite* which was not published in his lifetime. He wrote no settings of the Evening Canticles for the Anglican rite. The settings we have are therefore all the more precious and, as always, show the originality of his creative mind. This *Te Deum* is, to my mind, the finest of these liturgical settings. It has drama, energy, variety, and clarity and integrity of structure. The opening page sets the scene and introduces the pedal syncopated *ostinato* which underpins the whole of the first section and the 'reprise' when it comes after the contrasting central section. The voices climb from the bass up to soprano in quietly urgent statements of 'We praise you' and build to a huge climax at 'Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth'. The central section is given to a treble or soprano soloist with the choir reinforcing his or her phrase ends with quietly urgent chords and the words 'O Christ!' Longer phrases develop and lead to the reintroduction of the pedal *ostinato* and the initial choral material. Another thrilling climax is reached before the beautiful quiet ending.

Few cathedrals or churches sing the Office of Matins these days for which this canticle was intended and so its original liturgical setting is rarely possible nowadays. It is much more of use as an anthem or as a concert item and it is, of course, extremely effective in either rôle. The challenges in this work are as much for the conductor as the choir. The conductor needs to see the big picture, relate the first and last sections and prevent the central one from becoming sentimental or too slow. He/she needs to make sure that Britten's directions about tempi are fully understood, and which tempo he means when he directs Tempo I or II etc. For the choir, it is the ability to sing quietly with abundant energy, to have absolute clarity of diction, to note the details of articulation – the staccato marking, for instance, on the word 'Lord' in bar 54, and similar markings in the central section. This is an outstanding setting of these much-set words and it should be far more widely performed.

CH76582 Vocal score

CH76593 Full score

Two Part-Songs

I lov'd a lass (1932) 2'

Lift Boy (1932) 3'

for SATB and piano

Texts: George Withers (*I lov'd a lass*) and Robert Graves (*Lift Boy*)

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2

These are two delightful and contrasted part-songs for choir and piano which ought to be a gift to choirs looking for rare secular repertoire for their concert programmes. *I lov'd a lass* is full of fun, while the challenge lies in the regularly changing metre. The choir's first bar is in 7/8 and is followed by 5/4 and then 3/4. Later on Britten gives us 3/4, 7/8, 11/8, 4/4, 5/4, 7/8, 4/4 in successive bars but this all adds to the entertainment. There are lots of *portamenti* too in what adds up to a passionate little piece.

Lift Boy sets a nonsense poem by Robert Graves about a boy who starts life as a knife-boy, moves on to become a lift boy and then a lift man. Preached damnation by 'Old Eagle' one day, he cuts the lift cables and down they all go. But Graves ends by saying: 'Can a phonograph lie? A song very neatly contriv'd to make you and me laugh.' Curious indeed. But Britten obviously sees the humour in it with a busy piano part accompanying straightforward choral passages which have nothing of the complexity of metre of the previous song. The message of damnation is delivered in suitably solemn tones before the piece dances off to its laughing ending.

I lov'd a lass 979-0-060-01454-3 Choral score

Lift Boy 979-0-051-41850-3 Choral score

Venite Exultemus Domino (1961)

6'

for SATB and organ

Text: Psalm 95 (Book of Common Prayer: Morning Prayer)

Publisher: Chester Music

Difficulty level: 1-2

This work was not published in Britten's lifetime but it was obviously intended as a companion work to the *Jubilate in C* as it was written in the same year. It wasn't performed until 1983 when it was given its premiere in Westminster Abbey under Simon Preston. The choir sings chant-like phrases almost in the manner of Anglican chant. The organ joins the end of a phrase and modulates where it will from where the choir picks up and travels to a further place. The phrases are varied dynamically but the greatest colour is given via the medium of key change.

It is a curiously effective piece. Time is almost suspended, and once the listener has got over the surprise at its means and has settled into focusing on the words, the music takes on a life of its own. The gentle *Gloria* is especially effective.

CH76571 Choral score

Voices for Today op. 75 (1965)

10'

Anthem for Chorus (men, women and children) with organ accompaniment (*ad libitum*)

Text: At the suggestion of E.M. Forster and Peter Pears, Britten chose a selection of 'sentences or verses from the great peace lovers of history': Jesus Christ, Asoka, Sophocles, Lao Tzu, Bright, Penn, Melville, Camus, Lec, Yevtushenko, Blake, Hölderlin, Tennyson, Shelley and Virgil.

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 4

Voices for Today is an example of a substantial choral work by Britten which is almost never performed. It was composed for the 20th anniversary of the United Nations and was given three simultaneous premieres in London, New York and Paris. Note-wise it is not as difficult as *Sacred and Profane* for instance, but it is not easy, and it is not an immediate work to grasp as it is unlike any other in Britten's output. Its performance complexities add to these issues. Britten has scored the work for a main chorus part for SATB and a separate boys' choir (which, of course, can be boys and girls or just girls) which he indicates should be in a gallery if possible with its own conductor. His detailed performance instructions show how these two groups should operate. 'The boys' part has no regular measured tempo, but its rhythm is shown by dotted barlines... The speeds of the two choruses are usually not the same, but the beats must coincide whenever there is a long barline running from top to bottom of the system.' Further instructions are given including singing the work in the performers' vernacular (except for Virgil's *Eclogue*).

If it all sounds complicated and off-putting it should be given its chance to shine through a committed performance. In some ways it shares a mindset with *Advance Democracy* in that it is a politically motivated work whose text advocates the peace which Britten so passionately believed in and which later on was writ large in the *War Requiem*. In reality, what sounds complicated in the coordination of the two choirs is perfectly straightforward to realise as Britten gives 'curlew' signals in the score where either choir can hold while the other completes its phrase, so that a point of required ensemble can be reached at the same moment.

After a richly scored opening 'If you have ears to hear, then hear!' the music becomes almost surprisingly spare as if Britten wants maximum clarity from the singing of the words. He wants his points made clearly and concisely. The boys' choir does not join until the extended setting of Virgil which is at approximately the half-way point. Here, the choir sings short chant-like phrases divided by commas while the boys sing a wordless melody at a completely different speed, ignoring the commas of the main choir but having key moments of common arrival. The music of the main choir develops with a variety of textures and dynamic contrasts reflecting the text. Eventually, in the final section, the boys divide into two parts singing the words of the opening (quoted above) and the choir sings Virgil's closing words (in Latin) 'Start now, little boy, by greeting your mother with a smile. Her ten months' pregnancy has been long and tiring. Start now little boy...' (The ten months is within the scale of the Julian calendar).

There is an organ part which can be used and which Britten noted 'should be used primarily when the resonance of the building is inadequate'. In my opinion the organ part enhances the work.

0-571-50020-X Choral score

A Wedding Anthem (Amo Ergo Sum) op. 46 (1949)

10'

for SATB with soprano and tenor soloists and organ

Text: Ronald Duncan

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3-4

This anthem, which is really more like a mini cantata than an anthem, was written for the marriage of the Earl of Harewood and Marion Stein. It took place in St. Mark's, North Audley Street, London, the church for which Britten had written his C major *Te Deum* and E♭ *Jubilate*. The original soloists were Joan Cross and Peter Pears and Britten conducted.

The difficulty with this work is that it really requires two professional soloists to do it justice. The choir begins the anthem and Britten uses the *Ave Maria* which Duncan places at the beginning and end of the first verse like a peal of bells. It is wonderfully effective. It is also used as a refrain. The second section (verse) is marked 'Recitative' and is for soprano solo. The early freedom implied by that term gives way to an *Andante comodo* and the soloist sings a beautiful lyrical setting of Duncan's imaginative words. The choir returns with a *piano* version of the 'Ave Maria' as a refrain and the tenor soloist takes over for verse three. Britten's flowing organ accompaniment takes its cue from the opening words here: 'As mountain streams find one another Till they are both merged there in a broad, peaceful river...' This is another extended and lovely solo for the tenor. In verse four, the choir rejoins for a brief refrain using the opening words of the anthem, and the soloists now sing a lively, playful duet. The ending for everyone is a quietly ravishing 'Amen'.

This is another work of Britten's which is almost never performed. The choral parts are not difficult and the organ part is less challenging than some of Britten's other choral/organ works. Only the solo parts would seem to represent a barrier to a regular performance profile for the anthem. These are not difficult solos in themselves, but do need singers who can project a real sense of the 'solo' and also have an easy top B♭ (both soloists) which can be managed without fuss in a lovely rising scale situation.

979-0-060-12018-3 Vocal/Piano score

A Ceremony of Carols op. 28 (1942, rev.1943) 22'

for boys' or female voices and harp (piano *in extremis* but with alterations and omissions)

There is also a version for SATB and harp arranged by Julius Harrison

Texts: Latin and English

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| 1. Procession | (using a variant of the <i>Magnificat</i> antiphon for the second Vespers of the Nativity of Our Lord) |
| 2. Wolcum Yole! | (anon.) |
| 3. There is no rose | (anon.) |
| 4a. That yongë child | (anon.) |
| 4b. Balulalow | (James, John and Robert Wedderburn) |
| 5. As dew in Aprille | (anon.) |
| 6. This little babe | (Robert Southwell) |
| 7. Interlude | (harp solo) |
| 8. In Freezing Winter Night | (Robert Southwell) |
| 9. Spring Carol | (William Cornish) |
| 10. Deo gracias | (anon.) |
| 11. Recession | (as for Procession) |

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3

The *Ceremony of Carols* is one of Britten's best-known and most-performed works. It is a brilliantly conceived and dramatic concert work which sees the voices process to their places singing unaccompanied plainsong and, at the end, processing out again to the same chant. These movements can also be accompanied but strictly only if the voices do not process. The final *Alleluia* can be repeated as many times as necessary to get the singers to and from their destination.

The carols are for three-part children's voices (though, of course they can be sung by female adults as well) and they form a two-part work around a central *Interlude* for harp which is based on the plainsong from the Procession. Variety is the key word here as all the carols have such individual identities. The forthright *Wolcum Yole!*, the deliciously lyrical *There is no Rose*, the swinging *Balulalow*, the fiery and dramatic *This little Babe* all contribute to a work which is a feast of discovery throughout. Lovely solos and duos add further colour and the harp part, an inspired choice of accompaniment, enriches, colours and surrounds the voices with its pictorial musical imagery. If anything shows Britten's genius for writing for voices it must be this work.

