



DECCA

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ELOQUENCE

## BRITTEN

Simple Symphony  
The Young Person's  
Guide to the Orchestra  
Peter Grimes: Sea  
Interludes & Passacaglia  
Sinfonia da Requiem

Eugene Goossens  
Eduard van Beinum  
Benjamin Britten

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**BENJAMIN BRITTEN** (1913-1976)

**Simple Symphony for string orchestra, Op. 4**

<b>1</b>	I	Boisterous Bourée: Allegro ritmico	3'42
<b>2</b>	II	Playful Pizzicato: Presto possibile pizzicato sempre	3'02
<b>3</b>	III	Sentimental Saraband: Poco lento e pesante	6'34
<b>4</b>	IV	Frolicsome Finale: Prestissimo con fuoco	2'50

**New Symphony Orchestra of London  
Eugene Goossens**

<b>5</b>	<b>The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, Op. 34</b>	16'59
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**Peter Grimes**

**Four Sea Interludes, Op. 33a**

<b>6</b>	I	Dawn (Act I)	3'09
<b>7</b>	II	Sunday Morning (Act II)	3'29
<b>8</b>	III	Moonlight (Act III)	3'40
<b>9</b>	IV	Storm (Act I)	3'51
<b>10</b>		Passacaglia (Act II)	6'56

**Concertgebouw Orchestra, Amsterdam  
Eduard van Beinum**

**Sinfonia da Requiem, Op. 20**

<b>11</b>	I	Lacrymosa	8'19
<b>12</b>	II	Dies irae	5'04
<b>13</b>	III	Requiem aeternam	6'17

**Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra  
Benjamin Britten**

Total timing: 74'58

'The ceremony of innocence is drowned': those words of W.B. Yeats, set so hauntingly by Benjamin Britten in *The Turn of the Screw*, reflect the composer's obsession with innocence and the difficult passage it has among the rocks and currents of the cynical modern world. No composer of the 20th century was more deeply or consistently preoccupied with the task of keeping his childhood alive within him and of making this presence audible in his music.

Britten wrote his *Simple Symphony* between December 1933 and February 1934 and based it on eight works (two for each movement) which he had composed in the years from 1923-26, that is between the ages of ten and thirteen. He was, of course, not the first composer to return to themes of his youth, but such an activity is more generally found in middle-aged composers, indulging in a little sentimental nostalgia. For Britten there was no question either of nostalgia or of sentimentality. Quite simply, he felt the original ideas were too good to lose. He declared in his prefatory note to the score: 'Although the development of these themes is in many places quite new, there are large stretches of the work which are taken boldly from the early pieces – save for the re-scoring for strings'. As for the sentimentality, the very title of the third movement, 'Sentimental

Saraband', shows Britten's playful objectivity in this respect.

The first movement, 'Boisterous Bourrée', is a brisk Allegro, strongly contrapuntal, and built mainly from two contrasted motives, one spiky and gay, the other lyrical. The second movement, 'Playful Pizzicato', is a scherzo and trio, entirely pizzicato, very fast and pert in the main section, which is repeated, and laced with bucolic humour in the trio. Then we have a 'Sentimental Saraband', ironically eloquent and spaciouly laid out – a most effective piece of string writing, with many characteristic harmonic touches. The work concludes with a 'Frolicsome Finale', built from a powerful upward thrusting phrase given at first to the entire consort in unison. The development of this simple idea is astonishingly bold and eventful.

Goossens' recording of this work was made in September 1953, towards the end of Decca's 'mono' era, and the sessions also included Britten's *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings* (with Peter Pears and Dennis Brain, released on Decca Eloquence) and the Op.29 Prelude and Fugue, which was never published. In March the next year he recorded the composer's *Les Illuminations* with Pears.

1945 marked the 250th anniversary of the

death of Henry Purcell, whose music Britten loved for its clarity, brilliance and vitality. In the summer of that year Britten toured the concentration camps in Germany with Yehudi Menuhin. To remember Purcell, a pure relic of England's past, was also perhaps in a way to deny the uses to which the Nazis had put their own musical past and to celebrate the survival of 'the ceremony of innocence'. Britten 'defied the nightmare horror' in his *Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945), in which Purcell's influence can be clearly heard. The horror thus exorcised, he turned with a lighter heart to writing music for a 1946 film for schools called *The Instruments of the Orchestra*. He took for his theme a hornpipe from Purcell's incidental music to *Abdelazar* or *The Moor's Revenge*.

