

CHANDOS

SUPER AUDIO CD

BRITTEN PETER GRIMES

Stuart Skelton *tenor*

Erin Wall *soprano*

Bergen Philharmonic
Orchestra and Choirs

Edward Gardner



Photograph by Roland Haupt / Lebrecht Music & Arts Photo Library / Bridgeman Images

Benjamin Britten, at his home, Crag House, in Aldeburgh, late 1940s

Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976)

Peter Grimes, Op. 33 (1944 – 45)

An Opera in a Prologue and Three Acts

Libretto by Montagu Slater (1902 – 1956)

after the poem of the same title, published in the collection *The Borough* (1810),

by George Crabbe (1754 – 1832)

Peter Grimes, a fisherman	Stuart Skelton	tenor
Boy (John), his apprentice	Samuel Winter	
Ellen Orford, a widow, schoolmistress of the Borough.....	Erin Wall	soprano
Captain Balstrode, retired merchant skipper	Roderick Williams	baritone
Auntie, landlady of 'The Boar'	Susan Bickley	mezzo-soprano
Niece 1 } the main attractions of 'The Boar' {	Hanna Husáhr	soprano
Niece 2 }	Vibeke Kristensen	soprano
Bob Boles, fisherman and Methodist	Robert Murray	tenor
Swallow, a lawyer.....	Neal Davies	bass-baritone
Mrs (Nabob) Sedley, a rentier widow of an East India Company's factor	Catherine Wyn-Rogers	mezzo-soprano
Reverend Horace Adams, the Rector.....	James Gilchrist	tenor
Ned Keene, apothecary and quack	Marcus Farnsworth	baritone
Hobson, carrier	Barnaby Rea	bass
Dr Crabbe.....	Silent role	

First Fisherman **Francis Brett** bass
 Second Fisherman **David Hansford** bass
 A Lawyer **Vernon Kirk** tenor
 A Fisherwoman **Catherine Backhouse** mezzo-soprano
 First Burgess **James Berry** bass
 Second Burgess **Peter Brooks** baritone
 Third Burgess **Andrew Masterson** tenor
 Fourth Burgess **George Butler** bass
 Fifth Burgess **Samuel Knock** tenor
 Sixth Burgess **James Holt** baritone
 Choral Soprano **Catrin Woodruff-Abel** soprano
 Townspeople and Fisherfolk

Scene: The Borough, a small fishing town on the East Coast

Time: towards 1830

Bergen Philharmonic Choir

Edvard Grieg Kor

Royal Northern College of Music Chorus

Choir of Collegium Musicum

Håkon Matti Skrede chorus master

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra

Melina Mandozzi leader

Edward Gardner



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019



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Edward Gardner

COMPACT DISC ONE

	Prologue	8:30
1	Hobson: 'Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!' –	6:40
2	Peter: 'The truth – the pity – and the truth' –	1:50
3	[Interlude I] Lento e tranquillo –	3:12
	Act I	[41:15]
	Scene 1	21:53
4	Chorus of Fishermen and Women: 'Oh hang at open doors the net, the cork' –	5:14
5	Peter: 'Hi! Give us a hand!' –	3:18
6	Hobson: 'I have to go from pub to pub' –	4:53
7	Balstrode: 'Look! The storm cone!' –	2:27
8	Balstrode: 'And do you prefer the storm' –	6:01
9	Interlude II Presto con fuoco –	4:28

	Scene 2	14:54
10	Auntie: 'Past time to close!' –	4:43
11	Balstrode: 'Pub conversation should depend' –	2:58
12	Peter: 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades' –	2:27
13	Chorus: 'He's mad or drunk' –	1:02
14	Keene and the Others: 'Old Joe has gone fishing' –	2:13
15	Hobson: 'The bridge is down, we half swam over'	1:31
	Act II	[47:49]
16	Interlude III	2:12
	Allegro spiritoso –	
	Scene 1	29:33
17	Ellen: 'Glitter of waves' –	3:40
18	Rector: 'Wherefore I pray and beseech you' –	3:35
19	Chorus: 'O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord' –	5:17
20	Auntie: 'Fool! to let it come to this!' –	3:08
21	Boles: 'People – ...No! I will speak!...' –	1:56
22	Ellen: 'We planned that their lives' –	2:19
23	Rector: 'Swallow – shall we go and see Grimes in his hut?' –	3:05
24	Nieces: 'From the gutter'	4:21
	TT 82:39	