The challenges here are in creating a real equality between voice parts, fielding a confident pair of soloists, and making the most of the wonderfully colourful poems Britten has chosen to set. Pronunciation is not really an issue, but when I recorded this work with the Finzi Singers I decided to follow the example of *Sacred and Profane* and use authentic medieval pronunciation for which an expert coach was necessary. It brings an added element of colour to a familiar aural experience.

Complete editions:

- 979-0-060-01410-9 SSA Choral score
- 979-0-060-01411-6 SATB Choral score
- 979-0-060-01412-3 Harp part

Separate editions:

- 2. Wolcum Yole!**
- 979-0-060-01561-8 SSA Choral score
- 979-0-051-41826-8 SATB Choral score
- 3. There is no rose**
- 979-0-060-01544-1 SSA Choral score
- 979-0-060-82979-6 SATB Choral score
- 4b: Balulalow**
- 979-0-051-41916-6 SSA Choral score
- 5. As dew in Aprille**
- 979-0-060-01391-1 SSA Choral score
- 6. This little babe**
- 979-0-060-01545-8 SSA Choral score
- 979-0-060-82980-2 SATB Choral score
- 8. In Freezing Winter Night**
- 979-0-060-01455-0 SSA Choral score
- 9. Spring Carol**
- 979-0-060-01532-8 SA Choral score
- 10. Deo gracias**
- 979-0-060-01419-2 SSA Choral score
- 979-0-060-01420-8 SATB Choral score

The Children's Crusade op. 82 (1969) 19'

A Ballad for Children's voices and orchestra

Scoring: 6 solo perc (small gong, bd, susp cymb, small cymb, wb, trng, sd, tabor, 2 glock, tamb, bells, td, xyl, scraper, gong, t-t)/tutti perc ('divided into three categories which can include any of the following instruments, tuned: t bells, xyl, vibr, glock, cel; rhythmic: sd, td, tabor, bd, wb, tamb, castanets, rattle, trng, susp cymb; clashed or ringing: clashed cymb, trng, gong or t-t, anvil, cowbells, sleighbells)/2 pianos, chamber or electronic organ.

Text: Berthold Brecht translated by Hans Keller

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 3-4

This is a big serious piece for children – yet another fine example of Britten writing a major work with a serious subject at its heart for young people to both sing and play. The huge array of percussion is designed to be played by school children supplemented by a few teachers/adults. The piano and organ parts are specifically designed to support the singers and to help with providing the pitch for starts of phrases and often with continuation as well.

The choral parts are all for unbroken voices though there is one solo part which Britten allocates to a 'tenor' though, in reality, he is still thinking of this as a child's voice which is 'on the cusp' – an alto in chest voice.

The *Children's Crusade* is another war piece. Coming after the *War Requiem* where he had unburdened his soul in relation to his pacifist convictions, he still wanted to take up Wilfred Owen's assertion that 'all a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poet must be truthful.' This piece is another demonstrating the futility of war, witnessed through the eyes of a group of brave Polish children in the face of overwhelming odds. It is a moving work on various levels, but the immediacy of Brecht's imagery (the dog adds further to the poignancy of the story) coupled with Britten's decision to use children to perform it, leaves an indelible impression on the mind of the listener, and undoubtedly the performer – as was obviously intended.

This is not an easy work. Unlike the light-hearted *Welcome Ode* this is a major undertaking. Britten is, as usual, very clear in his intentions and writes a helpful explanatory preface. He notes that two conductors are probably necessary especially as there are times when the voices and the instruments follow different tempi. He uses a 'curlew' sign – as he did in *Voices for Today* and elsewhere – to indicate when one group must wait for the other before continuing. Compared with some of the convoluted aleatoric or improvisatory passages required by contemporary composers Britten's devices are fairly straightforward and are clearly notated. They should not hold undue terrors for modern performers. However, they do require understanding and performance discipline and conductors who will be clear in their directions.

Britten asks for nine soloists. These are all children from the choir who, as Britten directs, 'should stand and sit where marked in the score'. One sings out of sight. The vocal parts are not particularly difficult though they are certainly not easy. The keyboard parts provide a good deal of support in terms of starting notes etc. But this is never done obviously and the singers will have to know how to hear what they are being offered in support.

The bottom line in this piece is that these young people are never being written down to. Britten writes a work which challenges them on every level – including the nature of the story. That makes *Children's Crusade* a hugely worthwhile work to rehearse and perform. With today's emphasis on co-education the involvement of girls with boys makes the whole thing far more achievable in every sense than it might have been at the time of its premiere.

Rediscover a dramatic and involving score. This is a kind of Noye's *Fludde* but exclusively for children.

- 0-571-50332-2 Choral score
- 0-571-50330-6 Full score

Fancie (1961, rev.1965) 1'

for unison/optional three part voices and piano

Text: Shakespeare

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1

This was originally one of three settings of Shakespeare texts by different composers – the others being Kodály and Poulenc. It is classic Britten: lovely singable lines, colourful piano part and a highly effective division into three parts at the end in the revised version. It would programme well with *The Oxen*.

- 979-0-060-01423-9 Choral score

Friday Afternoons op. 7 (1933-35)

23'

Twelve children's songs with piano accompaniment

Texts:

- | | | |
|-------|------------------------------|---|
| 1. | Begone, dull care | (anon.) |
| 2. | A tragic story | (William Makepeace Thackeray) |
| 3. | Cuckoo! | (Jane Taylor) (in 2 parts, 2nd ad lib.) |
| 4. | "Ee-Oh!" | (anon.) |
| 5. | A New Year Carol | (anon.) |
| 6. | I mun be married on Sunday | (Nicholas Udall) |
| 7. | There was a man of Newington | (anon.) |
| 8. | Fishing Song | (Izaak Walton) |
| 9. | The useful plough | (anon.) |
| 10. | Jazz-Man | (Eleanor Farjeon) |
| 11. | There was a monkey | (anon.) |
| 12. | Old Abram Brown | (anon.) (in 4 parts) |
| (13.) | Lone Dog | (Irene McLeod) |

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1-2

This set of mainly unison songs for young voices is a gift for a concert of music for upper voices. It is a substantial work taken as a whole but its individual movements are both short and straightforward in their various challenges. Britten wrote the work for the boys of his brother's preparatory school (age 7-13), Clive House, Prestatyn, in Wales to sing. However he encountered a problem with copyright over the use of the *Lone Dog*. He therefore wrote *Begone, dull care* to replace it. When these issues were resolved years later the song was included as an appendix item in the 1994 edition.

The real beauty of these songs is that Britten never writes down for the children. These are art songs in the best sense of the word and mix both dark and light humour with seriousness and romance to create a little world of changing scenes and emotions. The texts are, as always, carefully chosen to give Britten maximum variety of mood and to challenge and encourage the children's interest and involvement. The piano parts carry a lot of the responsibility for the creation of mood and atmosphere and ideally need a pianist of reasonable accomplishment to do them justice. In *There was a monkey* Britten writes an increasingly challenging part which is very effective in making the charged mood rise to its climax. However, he writes an easier alternative part which can be played if the pianist finds the other too difficult.

The mixture of texts gives Britten wonderful opportunities for word painting. The lively *Begone, dull care* which opens the work, the nonsense poem of A tragic story where a man wants his pigtail to hang in front so he can see it, the gentle story of the Cuckoo and his progress through the months of the year, the rather sobering story (especially in our post-fox hunting ban days) of the shooting of a fox by a farmer whose geese it has killed, the sublime A New Year's Carol – and so on, leading to the powerful four part canon of *Old Abram Brown*. These little pieces demonstrate so clearly Britten's genius – his ability to write really good music which is so recognisably his – without any feeling that he is making compromises for the young singers.

979-0-060-10500-5 Choral score

Separate editions:

No. 2 A Tragic Story

979-0-060-01548-9 Choral score

No. 5 A New Year Carol

979-0-060-01473-4 Choral score

No. 12 Old Abram Brown

979-0-060-01485-7 Choral score

The Golden Vanity op. 78 (1966)

17'

A vaudeville for boys and piano after the old English ballad

Text: Colin Graham

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2

This work for treble voices (it really needs to be boys because of the subject matter) is another gift for schools – or for those communities or towns which still have boys' choirs. Its subject matter is heavily masculine but, like a lot of Britten's more searingly emotional works, involves the individual against the crowd, the powerful against the underdog, the power of impossible love, and the ultimate weakness of those who are supposed to be leaders. There is a lot of *Billy Budd* in *The Golden Vanity*. To this end, like the *Children's Crusade* (see separate entry under 'works with orchestra'), there is an unspoken moral to the story which Britten hoped would seep into the children's consciousness and be a direction indicator for their adult morality. This, he hoped, might be a small step in helping to make the world a better and a fairer place.

The story is simple. *The Golden Vanity*, laden with gold and silver coins, sets out to sail 'the lowland sea' when she soon encountered a Turkish galleon

'who had no business...on the waters of the lowland sea'. The Turks turned out to be pirates and the captain of the *Golden Vanity* first thought of turning around and running for safety. His crew had other thoughts, however, and a broadside was fired which fell hopelessly short. While re-loading their cannons on the starboard side the Turks sailed to the port side and fired a broadside which disabled the *Golden Vanity*. Scared witless, the captain feels that all is lost and that they will be captured and sold into Turkish slavery. However, he reckons without the plucky young cabin boy who respectfully offers to sink the Turkish ship, but not before first asking that his reward should be to marry the captain's beautiful daughter. There is general ridicule on all fronts from the crew, the Bosun being especially despairing as he had set his sights on the same girl. But the brave young cabin boy is as good as his word, strips off, dives overboard and, with a small spike, sets about gouging holes in the hull of the Turkish ship. The Turks are celebrating and gaming above and do not notice their ship filling up with water. Panic and confusion follow as the ship sinks. Wild celebration erupts from the *Golden Vanity*. The cabin boy swims back but is overlooked. He tries to attract the attention of the Captain and the bosun who purposefully ignore him: the captain because he cannot conceive of such a match for his daughter, the bosun because he wants her for himself. The boy swims around the other side of the ship and appeals to his messmates to save him but they are too late and when he is lifted out of the water he is dead. His cries of 'sinking, sinking' will haunt them all forever. The Captain and his bosun 'turned away but found we couldn't weep, ashamed of the promises we never did keep – for the thought of the cabin boy no more shall we sleep, while we sail on the Lowland sea'.

The work divides the choir into two, representing the two ships. It also requires various soloists to sing the parts of the Captain (alto), Bosun (treble) and Cabin-boy (treble) from the first, and Pirate Captain (alto) and Pirate Bosun (treble) from the second. Britten asks that there should be no scenery as such but only a few props such as ropes and telescopes. The boys should dress in costume but mime the actions. A drum is used to represent the cannon fire. The two 'boats' should have pennants to identify them.