After a tutti rendering of the theme, presentations by the four orchestral families and a repeat of the tutti, we hear the variations for the individual instruments, culminating in a fugue and finally in a superimposition of fugue and main theme which is truly exciting. Imogen Holst called *The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* 'that liveliest and most exhilarating of all lessons in orchestration' and although sometimes, now increasingly rarely, recorded with spoken commentary, it soon embarked on an independent concert career, sometimes

under its more formal subtitle 'Variations and Fugue on a theme of Purcell'.

*Peter Grimes*, Britten's opera set in a Suffolk fishing community was first performed in 1945 and quickly established its composer's reputation as a musical dramatist of major significance. Almost as important an element in the opera as the singers themselves is the orchestra, which frames the drama in a series of tellingly evocative interludes. 'Dawn' comes from the beginning of Act I, where it depicts the grey light of the morning sky and the cold, unforgiving swell of the waves below. In 'Sunday Morning' (from the start of Act II) the sun is out and the sky is gleaming. Church bells ring as the townsfolk make their way to church, and Ellen Orford, the village schoolmistress, decides to stay outside in the sun.

'Moonlight' forms the introduction to Act III, in which flutes and harps shoot shafts of light onto the waves and over the empty streets of the town. The fierce dissonances and syncopations of 'Storm' reflect the turbulent state of mind of the fisherman Peter Grimes in Act I, while the Act II Passacaglia contrasts his longing for a loving relationship – represented by a poignant viola melody – with his sense of isolation. Eduard van Beinum's recording of these pieces were revelations in their time. 'It is unlikely that any

English audience, whether in the theatre or the concert hall, has heard certain passages so splendidly realised', wrote Desmond Shawe-Taylor about the *Grimes* recordings. Van Beinum, a favourite with orchestras as with audiences, once remarked that 25 years after a conductor's death all that is left of his life is the anecdotes. He was forgetting his recordings.

It was after Serge Koussevitsky's performance of the *Sinfonia da Requiem* in Boston in January 1942 that the conductor, impressed by the dramatic nature of the work, asked the composer why he had not yet written a full-scale opera. Britten's answer – that he had plans to make one out of Crabbe's *The Borough* but that the size of such an undertaking made it an economic impossibility – prompted Koussevitsky to provide him with a grant from the Foundation he had established in memory of his wife and a promise to put the work on at the Berkshire Festival.

It is not surprising that the conductor who did so much for contemporary music made so astute a judgement, because the *Sinfonia*, written in 1940, is not only the most important of Britten's early instrumental works, but also the one in which dramatic conflict is handled in purely musical terms in a convincingly powerful way. The menace of the initial drumbeat,

combined with the intensity of monothematicism, prompted a design for the sonata-form first movement in which growth continues through each section until a crushing climax is reached, when the brass bring back the second subject in the form of a conflict between major and minor triads, a gesture common enough in Britten, of course, but here all the more potent for being juxtaposed with the minor and major thirds of the first subject.

The second movement is an outburst of elemental fury that puts to more important use the biting satirical tone Britten had developed during the 'Auden' years. It is all the more impressive for hiding a fairly straightforward structural principle under a surface of such seeming anarchy. It gives rise to the bitonal bass which accompanies the dance-like hymn of the flutes at the opening of the consoling 'Requiem aeternam'.

Britten recording the *Sinfonia* twice, first in September 1953 with Danish forces and then more than ten years later in December 1964 with the New Philharmonia Orchestra. Andrew Porter, reviewing the earlier recording in the February 1955 issue of *The Gramophone* declared that it 'could hardly be bettered'.

DECCA

**Recording producer:** John Culshaw

**Recording engineers:** Kenneth Wilkinson (Simple Symphony, The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, Peter Grimes)

**Recording locations:** Decca Studios, West Hampstead, London, November 1953 (Simple Symphony); Grote Zaal, Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, September 1953 (The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra, Peter Grimes); Danish Radio Concert Hall, Copenhagen, Denmark, September 1953 (Sinfonia da Requiem)

**Remastering:** Audio Archiving Company, London, UK

**Eloquence series manager:** Cyrus Meher-Homji

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**Booklet editor:** Bruce Raggatt