COMPACT DISC TWO

1	Interlude IV	5:51
	Passacaglia. Andante moderato (sempre un poco rubato) –	
	Scene 2	12:32
2	Peter: 'Go there! Go there!' –	3:05
3	Peter: 'In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home' –	3:16
4	Peter: 'Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut' –	3:00
5	Rector: 'Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Nobody here?'	3:10
	Act III	[36:59]
6	Interlude V	4:14
	Andante comodo e rubato –	
	Scene 1	18:12
7	Swallow: 'Assign your prettiness to me' –	2:48
8	Mrs Sedley: 'Mister Keene! Can you spare a moment?' –	2:46
9	First Burgess: 'Come along, Doctor!' –	1:49

10	Ellen: 'Is the boat in?' –	0:52
11	Ellen: 'Embroidery in childhood' –	3:08
12	Balstrode: 'We'll find him, maybe give him a hand' –	1:32
13	Mrs Sedley: 'Mister Swallow! Mister Swallow!' –	5:15
14	Interlude VI Lento –	2:28
	Scene 2	12:04
15	Voices: 'Grimes! Grimes!' –	5:13
16	Ellen: 'Peter, we've come to take you home' –	2:32
17	Chorus, led by Soprano: 'To those who pass, the Borough sounds betray'	4:19
		TT 55:37



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019

Britten: Peter Grimes, Op. 33

'Any more for Peter Grimes the sadistic fisherman?', a London bus conductor is reported to have enjoyed shouting at his passengers when dropping them off near Sadler's Wells Theatre during the opening run of the hugely successful new opera *Peter Grimes* in June 1945. As a result of both the unexpectedly high profile of this work and his many subsequent achievements in the genre, its composer, Benjamin Britten (1913–1976), was destined to enter the history books as having single-handedly resurrected the fortunes of the composition of original operas in the English language after the mixed fates which such works had received during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While recent scholarship has plausibly argued that the historical significance of Britten in this regard is in fact something of a myth – one that was in part carefully constructed and promoted by the publicity associated with the activities of his later company, the English Opera Group – there can be no denying that *Peter Grimes* broke considerable new ground and encouraged other British composers to tackle opera composition themselves. Britten commented that the occasion of the opera's premiere 'was a greater

one than either Sadler's Wells or me', and went on to express the hope 'that many composers will take the plunge, & I hope also that they'll find as I did the water not quite so icy as expected!'

Peter Grimes was not his first opera. During the three years that Britten and his partner, the tenor Peter Pears, had previously spent in North America (1939–42), Britten had collaborated with the poet W.H. Auden on *Paul Bunyan*, a curious attempt to relate the tale of America's mythical founder in an operetta style that lay halfway between Broadway and the high-school musical. Performed at Columbia University in May 1941, the work was a resounding flop and had to wait more than three decades before again seeing the light of day (when the ailing Britten was encouraged to revise it for a production at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1976, the year of his death). In 1942, the idea for a second opera came to Britten when he and Pears were staying in California and chanced upon an article in *The Listener* which reprinted a radio talk given by the British author E.M. Forster about the poet and clergyman George Crabbe (1754–1832). 'To talk about Crabbe is to talk about England', the article began, and its evocative description

of the Suffolk coastal town of Aldeburgh, where Crabbe was born and briefly served as a curate, had a huge and immediate impact on Britten. He, too, had been born in Suffolk, and the deep nostalgia for the region engendered by Forster's article proved to be a major factor influencing the composer's decision to return home later that same year and lay down domestic and cultural roots in East Anglia, where Britten soon decided to settle in Aldeburgh himself. If, as Forster suggested, the experience of Aldeburgh 'was the making of [Crabbe] as a poet', it also proved to be the making of Britten as a composer. Forster's description of Crabbe and his relationship with the town might be applied with equal aptness to Britten's:

Even when he is writing of other things, there steals again and again into his verse the sea, the estuary, the flat Suffolk coast, and local meannesses, and an odour of brine and dirt – tempered occasionally with the scent of flowers. So remember Aldeburgh when you read this rather odd poet, for he belongs to the grim little place, and through it to England.