Compared with the *Children's Crusade* this is a very straightforward work. It is another example of Britten's ability to write a serious work in a light format and in a simple enough style to be widely taken up and thoroughly enjoyed. The element of simple drama increases its appeal (the boys march in and out, for instance). The insistence on simplicity of production lends further appeal to hard-pressed music and art departments.

The musical phrases are simple enough to sing and there are only very few moments when harmony is required and the boys split into parts. The refrain '...and she sailed upon the Lowland Sea' is always given a chord on the first syllable of 'Lowland' each time it is sung (this is slightly extended for the very final phrase of the work). For the rest, the music is divided into the two parts representing the two ships. The pianist needs to be competent and rhythmically supportive.

0-571-50107-9 Chorus part (Eng/Ger)

0-571-50106-0 Vocal score (Eng/Ger)

0-571-55492-X Vocal score (Fr)

King Herod and the Cock (1962)

2'

for unison voices and piano

Text: traditional

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1

This is a simple arrangement of a folk melody collected by Cecil Sharp. Neither the voice part nor the piano part is difficult but, as always, the writing is supremely effective. It was composed for the London Boy Singers and was premiered by them at the 1962 Aldeburgh Festival with Britten at the piano. The first three verses are all the same, the fourth has subtle changes which add a touch of spice to the whole. In performance it is the words which need to be really put across and given dynamic interest, variety and projection.

979-0-060-01457-4 Choral score

Missa Brevis in D op. 63 (1959)

11'

for boys' (upper) voices and organ

Text: Ordinary of the Roman Rite (Latin)

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2-3

Like the *Ceremony of Carols* this work is one of Britten's most performed and well-loved works for upper voices. It was written for George Malcolm's outstanding boys at Westminster Cathedral with their distinctively bright continental tone. Many other types of upper voices have since adopted it, of course, and these days it is as much performed by women or girls, or mixed boys' and girls' voices as by boys alone. The *Missa Brevis* requires three soloists,

though it is possible to make it work with only two. The choir is divided into three voice parts, the third of which needs to be able to produce low As.

The work is incredibly fresh and original. Part of this is Britten's organ part which is no 'accompaniment' but rather an equal partner in the realisation of the text in music. Britten's direction in the *Kyrie* that the voices should sing 'passionately' underpins the approach to the performance of the whole work. It is an intensely dramatic reading of these familiar words. The grave passion of the *Kyrie*, the rhythmic ebullience of the *Gloria* with its 7/8 time signature and its colourful dynamic contrasts, the pealing bells of the *Sanctus*, the slow, measured tread of the *Benedictus* (the gentle march of 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord') for two solo voices followed by the tutti for the pealing *Hosanna*, and finally, a rather dark and troubled *Agnus Dei* which impresses through its relentless intensity and its final exhausted staccato utterance of 'dona nobis pacem'.

While not as difficult note-wise as the *Ceremony of Carols* (and being far shorter as well), there are still plenty of challenges for any group of voices that undertakes this work. It needs three really equal voice parts and solo voices that can sing with confidence and conviction. Tuning issues will also arise at key points, and the ability to tune three part chords instinctively is needed in much of the work. It also helps if the organ which plays with the voices has a suitable range of colours to realise Britten's intentions.

979-0-060-01469-7 Vocal score
979-0-060-01470-3 Choral score

O can ye sew cushions? (1942)

3'

arranged for SSA and piano by Imogen Holst

Text: Traditional Scottish
Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1

Britten made many folk song arrangements throughout his life with those from the British Isles becoming particularly popular. Imogen Holst, Britten's amanuensis for many years, made an arrangement of this song for SSA which simply fills out the harmony for the lower parts in well-written singing lines.

979-0-051-45213-2 Choral score

The Oxen (1967)

3'

Carol for women's voices (two parts) and piano

Text: Thomas Hardy
Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 1

Peter Pears' sister asked Britten to write this carol for publication in the National Federation of Women's Institutes' Book of Carols (1968). All the Somerset branches of the WI were asked to submit possible texts for Britten to choose from. Hardy's well-known poem 'Christmas eve, and twelve of the clock' brought from Britten a beautiful setting in which the piano part mirrors the tolling of the clock for midnight. It is in three clear sections with the central section being quicker before moving back to the original material for the final part. It is straightforward for singers and memorably effective. It would programme well with *Fancie*.

0-571-51860-5 Choral score (Part of Three Carols for Upper Voices)

Psalm 150 op. 67 (1962)

6'

for two part children's voices and instruments

Scoring: Treble instr I, Treble instr II, bass instr, 2 perc (timps, sd or tamb, cymb, susp cym, trng, tamb or castanets), keyboard. Optional parts, transposed if necessary, for 2 cl; tpt, hn, trbn; va

Text: Psalm 150 in English
Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1-2

This setting of the great psalm of praise which concludes the Psalter is typical of Britten's compositions for schools. It was composed for the centenary of Britten's own prep school – Old Buckenham Hall School (called South Lodge School when he was there) – which he attended between 1923 and '28. As can be seen from the scoring details above it is intended that as many children as possible can be involved in the performance by playing a variety of instruments which are not specifically detailed. So, there are two 'treble instrument' parts which might be anything from a recorder to a violin or flute and a 'bass instrument' which might be a 'cello or a bassoon – and so on. The voice parts divide into four (a canon at 'let everything that hath breath praise the Lord') but are basically in two parts and there is a great deal of unison singing.

As one might expect, Britten makes full use of the different forms of praise

described in the verses of the psalm to colour his composition. The delightful, dancing 7/8 rhythm of 'Praise him with the sound of the trumpet' makes an irresistible, light-hearted and toe-tapping section before the culminating 'Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord'. A *Gloria* gives the work a suitably climactic ending.

This is another brilliant, flexible and involving work for children. At only six minutes duration it can form a magical item in a school concert without the additional challenges of scenery/choreography which some of his other works for young people can involve.

979-0-060-01504-5 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-01505-2 Choral score

979-0-060-04664-3 Set of parts

979-0-060-04663-6 Full Score

Rejoice in the Lamb

for SSAA and organ

see **Mixed Voices with keyboard**

Rossini Suite (1935)

12'

for boys' voices and chamber ensemble

Scoring: fl (=picc), ob, cl; 2 perc (xyl, sd, bd, cymb, trng, glock, tamb, susp cym, wb, castanets); piano

Text: Wordless

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1 (chorus)

This is essentially a chamber ensemble work with a wordless boys' chorus adding another element to the scoring. I quote Paul Banks' Britten Catalogue as to the background of the work:

'These arrangements were made in connection with Lotte Reiniger's short animated silhouette film *The Tocher* (GPO Film Unit, 1935), but in the event only music from nos 1, 2 and 5 was used on the soundtrack (conducted by Britten). In 1936 nos 1, 2 and 4 were rescored and with two new arrangements formed *Soirées musicales*, op.9. In 1941 no.3 was reworked as the opening march of *Matinées musicales*.'

The boys' voices are used in two movements only. In the second they sing a beautifully lyrical wordless melody to an 'ah' vowel or as a hum. In the fifth and final movement they sing a madrigalian 'tra la la' in an *Allegro con brio* which is irresistibly lively and ends with a shout!

979-0-060-83650-3 Piano reduction

Sweet was the song

for upper voices with contralto solo

see **Christ's Nativity in Mixed Voices unaccompanied**

Three two-part songs (1932)

6'

1. **The Ride-by-nights** 2. **The Rainbow** 3. **The Ship of Rio**

for boys' or girls'/women's voices and piano

Texts: Walter de la Mare
Publisher: Chester Music

Difficulty level: 1

These are three lovely songs making a really delightful set in a concert programme. They were originally called *Three Studies in Canon* and that says all that needs to be said about how these pieces are structured. Britten loved writing in canon and seemed to tease out the fun of having voices leading and following each other. Remember that fabulous three-part canon in the *Ceremony of Carols: This little babe* as one of the most brilliant examples.

These pieces are very straightforward for all participants – piano and voices and are ideal material for schools or for upper voice choirs looking for original material which lights a special touch paper.

CH76615 Choral score

The Twelve Apostles (1962)

6'

for tenor solo, unison chorus and piano

Text: traditional
Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 1

This piece was first performed along with *King Herod and the Cock* by the London Boy Singers (see the entry above). It is interesting to note that Britten originally intended a larger-scale work which would have become his *Canticle IV* but what he wrote was beyond the capabilities of the London Boy Singers and so Britten switched track leaving the other work unfinished and wrote these two folk song arrangements instead.

The tune of this song is well-known, lively, and perfect for singing by a group of children. The pianist takes the weight of responsibility for creating the right mood to support the singers. The idea of using a tenor soloist in dialogue with the children is brilliant. Not only does it add colour and texture but an element of drama as well. The ending rushes madly for the final barline!

[0-571-50595-3](#) Choral score

A Wealden Trio (1929, rev.1967)

3'

Christmas Song of the Women

for unaccompanied SSA

Text by Ford Maddox Ford (1873-1939)

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2

The earliest versions of this choral work were composed when Britten was aged only 15, therefore pre-dating *A Hymn to the Virgin*. He uses an interesting text for what is essentially a miniature scena in which three women bemoan (in dialect – which the performance notes suggest should not be exaggerated!) the fact that Christmas is hard when there is little food, there is no wood for the fire and their husbands are good-for-nothings. They end by feeling aggrieved that it is warm in heaven and cold on earth but note that Jesus was born in equally poor conditions as the ones in which they live and so they can relate to him and his parents on this level. Britten, young as he was, felt the instinctive drama of this (as the incipient opera composer).

The carol can be sung by three solo voices, or three soloists with a chorus, or the whole piece can be sung by a choir. The most dramatic option is the soloist followed by a chorus which is surely the way Britten intended it. Soloists should be placed a little apart from the chorus, if this option is taken, in order that issues of balance don't arise. This is especially true when, in the second half, a soloist sings with the chorus.

The carol is essentially straightforward and ought not to present undue problems to a choir used to singing rhythmically, dealing with duplets in a compound time signature and which can field three confident soloists.

[0-571-51860-5](#) Choral score (Part of Three Carols for Upper Voices)

Ballad of Heroes op. 14 (1939)

18'

for tenor (or soprano) solo, chorus and orchestra

Scoring: 3 (II=picc), 2, ca (=obIII), 2, cl in Eb, 2, dbl bn (=bnIII); 4, 2, 3, 1; timps, 2 perc (xyl, sd, td, bd, whip, cymb); harp, strings; OFFSTAGE: 3 trumpets in C; sd (optional instruments are ca, dbl bn, offstage tpts and sd). Britten asks for the offstage instruments to be in a gallery or 'isolated position', and later to be out of sight.

Text: W H Auden and Randall Swingler

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3 (for chorus)

This highly dramatic and rarely performed work was written for a *Festival of Music for the People* and first performed on 5 April 1939 at the Queen's Hall, London, conducted by Constant Lambert. It is another of Britten's passionate outbursts against the waste and horror of war which had already engulfed Europe once earlier in the century and was about to do so for the second time. The declaration of war was made on 3 September that year. His choice of texts is highly significant. He had collaborated with Randall Swingler as recently as the previous year on his short unaccompanied choral work *Advance Democracy* – another politically motivated piece (see separate entry). Both Swingler and Auden were aiming in their poems to goad the downtrodden Englishman into standing up and fully living the life of freedom for which their forebears fought and lost their lives. Swingler's lines which say: 'You who lean at the corner and say "We have done our best", ...To you we speak, you numberless Englishmen, To remind you of the greatness still among you...Your life is yours, for which they died.' sum up the essence of the message of the piece.

The work is in three continuous movements. First comes a Funeral March (to Swingler's poem part-quoted above), then a manic Scherzo, a *Dance of Death* to a rum-te-tum verse by Auden which only increases its sense of the *macabre*. Finally comes a slow and powerful *recitative and chorale* and a slow *Epilogue* in which the funeral march music from the opening returns.

Virtually the whole of the first section of the opening movement is in unison for the chorus. The slow tread of the funeral march is given an added solemnity by this unison singing. The first ten bars are recited on a low C, the next eight bars an octave higher, and after this there is a mixture of simple harmony (more to avoid high notes for low voices) and further unison singing for the rest of the movement. The Scherzo is interesting in setting out the first three vocal parts in a kind of fugal progress. The tenors have the first complete statement in the home key (G minor), the altos are next in the dominant but by themselves, the sopranos are next in line and back in the tonic – again by themselves, and finally the basses have the subject but this time as the basis of a canon at the unison between them and the altos (in a truncated version). The tenors, a major third higher, are followed by the sopranos and then the voices gradually come together to take the music to its first impassioned climax. Short, sharp, quick-fire phrases interrupt the ongoing relentless orchestral progress often referring back to that original musical idea. The music dies out at the end in an exhausted hush.

The third movement introduces the tenor (or soprano) soloist in a highly lyrical accompanied recitative. The choir responds with a simply harmonised chorale which acts as a backdrop to the soloist's continuing line. This section is unaccompanied and, though simple for the choir, provides the greatest challenge of the work in keeping the pitch up. There are eighteen bars of slow sustained singing here after which a horn delivers the verdict on the success or failure of the choir to keep in tune. After this the chorale material is maintained but with full orchestra support until the *Epilogue* when material from the opening returns and the choir sings those repeated unison Cs to take the work to its quietly effective ending.

The *Ballad of Heroes* is straightforward for a choir to perform. The complexity, such as it is, is all in the orchestra. Britten's instructions as to the possibility of omitting several instruments from the performance make it even more practical (and less expensive). This really is a work to explore and consider programming - it is a sure-fire audience winner.

979-0-060-01393-5 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-09085-1 Study score

The Building of the House op. 79 (1967)

6'

Overture with or without chorus

Scoring: 2,2,2,2; 2,2,0,1; timps; 1 perc (bells, trgl, cymb, sd, xyl); strings

The chorus can be replaced or added to by an organ (chamber or grand) or by extra brass (3rd trumpet and 3trombones)

Text: Psalm 127 (in English) adapted by Imogen Holst from *The Whole Book of Psalms*

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 1 (for chorus)

This vivid overture was written for the opening of the Snape Maltings Concert Hall in 1967. It was used again when the hall reopened in 1970 after the disastrous fire of 1969 and 30 years later after major renovations. It is an 'occasional' piece in the best sense of that term and must be one of the most frenetic overtures in existence. The mood Britten creates is one of frantic creativity, of the hustle and bustle of finishing off a building in time for its opening, of the excitement of a purpose-built concert hall of sizeable proportions after so many years of coping in the Aldeburgh Jubilee Hall and local churches, and of his own personal triumph in seeing through such an ambitious project to its conclusion. No wonder, then, that the strings hurtle away from the starting blocks like fired up horses in the race of their lives and the winds cascade around like flights of seabirds on the dancing wind. It is electrifying. The chorus (and/or organ and/or brass) come in quietly with a stately chorale. The melody Britten uses is from Valentin Schumann's *Geistliche Lieder* of 1539, later set by Luther to the words of the Lord's Prayer and simply known as *Vater Unser* (Our Father) and used a number of times by J.S. Bach.

The choral parts are straightforward and designed for simply effective declamation. The overture is an ABA shape with the central section being a quietly reflective respite from the excitement. The musical lines bear some resemblance to the shape and feel of the chorale melody thereby binding the music more grippingly together before the strings take off once again on their galloping semiquavers. The choir comes in again for the final few pages of the score and the whole edifice builds to a thrilling ending.

This is a great concert opener with or without a special occasion to justify it. Short, sharp and effective it has the audience putting their seat belts on and watching the road ahead with an intensity rare in music of this period. A great piece for a Britten centenary concert.

0-571-50144-3 Chorus part

0-571-50151-6 Study score

Cantata academica, carmen basiliense, op. 62 (1959) 21'

for SATB soloists, chorus and orchestra

Scoring: 2 (II=picc), 2, 2, 2; 4, 2, 3, 1; timps; 4 perc (trng, tamburo militare, tamb, cymb, Chinese block, bd, t-t, xyl, glock, bells in C); 2 harps (II *ad lib*); pf (cel *ad lib*); strings

Text: in Latin compiled from the charter of the University, and from older orations in praise of Basle by Bernhard Wyss.

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 4 (for chorus)

Britten's genius lifts this work above being just a worthy celebration of the 500th anniversary of the foundation of Basle University. It is tongue-in-cheek and mockingly non-academic while referring all the time to academic musical forms and formulae. It is written in two parts (everything is in the statutory Latin including the titles of the parts – Pars I and Pars II). The titles of the movements show Britten's intention to show off a wide variety of techniques. Here are some examples: *Chorale/Alla Rovescio* (the theme is given and responded to with the same melody upside down)/*Recitativo/Tema seriale con fuga/Canone ed ostinato*. There is a good deal of humour here.

There are seven movements in *Pars I* and six in *Pars II*. The tenor soloist is given three florid recitatives, accompanied only by a piano, which act as bridges between other orchestrally accompanied movements. Of these the most noteworthy are the *Arioso con canto popolare* for soprano solo with tenors and basses who hum a student song; another terrific Britten scherzo; and a wonderfully raucous final pair of movements (*Canon ed ostinato* and *Corale con canto*) where Britten seems to be aping the *Vivat Regina!* cries in Parry's *I was glad* or encouraging the kind of noisy 'I'm from the best university' kind of student touchline shout. This has outrageously high notes for the tenors (top B) which further endorse this feeling. There are real echoes of the *Spring Symphony* (see separate entry) final movement here which are further underlined by the last section of the Cantata which brings in the bells, piano, huge percussion and the inevitable chorale in which the choir sings 'that a free academy may thrive in a free community, for ever the ornament and treasure of illustrious Basle'.

This may not be Britten at his most soul-searching but, as always, there is plenty here to enjoy, especially if the work is not taken too seriously. It is a celebratory, occasional piece and it could be well taken up by other academic establishments celebrating big anniversaries. The chorus parts are not very difficult, though they do present challenges for the choir – not least in having tenors capable of those very high notes at the end. The *Tema seriale con fuga* is sinewy and needs careful tuning. It also has the subject regularly given upside

down after its initial sounding by the basses. All good fun.

979-0-060-01402-4 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-01401-7 Study score

CD track 22

Cantata misericordium, op. 69 (1963) 20'

for tenor and baritone solos, small chorus and string quartet, string orchestra, piano, harp and timpani.

Text: In Latin by Patrick Wilkinson

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 4 (chorus parts)

This work is a different as chalk from cheese from the *Cantata academica*. Here is a searingly beautiful work which presses all Britten's sympathetic buttons. It was composed for the centenary of the Red Cross and first performed in Geneva on 1 September 1963 conducted by Ernest Ansermet. Britten worked with his librettist, Patrick Wilkinson, to create a dramatic *scena* around the parable of the Good Samaritan. How appropriate this was for the organisation whose work it was intended to celebrate. Wilkinson set it in Latin, giving the Cantata a timeless sense of the universality of the message the parable conveys.

Britten's scoring further emphasises the intimacy of the work which has echoes of *Saint Nicolas* and the *Ceremony of Carols* in its use of the harp and piano. The separate string quartet, however, is the truly personal touch giving that powerful sense of looking in on a private conversation. The quartet begins the work with a contrapuntal figure which returns at key moments as a refrain or as a joining passage marking the arrival of a new potential source of help to the wounded man, and again at the end. This is a work which barely raises its voice. The emphasis is on compassion and not on the violence done to the traveller who was so badly injured and so callously ignored by the priest and the Levite who passed by. This Cantata immediately followed the composition of the *War Requiem*, and Owen's pity and waste of war is at the heart of this new work which could have painted a very different picture of righteous indignation or the fighting which would leave the traveller broken by the wayside. The end of the work also has strong resonance with the *War Requiem* when the Samaritan has taken the traveller to recover in a local inn and says: 'sleep now, my friend, sleep: forget your injuries.' Britten has achieved a remarkable effect in this work. It leaves an indelible impression on its listeners and, like all stories designed to demonstrate a moral, sends one away intent on being a better person.

The choral parts of the *Cantata misericordium* are quite challenging, though not in the league of *Sacred and Profane* or *A Boy was Born*. What is essential in performing this work, however, is that the choral parts should be so well sung that the gentle nature of the work is not disturbed by obviously problematic passages for choir. The whole concentration should be on the message, as Britten intended. It is the moral of the tale and not its means of communication which is paramount. The choir is given the same material as the string quartet at certain points and needs to both balance with those solo players and enrich their textures. It is an interesting challenge which perhaps should be mainly reserved for small expert chamber choirs who can really get under the skin of Britten's intentions.