Forster's article discussed Crabbe's poem 'Peter Grimes', which was published in 1810 in a collection entitled *The Borough*. The poem tells the story of a violent Aldeburgh fisherman who kills the boy apprentices he has procured from the workhouse and is subsequently visited by their ghosts. Crabbe's Grimes was reputedly

based on the real-life Tom Brown, a fisherman whose apprentices mysteriously disappeared with the result that he came increasingly under suspicion of murdering them. In Crabbe's poem, after three of his apprentices vanish, Grimes is forbidden to take charge of any more; he becomes isolated from his local community as a consequence of his brutish behaviour, and finally goes insane – having at no stage demonstrated a shred of sensitivity or remorse for his actions. Deciding to investigate this intriguing story further, Britten purchased a copy of Crabbe's *Poetical Works* (1851) from a California bookshop and began to think about the tale's operatic potential.

Britten and Pears started planning a Grimes opera in earnest while subsequently staying on Long Island and awaiting their voyage back to the UK. Britten had been fortunate in securing a commission for the work from the foundation which the conductor Serge Koussevitzky had established in 1942 in memory of his wife, Natalie. Koussevitzky, who had recently conducted Britten's *Sinfonia da Requiem* in Boston, generously waived his plan to give the opera its first performance, at Tanglewood, in order that it might be premiered in the UK. (Later – albeit with vested interest – the maestro would declare that *Peter Grimes* was the greatest opera since Bizet's *Carmen*.) Britten and Pears duly sailed home in March 1942, on the liner *SS Axel Johnson*. While on board, Britten was

occupied with composing (or, more accurately, reconstructing) his choral works *Hymn to St Cecilia* and *A Ceremony of Carols*, after US Customs officials had unhelpfully confiscated some of his manuscripts on departure in case they contained coded information intended for the Allies' wartime enemies. During the voyage Pears occupied himself with making some notes based on Crabbe's poem, and these contrasted the sea, which he described as '(The Incalculable – Uncontrolled) cf. war, violence', with the land, '(Secure – Unchanging) Peace etc.'. As the opera took shape, the instability and unpredictability of the sea became directly associated with Grimes, who owed his fisherman's livelihood to it, while the stability of the land was symbolised by the character of the schoolteacher Ellen Orford, who was borrowed from another of Crabbe's tales. The doomed relationship between Grimes and Ellen, whom he loves and wishes to marry in order to gain respectability, lies at the very heart of the opera. As Forster described the operatic Grimes in 1948, the fisherman had in Britten's hands been transformed from the brute he is in Crabbe's poem into a 'misunderstood Byronic hero', who 'is sensitive, touched by pity, stung by remorse, and corrected by shame'. Given that Pears created the title role in the premiere production and quickly became indelibly associated with it, it is interesting to note that Grimes was originally

slated to be a baritone rather than tenor, suggesting that the part had not been initially conceived for him.

Once the preliminary planning of the opera's scenario was finished, Britten next needed to acquire the services of a competent librettist. He was reluctant to work with Auden again after the disaster of *Paul Bunyan*, and instead initially turned to Auden's theatrical collaborator, Christopher Isherwood, whom he knew well from having composed incidental music to two jointly authored Auden – Isherwood plays which had been staged in London in the late 1930s. When Isherwood declined the invitation, Britten turned to his second choice, the left-wing writer and journalist Montagu Slater, a talented amateur musician whom he had met when they had worked together on the GPO Film Unit's documentary *Coal Face*, in 1935, after which Britten had written music for several of Slater's politically charged plays. Slater was attracted to the plot's social themes and agreed to write the libretto, on which he worked principally between June 1942 and the end of 1943; the bulk of the opera's music was then composed between January 1944 and February 1945. Slater proved to be a slow writer and, as he was in full-time employment, he could only work on the opera in his spare time. This was a cause of considerable frustration to Britten, who in some instances proceeded to write stretches of music without the necessary words to hand:

several of the opera's most memorable musical ideas were composed to temporary, awkward texts which needed to be modified at a later stage.