979-0-060-01405-5 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-01406-2 Choral score

979-0-060-01404-8 Study score

Children's Crusade

A Ballad for Children's voices and orchestra

see *Children's and Upper Voices*

CD track 6

The Company of Heaven (1937) 45'

Cantata for speaker(s), soprano and tenor soloists, chorus, timpani, organ and strings

Text compiled by R. Ellis Roberts

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2-3 (chorus)

Britten wrote this work as a radio feature for the BBC marking Michaelmas Day – St Michael and all Angels – on 29 September. One of two such works he composed close together, this was written in 1937 and *The World of the Spirit* (see separate entry) the following year. He collaborated with the writer Richard Ellis Roberts on both projects. Britten was only 23 when he wrote this work but his reputation had already reached the point where he was recognised as one of the most formidable talents of his generation. When one considers that his set of virtuoso choral variations *A Boy was Born* was already four years old and his *Frank Bridge* variations had just been completed it is hardly surprising that the BBC would seek to commission him.

The work is divided into three parts: *Before the Creation*, *Angels in Scripture*, and *Angels in Common Life and at our Death*. Michael was, of course, an archangel and his feast day marks the celebration of all angels. The theme of angels is therefore an obvious one. The musical movements are separated by spoken texts taken from many sources. It is ideal to have two voices, a male and a female, to bring additional vocal colour to a performance. As with *The World of the Spirit* it is perfectly possible to cut sections of text if they are felt to be too long.

The work opens with Britten's representation of chaos. This is done effectively by other worldly timpani rolls, 32' pitch notes on the organ and quiet unison lines from the strings. Sudden outbursts of *forte* from the organ feel like falling fiery meteorites lightening up the gloom. The first speaker joins the end of this movement and then both give the first set of readings. The short first part is concluded by a big choral movement. Part II begins with a series of short readings interspersed by brief choral references to Jacob, Elisha and Mary who have featured in the readings. The fourth movement which follows is another choral movement this time including the soloists. It is based on the plainsong 'Christe, sanctorum decus Angelorum'. The fifth movement is an extraordinary *coup de théâtre*, setting the famous passage in the Book of Revelation about war in heaven. This is St. Michael's battle with the dragon, Lucifer, and his victory resulting in Lucifer's expulsion from Heaven. Britten's brilliant imagination has the tenors and basses speaking their part but at given approximate pitches. He also asks that as the dynamic rises, so does the pitch. The effect is animal and dramatic. This movement concludes Part II.

Part III has some very compelling readings which are responded to by further fascinating choral settings. Movement seven, in particular, a tenor solo aria, conjures an extraordinary sound world. The text begins 'A thousand thousand gleaming fires Seem'd kindling in the air... Methought the very breath I breath'd Was full of sparks divine...' It gives clear hints of future operatic music and seems somehow to sound like fireflies in the way Britten uses his strings, both with mutes and a mixture of bowed and plucked instruments, and works his textures. The soloist is given staccato phrases to sing in among more lyrical parts. The whole thing is mesmerising in its effect. The ninth movement, 'Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the most High', a setting of Psalm 91 in the Myles Coverdale translation, is the only unaccompanied setting in the work and it is also available separately (see separate entry). Britten uses another chant as its basis – that of the fifth psalm tone. The final movement is a choral setting of the well-known hymn 'Ye watchers and ye holy ones' to the tune *Hyfrydol*. Reaching a powerful climax with a final 'Amen' the music winds down with the choir singing repeated 'Amens' and the soloists singing 'Heaven is here, and all the angels of Heav'n'.

While the format of this work is similar to *The World of the Spirit* its musical language is very different. In many ways this piece is more forward looking than its successor but in other ways the next work is more satisfying and more memorable – to this listener at least – in a concert performance. Whatever individual people's reactions are to these two scores there is no doubt that they represent a completely different aspect of Britten's creativity from the many familiar pieces which are regularly performed. Both these works make powerful statements and are emotionally intense. They need good, experienced, intelligent, thoughtful, and vocally interesting readers to do justice to what is a hugely important element in their performance. *The Company of Heaven* is less expensive to perform than *The World of the Spirit* but it is of course likely that the orchestration of the rest of the programme will dictate which piece is preferred.

0-571-51090-6 Choral score

0-571-51188-0 Full score

Inkslinger's Love Song

for tenor solo, chorus and orchestra

see *Choral Music from the Operas*

God Save the Queen (1961)

for SSAATTBB and orchestra

Scoring: 2,2,2,2; 4,2,3,1; timps; 2 perc (cymb, sd, bd), strings

Britten also made a reduced orchestration in 1967:

2,2,2,2; 2,2,0,1(ad lib); timps; 2 perc (cymb, sd, bd) strings

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1-2

This unusual arrangement of the British National Anthem was written for the Leeds Festival and sets two verses. The first is miraculously *piano* and the hushed awe engendered is extraordinary. How did he come up with something so simple and so original? This verse is in E \flat major. Four bars later and a *molto crescendo* past we are in a flag waving B \flat major and singing for all we are worth. The final phrase is repeated twice to round the whole thing off. It is a prime example of the simplest things so often being the most effective, as heard when this version has been programmed at The Last Night of the Proms.

979-0-060-01472-7 Vocal/piano score

Lullaby of Dream Shadows

for chorus and orchestra

see **Choral Music from the Operas**

CD track 5

Praise We Great Men

8'

for SATB solos, chorus and orchestra

Orchestrated and completed by Colin Matthews (1976)

(3 fl II&III =picc, 2 ob I=ca, 2 cl II=bass, 2 bn/4 hn, 2 tpt, 2 or 1 trb/timps/
2 perc (bd, cym, vib, glock)/piano/harp/strings

Text: Edith Sitwell

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2 (chorus)

Edith Sitwell had composed her poem 'Praise We Great Men' for Britten, who wanted to set it for Mstislav Rostropovich to perform in his first season as conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington. Britten got about half way through but he became so ill that he could not complete it. He therefore talked to the composer Colin Matthews, who had recently collaborated with him on completing the *Welcome Ode* (see separate entry), and agreed that Matthews should orchestrate the work. Matthews added a coda as a 'completion' which was simply a repeat of an earlier section of the work.

The work opens with a dramatic gesture from the choir with no orchestral preamble. A great cry of 'Praise we great men' sweeps up and down with equally dramatic dynamic shifts from *forte* to *pianissimo* or, a little later, from a *fp* to *pp*. Matthews' orchestration is instinctively colourful and shows his deep empathy with Britten's soundworld. Sitwell composed her poem in stanzas of unequal length. According to Matthews, Britten originally marked the poem up in eleven sections which he changed to ten when he united the first two. This division into short 'movements' gave him plenty of opportunities for new colour and variety of forces. Thus the first section is scene-setting and triumphant. The second uses the four soloists which Britten told Matthews he envisaged as 'leading singers of a professional choir rather than as fully fledged 'soloists'. He was therefore thinking of them chorally and as a consort of blended and balanced voices. The full chorus joins, and the first word of the next section ends the previous one. A compound time signature heralds a new mood and altos and basses sing quietly and 'marked' in praise of 'Those who can raise Gold spirits of men from their rough Ape-dust'. There is much pairing of parts in this section between altos and basses and sopranos and tenors. At figure 4 there is an extended tenor solo which is the music Matthews took for his coda which follows to end the fragment.

Though this is a truncated work, the slow coda, only fourteen bars long, is long enough to impart a satisfyingly rounded-off feeling. What is missing is obviously tantalising but what a shame it would have been not to have these almost final thoughts from one of the century's greatest musical geniuses. This is an occasional piece; a celebratory 'ode' which can be used on many and varied occasions. The chorus parts are very straightforward. Conductors are urged to look at this as yet another example of the rare Britten which complements the popular and familiar output of this extraordinary composer.

0-571-53032-X Vocal score

0-571-53031-1 Full score

Rejoice in the Lamb

for SATB and orchestra (wind quintet, percussion, organ (ad lib) and strings)

see **Mixed Voices with keyboard**

CD track 17

Saint Nicolas op. 42 (1947-48)

50'

Cantata for tenor solo, chorus (SATB), semi-chorus (SA), four solo boys, string orchestra, piano duet, percussion and organ

Scoring: Piano duet; organ; strings; percussion (Timpani/side drum, bass drum, tenor drum, cymbal, triangle, gong, whip, tambourine)

Text: Eric Crozier

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 3

Saint Nicolas (note the name has no 'H' in it!) was written for the centenary of Lancing College in Sussex, the independent secondary boarding school on the south coast of England which Peter Pears had attended in his teens. It has a vast chapel intended by its founder, Revd Nathaniel Woodard, as the cathedral for all the schools of his extensive foundation known collectively as 'Woodard' schools.

St. Nicolas is famous for many legendary miracles and for being the original 'Santa Claus'. Crozier's libretto is designed to tell the story of his life, to recount some of his most celebrated acts and to give the audience/congregation the opportunity of joining in two beautiful hymns at key moments: 'All people that on earth do dwell' and 'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform'. The narration is all done by the choir, though the tenor sings first-person narratives as well in his role as the mature Nicolas. The young Nicolas is sung by a boy in movement II. There is a dramatic moment at the end of this movement when the boy's voice does a tumble and the tenor proclaims in the voice of Nicolas as a young man: 'God be glorified'.

The third movement is an accompanied recitative in which the soloist sings of Nicolas devoting himself to God through the agonies and torment of the many distractions and temptations of life. His faith wins through and he sings a final touching phrase: 'and Love was satisfied'. The sea whips up a storm in the next movement: 'He journeys to Palestine'. It threatens to overturn the ship and drown everyone on board. There is wailing from the sopranos and altos of the semi-chorus and agonised calls from the tenors and basses to 'man the pumps'. Finally, Nicolas begs God to let the storm cease and offers thanks for their safe delivery. Britten creates a palpable sense of relief in the final pages.

In the fifth movement, 'Nicolas comes to Myra and is chosen Bishop', the choir sings chorale-like phrases welcoming him as their new Bishop. They go through his ceremonial dressing with all the accoutrements of his office, the mitre, crozier (nice pun on the librettist's name), robe and ring. An energetic chorus 'Serve the faith and spurn his enemies' leads to the first great hymn – a wonderfully climactic moment. Britten's arrangement is suitably uplifting.

But things did not go on smoothly and during the reign of Diocletian and the persecution of martyrs (303-311) Nicolas was imprisoned for eight years before he could resume his pastoral mission among the poor and disadvantaged. The sixth movement is an impassioned picture of those barren years and Nicolas' frustration at the interruption of his work. In the next movement, probably the best-known section of the work, Nicolas performs the miracle of the three pickled boys lost to their families, 'slaughtered by the butcher's knife'. At the end of this movement three boys enter from the other end of the church singing 'Alleluia'. It is a very moving moment. Continuing this theme, the eighth movement 'His piety and marvellous works' is a list of miracles he performed followed by a beautifully simple falling phrase which is sung like a round 'Let the legends that we tell, Praise him with our prayers as well'. Typical Britten, tuneful, memorable and supremely effective. The final movement tells of Nicolas' death and the work ends with the other great hymn: 'God moves in a mysterious way'.

There are divided opinions about this work. Some feel it to be sentimental, while others, like me, feel that it is a genuine and heartfelt response to a text which is aimed at connecting with young people. Typical of Britten is the eminently practical nature of the work. Its orchestration is minimal and the string parts are written to be played by amateurs led, as Britten notes, preferably by a quintet of professionals. He also notes that the piano duet part is not difficult and can also be played by less experienced players. Only the first percussion part should be taken by a professional. He should also play as many of the other instruments as he can. The other parts can be played *ad libitum* by one or more 'enthusiastic amateurs'. This is Britten the social musician, the encourager and provider of good new music for the young of all abilities. If some of the music is therefore not what the classical music establishment thought the composer should be spending his time on, we should focus instead on how young performer's faces light up as they get stuck into the task in hand and involved with the story. It has all the right elements for our 'Harry Potter' age: magic (lots of miracles), drama (storm at sea), imprisonment (will he, won't he get out?), and even a wand – of sorts – in his crozier!

Saint Nicolas is a great audience piece. It forms a meaty work for a half of a concert programme and it involves everybody. It can be produced inexpensively if the minimum of professionals are used: tenor solo, string quintet and percussionist. Even if all the orchestral forces are professional it will not break the bank – a serious consideration in these straitened times. Its greatest challenge is managing the forces and the distances. Britten suggests that the gallery choir (sopranos and altos) has its own conductor which helps. The work can also be sung by almost any fair-sized choir, and can be very effective with a large group.

This work demonstrates to me Britten's generosity of spirit and his natural feeling for enriching the repertoire at all levels of attainment. What a gift!

979-0-060-01514-4 Full score

979-0-060-01516-8 Vocal score

979-0-060-01517-5 Choral score

979-0-2025-2171-7 Choral score (German edition)

979-0-060-01515-1 Study score

Spring Symphony op. 44 (1948-49) 45'

for soprano, alto and tenor soli, mixed chorus, boys' choir and orchestra

Texts:

Part One	
Introduction:	Anon. 16th century
The merry cuckoo	Edmund Spenser
Spring	Thomas Nashe
The driving boy	George Peel and John Clare
The morning star	John Milton
Part Two	
Welcome maids of honour	Robert Herrick
Waters above	Henry Vaughan
Out on the lawn I lie in bed	W H Auden
Part Three	
When will my may come	Richard Barnefield
Fair and fair	George Peel
Sound the flute	William Blake
Part Four (Finale)	
London, to thee I do present	Beaumont and Fletcher
the merry month of May	
Sumer is icumen in	Anon

Scoring: 3 fl (III=picc and alto fl), 2 ob, ca, 2 cl in B fl, bass cl, 2 bn, dbn; 4 hn, 3 tpt in C, 3 trb, tuba, cow horn; timps, 4 perc (sd, td, tamb, cymb, bd, gong, bells in A, Bfl, wb, xyl, castanets, vibr); 2 harps; strings

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 5

The *Spring Symphony* was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Music Foundation and is dedicated to Serge Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. It was actually premiered at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam in July 1949 before its American premiere the following month at Tanglewood by its dedicatees.

This work is a major undertaking from all points of view. It uses a huge orchestra (complete with cow horn which has to be hired specially), a children's choir which certainly does not have to be composed only of boys, three soloists, and a large SATB chorus which is given very challenging and detailed music to sing. If any work demonstrates the flip side of the Britten coin from *Saint Nicolas* it must be the *Spring Symphony*. Here is a seriously intentioned, highly contemporary work for its time which nevertheless shows his predilection for anthologising texts, for creating amazing moments of levity – approaching the humorous episodes in his operas – and producing a score of such colour and vibrancy that the impression left on the mind is indelible. Despite being composed for an American ensemble and conductor this work is quintessentially British. The poems have strong connections with English pastoral imagery and some are forever associated with settings as madrigals. In fact this madrigalian emphasis bubbles gently beneath the surface for much of the work and points up where Britten's roots really lie.

The work is divided into four parts – loosely the four movements of a symphony. The second part is nominally the 'slow' movement and the third might be thought of as the 'scherzo' but this shoe-horning of his original structure into the standard formats is not entirely helpful. Britten actually sets each poem as a separate entity within each movement and simply moves on *attacca* into the next section. Thus the first part consists of five different sections each using varied forces and contributing to the colour and variety of the larger movement. The Introduction uses the full choir, *The Merry Cuckoo* is a tenor solo accompanied by three trumpets, *Spring*, the sweet spring uses all three soloists with choir, *The Driving Boy* is a *tour-de-force* for soprano and children's choir (who also have to whistle!), *The Morning Star* is given to the chorus to end the first part, and so the work continues. The Finale is a genuine set piece and is the one movement which is composed to a single extended poem by Beaumont and Fletcher. Full of humour and high spirits – the entry of the cowhorn always raises a smile – it makes a wonderfully upbeat ending to this earthy work. The children's choir is given a starring role throughout this amazing movement, but nowhere more so than at Britten's inspired *coup de théâtre* where he brings in the well-known *Sumer is icumen in* at the end which crowns the sweeping choral phrases. And all this is in the brightest of keys – C major. The ending, as dramatic as everything which has preceded it fades away as the tenor soloist sings '...and so, my friends, I cease' followed by a huge and final C major chord.

This is a challenging work on all fronts and is an extremely complex composition. It is however eminently performable by a choir of sufficient size to balance the large orchestra and who can rise to the level of attainment Britten requires. It also really does need a children's choir – and a children's choir which can sing with real confidence and projection. They are given a key role to play in this work. In fact the 'spring' element so vital to the whole concept is underscored by young singers in the 'springtime' of their lives. This, therefore, has to have a completely different kind of tone quality from the main choir – a second group of sopranos won't do. Beyond these practical caveats this is a score which deserves to be better-known and more often performed than it is, and choirs

and orchestras should be encouraged to promote it widely. It is one of the most original choral/orchestral works of the first half of the twentieth century.

979-0-060-01534-2 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-01533-5 Study score

Te Deum in C

for SATB, treble or soprano solo and orchestra (harp or piano and strings)

see *Mixed Voices with keyboard*

Two Psalms (1931)

for SATB choir

Psalm 130 (12')

Scoring:

2,2(2=CA),1,bass cl,2; 4,2,3(3=bass),1; timps, strings

Psalm 150 (7')

Scoring: 2(2=picc),2,2,2; 4,2,3(3=bass),1; timps; 1 perc (cymb, sd, tamburo militaire); strings

Publisher: Chester

Difficulty level: 3

These two psalm settings were written in 1932 when Britten was a student at the Royal College of Music as part of his submission for a Mendelssohn scholarship for which he also wrote the *Phantasy Quintet in F minor*. The scholarship application was not successful but the committee awarded Britten £50 in order that he should not feel discouraged! These psalm settings are the only examples of large-scale choral/orchestral music we have from Britten at this stage of his career and are therefore very valuable as markers and as pointers to his later development. Ireland (his nominal teacher), Howells and Vaughan Williams were all encouraging to him after reading the scores, and Vaughan Williams tried hard to get them a performance – something which never happened.

The words of *Psalm 130* form that emotive cry for help: 'Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord. Lord hear my voice.' The basic motif for the work is the slowly unwinding and muted compound time quaver (8th note) figure which the strings play at the start. The tempo marking is *Poco lento ma comodo* and it shows Britten's keenness to ensure just the right kind of tempo for the music. Attention to detail is evident everywhere, a hallmark of his style even at this stage. The vocal parts are not very demanding and there is much pairing of S/T and A/B. The orchestral scoring is also commendably spare allowing the big moments to really stand out when they arrive. This setting has a real sweep and emotional depth to it and it is curious that no performance was ever achieved.

The paean of praise which forms the text of *Psalm 150* is well-known and is a gift for the composer who can reflect all the different instruments detailed in the text and build up a terrific head of steam. Britten actually set this Psalm again much later in his career in 1962 (see separate entry) but the two settings are fundamentally different. Here, in a 6/8 time signature, the strings play a busy semiquaver (16th note) figure which is interrupted by more static wind chords, before the strings take off again. I wonder if it is possible that this opening was in Britten's mind when he came to make his setting of the *Jubilate Deo in C* (see separate entry). It isn't that the music is the same, but the lively instrumental opening seems to come from a similar mindset. The choir's entry is in unison and has both the static wind chords and the busy string writing around it. Then things get going and all sorts of colours and descriptive elements are introduced including a particularly effective *pizzicato* for the 'lute and harp'. The work ends with an exciting flourish.

In these two wonderfully contrasted settings Britten shows us his aptitude for choral writing, his feel for the balance between choir and orchestra, and his imagination in writing some beautifully descriptive music. We need to hear these early works which give us such insights into the development of Britten's musical personality. Richly rewarding discoveries.

War Requiem op. 66 (1961-62)

85'

for soprano, tenor and baritone solos, chorus, orchestra, chamber orchestra, boys' choir and organ

Scoring: 3 (3=picc), 2, ca, 3 (III=cl in Eb and bass cl), 2, dbl bn; 6, 4, 3, 1; timps, 4 perc (2 sd, td, bd, tamb, trgl, cymb, castanets, whip, Chinese blocks, gong, bells in C and F#, vibr, antique cymbals in C and F#); piano, grand org (*ad lib*); strings.

Chamber orch: fl (=picc), ob (=ca), cl, bn; hn; perc (timp, sd, bd, cymb, gong); harp, string quintet (2 vl, vla, vc, db)

Chamber organ (or harmonium) to accompany boys' choir

Text: Missa pro defunctis and Wilfred Owen

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 5

In many ways this magnum opus, one of the 20th century's defining works, was also Britten's defining moment. Everything he believed in and stood for was writ large in this most fortuitous commission. Coventry had been almost obliterated by German bombs on 14 November 1940. The cathedral was destroyed although its fine tower and spire were miraculously saved. The inspirational decision was taken to build a new cathedral at right angles to the old and to connect them. The new building's message was to be of reconciliation. A sacred ministry for reconciliation with international outreach was put in place and still partly defines the cathedral's mission.