His anxieties about the libretto and his own strong vision for the piece led Britten to consult others behind his librettist's back and even seek their help with redrafting certain passages. Two of the friends who helped Britten modify Slater's text would become future librettists of his in their own right. Eric Crozier, who produced the first staging of *Peter Grimes* and went on to write the libretto for *Albert Herring* (1947), became a constant confidant in this regard, and recalled that Slater was reluctant to demonstrate 'active collaboration', although this was perhaps an unfair comment given the lengths to which Slater thoughtfully went when successfully persuading Britten not to jettison the hauntingly lovely women's quartet which concludes Act II, Scene 1. Ronald Duncan (later the librettist of *The Rape of Lucretia*, in 1946) covertly refashioned the climactic mad scene, Britten informing him in February 1945 that 'Montagu agreed to the new mad-scene, & I kept your part in it fairly quiet, altho' I murmured that you helped us abit! [*sic*]'. It was probably neither by accident nor forgetfulness that Britten failed to send proofs of the definitive libretto to Slater for correction: the composer had to write to him to apologise in August

1945, claiming, 'I never bother poets with my proofs of their stuff – at least, Wystan [Auden] never read his. But I'm sorry if I've slipped up'. Slater had come to resent Britten's controlling attitude towards his text, and Crozier recalled that at one point he lost his temper, shouting, 'but this is *my* work, this is *my* work', when Britten expressed his displeasure at hearing that Slater intended to publish his libretto in a form of which the writer alone approved. Undeterred, Slater went ahead and issued his unadulterated text in the volume *Peter Grimes and Other Poems* (1946), in which the libretto was freed from all the eminently practical revisions that Britten had made to it in order to help the drama come to life vividly on the operatic stage.

Britten's publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, had hoped that *Peter Grimes* would be staged at Covent Garden to mark the re-opening of the venue (for which they had acquired the lease) as a serious theatre after its wartime incarnation as a dance hall. In the event, the Sadler's Wells Opera Company showed considerable enthusiasm for the work, and agreed to mount the first production under the direction of Crozier, with Pears (who had already sung for the company) in the title role and Joan Cross cast as Ellen Orford. The conductor was Reginald Goodall, and the designer Kenneth Green. As well as placing great demands on Slater during the writing

process, Britten had also been in close contact with Green because he wanted to be able to visualise the appearance of the sets and costumes as he worked on the opera's music. Green was another native of Suffolk, though his sets were inspired less by Aldeburgh than by the nearby town of Southwold which, unusually, features a prominent lighthouse in the town centre. Green's designs were described by one reviewer of the first production as 'most evocative' and responsible for creating 'an atmosphere of haunted moods that would be creepy if it were less poetical'.

By way of advertising the forthcoming production, members of the cast performed extracts from the opera (with Britten at the piano) at London's Wigmore Hall on 31 May 1945. The production itself opened on 7 June, almost exactly one month after the end of the Second World War in Europe. The euphoria unleashed by VE Day was still very much in the air, and doubtless contributed to the heady enthusiasm with which the new work was greeted by both the public and representatives of the press. But within Sadler's Wells itself significant tensions had arisen. There was open resentment on the part of some members of the company that the three principal stakeholders in the project (Britten, Pears, and Crozier) had all been conscientious objectors during the war, which made it arguably inappropriate for their creative work to be so

prominently showcased as part of the victory celebrations. Cross, in addition to playing the part of Ellen, was director of the company, and gossip was rife that she had agreed to mount the opera merely because she wanted to secure this high-profile new role for herself. Soon after its initial run, in spite of its great success, Britten withdrew the opera from the Sadler's Wells repertoire and Cross, Crozier, and Pears all quit the company.

A new and more expansive production of *Peter Grimes*, directed by Tyrone Guthrie, in which Pears and Cross reprised their roles, opened on the much larger stage at Covent Garden in November 1947. By this time the opera had (extraordinarily) already been staged in Antwerp, Basle, Berlin, Brno, Budapest, Copenhagen, Graz, Hamburg, Mannheim, Milan, Stockholm, and Zurich, as well as having been broadcast by Australian, British, and Italian radio stations. The delayed Tanglewood performance had also taken place, in the summer of 1946, and with the dynamic Leonard Bernstein at the helm. Stagings in Brussels, Paris, and New York followed in 1948, the year in which EMI made a recording of extracts from the work, featuring Pears, Cross, the BBC Theatre Chorus, and the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House under the baton of Goodall. (These recordings were not released at the time. Some first appeared as part of an LP anthology in 1972 and all of them were eventually issued on

CD in 1993.) Britten conducted his own recording with the Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House for Decca in 1958, a release which utilised the relatively new stereo technology for which Decca's opera recordings were then becoming renowned, with Pears again in the title role and Ellen portrayed by Claire Watson. Britten later conducted a production made especially for BBC Television, videotaped in colour in 1969 on the stage of the Snape Maltings Concert Hall near Aldeburgh, which survives as a valuable document of Pears's memorable interpretation of the title role.