For a long time Britten had felt that the gap in his output was a major choral/orchestral work. He tried twice to encourage writers to give him a libretto which would fire his imagination. W. H. Auden and Ronald Duncan were both asked but although they tried neither could supply what he wanted. When Coventry mounted an Arts Festival to celebrate the dedication of its new cathedral in 1962 Britten was an obvious choice to ask for a major work. This, for Britten, was the opportunity for which he had been waiting. As a lifelong, passionate pacifist it was his opportunity to write a work which reminded its audience of the reason for the building of this new cathedral, but also, and far more importantly, to demonstrate in the most powerful way possible the horror, devastation, futility and utter waste of war.

His inspired idea was to mix the words of the *Missa pro defunctis* (Mass for the Dead) in Latin with the poems of one of the greatest of the First World War poets, Wilfred Owen. Owen was killed within days of the ending of those hostilities and this further emphasised Britten's central theme of the criminal waste of human life in futile conflict. He uses nine of Owen's poems which form a kind of song cycle which weaves in and out of the formal sections of the Latin Mass. Owen's own statement: 'My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the pity...All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poets must be truthful.' chimed perfectly with Britten's own convictions and led to the writing of one of the most moving and personal works of modern times. The setting of the Latin Mass and the interspersing of solo song was a brilliant binding of public and private personas which hits the listener with extraordinary intensity.

So powerful was the first performance that *The Times* critic, William Mann, wrote: 'so superbly proportioned and calculated, so humiliating and disturbing in effect, in fact so tremendous, that every performance it is given ought to be a momentous occasion'. It was a score which immediately captured the public imagination. Among 20th century British large-scale choral works only Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* had previously caused the kind of stir which the *War Requiem* created. Walton's theatrical histrionics and hire-wire excitement couldn't fail to raise the gooseflesh. Here now, however, was a deeply spiritual work on the most serious subject which caught the national mood perfectly. When Britten's recording was released the following year it sold 200,000 copies within the first five months which was almost unheard of for a classical work, and possibly unique for a large-scale contemporary one. This was the moment of destiny for which Britten had been preparing all his adult life. The peace movements of the 1960s, the Cuban missile crisis, nuclear testing, anti-nuclear protests, the war-weariness of the seemingly endless conflict in Vietnam, all these things contributed to the public's readiness to hear this message which Britten so powerfully addressed. The fact that the original soloists were supposed to be from Germany, Britain and Russia further emphasised the message of reconciliation. The sad fact of Galina Vishnevskaya, the Russian soprano, being prevented from singing because she was refused permission by the Russian Minister of Culture, spoiled what would have been a truly historic cast of singers (the others were Peter Pears and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau). But Vishnevskaya did come to record the work in 1963 with Britten conducting. Her place at the premiere was memorably taken by Heather Harper.

The performance issues of the *War Requiem* are many and varied. Its forces are huge requiring a very large orchestra, a smaller chamber orchestra which accompanies the soloists, two organs, three soloists, main chorus and boys' choir. There are also ideally two conductors. In the premiere performance Meredith Davies conducted the main orchestra and choir while Britten himself conducted the chamber orchestra. Another issue is the building of the whole work on the interval of the tritone or augmented 4th (C – F#) – an interval which, for centuries, has been known as the 'devil's' interval. It sounds the note

of warning right at the opening of the work and appears throughout. The point of the tritone, however, is its dual capacity as a discord in its melodic guise, and its harmonic role as part of a chord leading to resolution (it forms part of a dominant 7th chord, for instance). This in itself mirrors the themes of conflict and reconciliation which underpin the whole work. From a practical point of view, however, there can be serious tuning issues relating to this interval and this is just one of the many performance challenges which face the intrepid conductor taking on the work. The boys' choir is placed at a distance and has a chamber organ or harmonium to accompany the voices. This choir still has to be co-ordinated with the main orchestra and will either need to be in the sightline of the principal conductor or given its own conductor.

Layout is a major issue for performers of the *War Requiem*. Because of the way in which the chamber orchestra and the full orchestra segue in and out of each other's sections it is much better, in practical terms, for the two groups to be placed together directly under the baton of the main conductor. It is the boys' choir and its organist who need a satellite conductor especially if they are 'at a distance' as Britten directs.

The next major issue is that of balance. Such a large orchestra will threaten even a big chorus at times and there is a fine line to be drawn between audibility and a possible reduction in drama, such as those moments of obliteration where it is the effect which matters. Such points occur in the *Dies Irae* and the *Hosanna* of the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* amongst others. But much more seriously, the chamber orchestra is given such a characterful part to play that the conductor needs to be very careful that the soloists are not drowned. The most important issue is the audibility of the words. While the words of the Latin Mass are, on the whole, very well known, Owen's poetry is not. The power of the presentation of this work is in the delivery of the message. If that message is weakened by carelessness with balance, or excessive loss of clarity due to an over-resonant acoustic, the performance will not achieve its full purpose however brilliant the playing and singing may be in itself.

After the *War Requiem*'s early success the critical tide in some quarters turned against the piece. This was a time when the music press was increasingly focusing on the European experimental avant-garde, and composers who extended tonal traditions, such as Britten and Shostakovich, were becoming difficult to place in terms of perceived 'relevancy'. Of course, performers and audiences remained true to the work and commentators have progressively restored the *War Requiem* to its central place in the musical canon. With the passing of half a century the critical concern – obsession – with fashion, style and language has faded into insignificance and one is left with the purity of a magisterial work of genius and a message which is as powerful in today's world of conflicts as it was in 1962.

Listeners and writers may argue about which of Britten's many great works represent the pinnacle of his achievement. Some will say *Peter Grimes*, others may point to *Billy Budd* or his third string quartet – or whichever work speaks most powerfully to that individual. I would say, however, that between the schoolboy *A Hymn to the Virgin* and the mature *War Requiem* we have two starkly powerful works representing two absolute extremes of scale but which demonstrate with vivid clarity the all-embracing nature of Britten's genius.

979-0-060-01556-4 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-01557-1 Choral score

979-0-060-01558-8 Choral score - boys' choir

979-0-060-10707-8 Study score

Separate editions:

Agnus Dei 979-0-060-08608-3 Choral score

Welcome Ode op. 95 (1976)

8'

for young people's chorus (SAB with optional T) and orchestra

Scoring: 2 fl, 2 ob, 2 cl, 2 bn/4 hn, 2 tpt, 3 trb, tuba/timp = sd/3 perc (bd, sd, cymb, trgl, tamb, xyl)/piano/strings

Texts:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. March | Thomas Dekker and John Ford |
| 2. Jig | (orch) |
| 3. Roundel | anon. 1600 |
| 4. Modulation | (orch) |
| 5. Canon | Henry Fielding |

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2-3

This irresistible work was written for the Queen's Silver Jubilee visit to Ipswich on 11 July 1977, though Britten was to die before the premiere. Colin Matthews orchestrated it under Britten's supervision. The work comes from the same essential stable as the *Spring Symphony* and the opera *Gloriana* (see the entry in this guide to the *Choral Dances from Gloriana*) but, written for a young people's chorus, is kept simple, direct and engaging. Britten's sense of practicality led him to write the chorus parts for sopranos, altos and basses only. There is a short

optional section for tenors in the first movement *March*. Tenors, of course, can easily sing along with the basses and have no reason to be excluded from the choir. Real tenors, as all choral people know, are, like Rachmaninov's Russian low basses, 'as rare as asparagus at Christmas', and Britten knew perfectly well that young mens' voices do not settle into a tenor or bass range properly for some years into adulthood.

The *March* is brisk, forthright and upbeat. The text is a royal welcome bringing in the whole population of the countryside, animals and all. The orchestral *Jig* which follows starts with a fiddle solo – very much a recreation of a country fiddler playing solo for people to dance to. The movement swirls around as the lads twirl their girls in a breathless dance. It is simple and yet also incredibly effective writing. The *Roundel* brings back the chorus in a sort-of round which starts with the sopranos and moves to the altos and then basses. A *Modulation* movement for orchestra links this movement with the final *Canon* in which the theme is given in unison by the choir first and then broken down into its proper separated entries. The ending has three sharply punctuated and short final chords.

This is another work which is an 'occasional' piece but as a taster of what Britten has to offer young singers it is a gift. It can be programmed in a number of ways and would work well as an 'overture', or might be used as a celebratory piece for the opening of a new hall, or the welcoming of a dignitary – or simply because it is a good piece!

0-571-52526-1 Vocal score

0-571-51102-3 Full score

Part III begins with a beautiful soprano aria (*O knowing, glorious Spirit!*) accompanied by harp and violin and flute solos. This movement is a real Britten soundscape especially in its ending. This is followed by a setting of Gerard Manley Hopkins' *God's Grandeur* (*The world is charged with the grandeur of God*). Britten was to base his unaccompanied setting of these words for his choral cycle *A.M.D.G.* (see separate entry) on the music from this movement. *A.M.D.G.* was written the year after *The World of the Spirit* and so this music was still very much in his mind as he wrote the second version. The movements share a terrific energy and almost relentless progress throughout. They also share melodic elements, especially the little chromatic rising figure which initially appears at the end of the very first vocal phrase. The quick repetitions of 'have trod' are replicated almost exactly, and the treatment of the gentle phrase 'Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods' is almost identically set in the later composition. It is fascinating to see how Britten wanted to develop his setting in this work into a larger-scale unaccompanied setting so soon afterwards.

The epilogue to the score, though not quite the final music, is a fully worked out arrangement of the plainsong melody heard at the beginning. This shows Britten's enjoyment of hymn singing which was to be such an important part of compositions like *Saint Nicolas* and *Noye's Fludde*. The work ends in a quietly contemplative coda with a gentle choral 'Amen'.

The World of the Spirit is a fascinating and absorbing score. It is completely outside the normal Britten oeuvre and is yet another example of a rarity which should be taken up and widely used. Audiences will love this music, and if the spoken parts are felt to be too lengthy some judicious pruning can easily and effectively be undertaken. Donald Mitchell made cuts from the original in putting the work together for publication and in doing so sanctioned others doing the same if the need or feeling arose.