The North Sea, at various times both benign and savage, arguably plays a central role in the opera, and its contrasting facets are celebrated in the orchestral interludes, the concert versions of which were first performed (under the title *Four Sea Interludes*, Op. 33a), at the Cheltenham Festival – just a week after the opera's premiere – by the London Philharmonic Orchestra under the composer. In his own 1945 introduction to the opera, Britten declared, 'I wanted to express my awareness of the perpetual struggle of men and women whose livelihood depends on the sea'; but he later downplayed this idea by saying that the opera was essentially about the actions of the people in it, and that they would have behaved the same way if they were situated anywhere else. A fifth orchestral interlude, the Passacaglia, Op. 33b, was given its concert premiere, at the

Royal Albert Hall by Sir Adrian Boult and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, on 29 August 1945. This interlude originally had the working title 'Boy's suffering' and opened with a *fugato*, but in its definitive form it became a powerfully obsessive invention on the motif setting the words, 'And God have mercy upon me!', which Grimes cries after the fateful moment when he strikes Ellen and his doom is effectively sealed.

In an introduction to *Peter Grimes*, given for its first radio audience, in 1946, Pears described it as 'an opera based on the conflict between society and the individual'. He went on to characterise the eponymous fisherman as 'very much of an ordinary weak person' who, in the course of trying to become accepted by the local community, 'offends against the conventional code'. 'Classed by society as a criminal', Pears noted, he is ultimately 'destroyed as such'. Certainly the powerful way in which the Borough's townsfolk are portrayed in the shape of the opera's vivid chorus writing, and the inexorable manner in which they drive Grimes to his watery grave and thereby become themselves implicated in (and to some extent directly responsible for) his tragic demise, is one of the work's most compelling features. The intensity of this conflict suggests that it held a special personal significance for the composer, who revealed that on their return to the UK he and Pears had felt 'out of it' as conscientious objectors, and that because of this the work

embodied a 'central feeling... of the individual against the crowd, with ironic overtones for our own situation'. Britten continued:

We couldn't say we suffered physically, but naturally we experienced tremendous tension. I think it was partly this feeling which led us to make Grimes a character of vision and conflict, the tortured idealist he is, rather than the villain he was in Crabbe.

But the tensions ran far deeper, given that both Britten and Pears were gay at a time when homosexuality was still a criminal offence. The musicologist Philip Brett – as part of an exhaustive examination of the opera's primary source materials in the early 1980s – was the first to argue that the comment by Britten in all probability implied a significant degree of ostracism on account of his and Pears's sexuality too. In any event, Grimes proved to be but the first in a long line of memorable operatic characters who, in Britten's prolific later output for the dramatic stage, were forced to grapple with intractable issues of conformity and nonconformity, of private desires conflicting with public responsibilities, and of the plight experienced by the lonely outsider.

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Synopsis

Prologue

The interior of the Moot Hall

The opera opens with Grimes under cross-examination at the inquest to establish the cause of death of his apprentice. Although the coroner, Swallow (who is also Mayor and the leading lawyer of the Borough), returns a verdict of accidental death, Grimes complains that this verdict does not really clear his name as the Borough gossips continue to blame him. The court is cleared. Grimes and the schoolmistress Ellen Orford sing a reconciliatory duet.

Interlude I

A depiction of dawn, leading directly into

Act I

Scene 1

A street by the sea, a few days later

The inhabitants of the Borough go about their daily business. When Grimes arrives and calls for help in hauling his boat ashore, everyone shuns him except Balstrode and the apothecary Ned Keene, who has procured a new apprentice for him. Despite the general disapproval of the Borough, Ellen agrees to fetch the boy from the workhouse by the carrier's cart.

Shortly after her departure, the storm breaks; it is all the more threatening because of a spring tide. The inhabitants flee from the dangers of the storm, leaving Grimes and Balstrode alone. Balstrode tries to persuade

Grimes to leave the town, but the fisherman declares that he is 'native, rooted here' and discloses his dreams of a wealthy future with Ellen as his wife.