CH76538 Vocal score

CH76527 Full score

The World of the Spirit (1938)

42'

for SATB soloists, speaker(s), chorus and orchestra

Scoring: 2 (fl=picc), 2, 2, 2; 4, 2, 3, 1; perc (1) (cymb, susp cymb, gong, sd, bd, tamb); timps; harp; organ; strings

Text: various authors compiled by R. Ellis Roberts

Publisher: Chester Music

Difficulty level: 3-4 (choir)

This unusual and in many ways remarkable work was the second *quasi cantata* Britten wrote specifically for BBC radio (the other is *The Company of Heaven* – see separate entry). The performing version published in 2001 makes suggested cuts (by Donald Mitchell) in the extensive readings which form a critically important part of the performance. A short prologue featuring the all-important plainsong chant *Veni Creator Spiritus*, which many will know as the hymn tune sung to the words 'Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire', opens the work, appears several times throughout and returns at the end in a fully worked out arrangement. In between these points the speakers read a variety of texts mostly on the subject of peace, generosity of spirit, forgiveness, joy in faith, steadfastness in adversity and the overarching importance of loving one's neighbour – a common thread through Britten's life reaching its climax in the composition of the *War Requiem*. Following the readings there are a number of movements for chorus, for soloists, and with a variety of accompaniments – sometimes organ alone, sometimes a small instrumental group, and sometimes the full orchestra.

One of the most interesting aspects of the work is the youthful Britten's (he was 24) musical responses to the words he was setting. There are points at which one unequivocally notes Britten's familiar language which was just in the process of development. Others, though, seem almost to parody other composers. The second movement (*O Thou that movest all*), basically a hymn, is almost pure Mendelssohn in its lush chromaticisms. He just avoids it becoming pastiche, but it sets a non-threatening tone to the soundworld in the early stages of the work. The next movement (*The sun, the moon, the stars*) has a wonderful sweep to it – almost a tidal motion, perhaps suggestive of his increasing obsession with the sea. It is a beautiful movement. *This is my commandment* which follows the next readings takes its cue (literally) from the words 'and after the fire a still small voice'. The utter stillness of this movement is breathtaking and it segues into the next movement *With wide-embracing love* which is an unashamedly romantic waltz. It is actually in 6/8 but the pulse is so slow that it could be easily taken for 3/4. And that concludes Part I.

Part II begins with the fifth movement *O life, O love, now undivided*. This uses the melody of the Mendelssohnian hymn from the second movement but very differently presented. Over static string chords the tune is sung in unison and the phrase ends are punctuated by harp chords which are a pre-echo of similar treatments in *Saint Nicolas* for instance. This highly effective movement develops beautifully. In the second verse the choir harmonises the melody accompanied by lower strings but still having its phrase ends coloured by harp and upper string chords. Finally, the soprano soloist joins fulfilling a gently descanting role. Next comes a section of varied readings interspersed by short vocal phrases for the soloists accompanied by organ. This section is more about the spoken word than about the music. The 'doxology' to this section, which is what the next movement (*The spirit of the Lord*) feels like, begins reflectively but suddenly becomes an ecstatically dancing *Alleluia*. This big movement is the last of Part II.

Choral Music from the Operas

A number of choral pieces have been extracted from Britten's operas either by Britten himself or by others after his death. They make unusual and highly varied concert items.

Carry her over the water (1939/41) 2'

from the Operetta *Paul Bunyan* op.17

SSATTBB

arranged by Colin Matthews from an ensemble in Act II scene 2

Text: W H Auden

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 1-2

This simple and beautifully effective chorus in three verses is entirely choral with a short section in verse two for upper voices. Only the altos don't divide, but the division of all the other voices give this short piece a richness which sounds lovely when Britten's performance directions are observed (dynamics, articulation and word colour).

0-571-50594-5 Choral score

CD track 34 Choral Dances from *Gloriana* (1953) 9'/11'

version for SATB (1954) 9'

version for tenor solo, harp and chorus (1967, for the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London) 11'

Text: William Plomer

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2-3

These colourful pieces form a masque in the opera which was performed for Queen Elizabeth I (*Gloriana*) on her visit to Norwich and performed by local people for her entertainment and in loyal homage. Each short *scena* represents a different group: Time, Concord, country girls, (S/A) young rustics and fishermen (T/B) and a finale in which all pay homage to their Queen. In the version for tenor solo with harp and chorus these movements are prefaced and linked by the soloist with harp who sets the scene for each movement and, in the final homage, joins the choir by adding a fifth vocal line (the harp also joins this movement) which transforms the piece.

These pieces make an ideal concert item and are not very difficult. They do however need reasonably agile sopranos/altos for the *Country Girls* movement, and a good balanced team of two tenors and two basses for the *Rustics and Fishermen*. As with many of Britten's choral works there is a lovely balance of moods between the movements which helps to make a satisfying whole. The *Final Dance of Homage* is particularly moving with its imitative lines moving between voice-parts and building to an impassioned climax before subsiding to a quiet ending.

979-0-060-01444-4 Vocal/piano score

979-0-060-01443-7 Choral score

No. 5 Rustics and Fishermen

979-0-051-45017-6 Choral score (TTBB)

Inkslinger's Love Song (*Paul Bunyan*) (1939-41) 5'

for tenor solo, T/B chorus, orchestra

Scoring: 2 tpt, 2 trb, tuba/1 perc (sd)/timps/harp/piano/strings

Text: W H Auden

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 1 (for chorus)

Britten withdrew *Paul Bunyan* after its first performance and only revised it in 1974. At that time he omitted two numbers involving chorus: *Inkslinger's Love Song* and *Lullaby of Dream Shadows*. These were published as separate items after Britten's death.

Paul Bunyan was the mythical lumberjack giant whose exploits helped create the birth of the independent America. Auden described Inkslinger (Paul Bunyan's book-keeper) as: "the man of speculative and critical intelligence, whose temptation is to despise those who do the manual work that makes the life of thought possible... Inkslinger is the only person capable of understanding who Paul Bunyan is, and, in a sense, the operetta is an account of his process of discovery." Inkslinger finds himself called upon in this number to show how a love song should be created. The chorus asks:

'But how do you think we should address her?' Johnny Inkslinger replies: 'You must sing her a love song.' 'That's too hard and takes too long.'

'Nonsense' replies Johnny, 'It's quite easy, and the longer it is, the more she'll like it. Use the longest words you can think of. Like this:'

...and so the song begins and Johnny proceeds to sing every long word he can think of. It's amusing and rather touching. The chorus of men, when they enter, play up to the procession of verbosity in a duet with the soloist and the whole song ends with the quite simple (at last) declaration: 'I love you.'

This is not a particularly easy piece to programme as you need the forces listed above and the piece is only five minutes long. But it is a delightful novelty if the right context can be found.

Lullaby of Dream Shadows (*Paul Bunyan*) (1939-41) 6'

for chorus and orchestra
Chorus of 2 sopranos and 2 tenors for most of the number, but with a SATB section at the end. Orchestra (Fl/picc, ob, cl, sax, b.cl, bsn/2 hrs, 2 tpt, 2 trb, tuba/timps/1 perc: SD, tri, susp.cym/harp/piano/strings)

Text: W H Auden

Publisher: Faber Music

Difficulty level: 2 (chorus)

The background to this extract from the original production of *Paul Bunyan* is detailed under the entry for *Inkslinger's Love Song*. This number was originally the finale to Act 1 but was cut by Britten after the preview performance before the first night.

The sopranos and tenors have a conversation about the dullness of being perpetually beautiful – the all-American beauty. 'We're very very tired of admiration.' Again, there is humour in the extract but also a serious message which is underlined when a full chorus completes the number.

As for *Inkslinger's Love Song* this is not an easy piece to programme and the orchestra for this piece is much larger. There will always be situations which arise, however, where these pieces are perfect for a given situation, and they offer a lovely way of having a taste of Britten's stage music when mounting the whole work would be impractical.

Tallis's Canon (from *Noye's Fludde*) (1958) 3'

for SATB chorus, unison voices and organ or piano

accompaniment.

Text: Joseph Addison

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1

The magical arrangement of this well-known hymn tune which concludes *Noye's Fludde* is reduced to a single verse arrangement in the *Cambridge Hymnal No.34*. As in the opera the words are Joseph Addison's 'The spacious firmament on high'.

978-0-521-20398-2 The Cambridge Hymnal (Cambridge University Press)

Two choruses from *Peter Grimes* (1945)

1. Song of the Fishermen (4')

'Working Chorus' from the opera *Peter Grimes* for SATB and piano

Three of the four stanzas from Act I scene 1 and the fourth from Act III

This arrangement published 1947/48, arranger unknown

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 1

This is an inspired choice for an extract from one of Britten's greatest masterpieces. The piano part sets the peaceful scene at the end of another hard-labouring, rough-hewn day of fishing involving the whole community – men and women. The beautifully simple choral phrases exude both peace and exhaustion. The different verses tell their story passionately building to a powerful climax under which the rising and falling figuration in the piano part mimics the rolling waves of the sea. It ends as it began, quietly using that familiar Britten fingerprint of the rising and falling arpeggio of superimposed thirds.

979-0-060-01530-4 Choral score

2. Old Joe has gone fishing (2')

Round for SATB chorus and piano

Extract (much arranged from both chorus and solo parts) from Act 1 scene 2 of Peter Grimes.

This arrangement published 1947/48, arranger unknown

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

Difficulty level: 2-3

The lively nature of this wonderfully exuberant piece makes a perfect foil for the *Song of the Fishermen* described above. It is much more challenging to sing but is well worth the effort of learning it. Choirs lap it up because it is such fun. It is a round, and the first challenge is the 7/4 time signature – effectively 1/2; 1/2; 1/2/3. There are four melodies with their associated words. The first is 'Old Joe has gone fishing and Young Joe has gone fishing and You Know has gone fishing and found them a shoal'. The second – completely different – is 'Pull them in in han'fuls and in canfuls and in panfuls' with long notes. The third is a fragmented phrase: 'Bring them in sweetly/Gut them completely/Pack them up neatly/Sell them discreetly.' Lastly comes the most difficult of the four: 'O haul away!' This is given a rising scale after a tie and a long held note after which the scale falls again. The timing over the ties can cause problems. When all four melodies are put together it is a real *tour-de-force* and the final page with the top sopranos sailing up to a long top B \flat and the basses right up on an E \flat gives it a terrific 'wow' factor. The divisi sopranos on the last page is the only time parts divide in the piece.

979-0-060-01486-4 Choral score

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Lichfield, 2011

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Published in Summer 2012

Publisher: Boosey & Hawkes

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