Interlude II

An evocation of the terrors of the storm. The music of the interlude underpins the whole of

Act I

Scene 2

Inside 'The Boar' on the evening of the same day
Fisherfolk shelter from the storm. As more arrive, news is brought of flooding in the neighbourhood. Grimes arrives to await Ellen and the apprentice. The Borough's antagonism towards him reaches a climax in Boles's accusation, 'His exercise is not with men but killing boys!'. To keep the peace and distract everyone's attention from Grimes, Ned Keene starts a round. Ellen and the apprentice turn up half-drowned; to everyone's consternation, Grimes insists on taking the boy away at once, back into the stormy night to his desolate hut.

Act II

Interlude III

A fine, sunny Sunday morning, some weeks later, leading without a break into

Scene 1

Scene as in Act I, Scene 1

Ellen and Grimes's new apprentice sit in the sun by the sea, while morning service is celebrated in the Parish Church. By chance, she discovers that the boy's clothes are torn and his body bruised. When Grimes comes to drag him off fishing, Ellen confronts Grimes; her questions lead to an open quarrel, observed and overheard by some of the community, which ends by his striking her. The Borough is roused and the townspeople follow the Rector and Swallow off to Grimes's hut to discover the truth of the situation. Four of the womenfolk (Ellen, Auntie, and the Nieces) contemplate the relationship between the sexes.

Interlude IV

Passacaglia

Act II

Scene 2

Inside Grimes's hut, an old upturned boat
Grimes orders the boy about in a rough manner which frightens the lad. In an attempt to soothe the boy's terror of him, Grimes evokes an image of what their life might be like if all goes well. The vision of paradise transmutes into one of hell as Grimes, in a foreshadowing of his eventual madness, recalls the dead, former apprentice. When he hears the townspeople climbing up the road to his hut, he loses his nerve, flings his nets and tackle out of the cliff-side door and bundles the boy out. The boy slips

and falls to his death. Grimes scrambles down after him. When the townspeople reach the hut they are surprised to find it empty, and not a little taken aback that it is neat and orderly. All leave by the main door except Balstrode, who goes out through the cliff-side door.

Act III

Interlude V

Moonlight on a summer's evening

Scene 1

Scene as in Act I, Scene 1. A few days after Grimes's disappearance

A dance is taking place in the Moot Hall, and there is considerable coming and going between the Moot Hall and 'The Boar'. Swallow tries his luck with Auntie's Nieces. Mrs Sedley, one of the leading gossips in the Borough, eavesdrops on Ellen as she tells Balstrode that she has found the boy's jersey washed up on the beach. Seeing that Grimes's boat is back, Mrs Sedley informs Swallow of what she has learned and of her grave suspicions for

the boy's safety. Swallow, as mayor, summons Hobson, constable of the Borough, to organise a posse to apprehend Grimes.

Interlude VI

Which leads directly into

Act III

Scene 2

Scene as in Scene 1, a few hours later. A thick fog has set in.

Only the fog-horn and the calls of the townspeople at their manhunt break the stillness of the night as Grimes, exhausted, hungry, wet, and now insane, tries to return to his hut. Ellen and Balstrode find him, but it is too late: he is beyond help. Balstrode proposes a way out: Grimes must sail out to sea, scuttle his boat, and sink with it.

As dawn breaks, life in the Borough resumes its daily round. There is a report of a boat sinking out at sea, beyond reach. No one is concerned.

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From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019



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One of the finest heldentenors on the stage today, the Australian **Stuart Skelton** is critically acclaimed for his outstanding musicianship, tonal beauty, and intensely dramatic portrayals. His repertoire encompasses many of opera's most challenging roles, from Wagner's Lohengrin, Parsifal, Siegmund, and Tristan to Strauss's Kaiser, Beethoven's Florestan, Saint-Saëns's Samson, Dvořák's Dimitrij, and Britten's Peter Grimes. He appears regularly at The Metropolitan Opera, New York, The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, English National Opera, and Opéra national de Paris under the batons of James Levine, Philippe Jordan, Donald Runnicles, Simone Young, Asher Fisch, and Daniele Gatti, among others. He maintains a rigorous symphonic diary in a broad range of concert work, spanning from Beethoven and Mahler to Janáček and Stravinsky. Stuart Skelton has collaborated in performances with Sir Antonio Pappano and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony, Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker, Franz Welser-Möst and The Cleveland Orchestra, Mariss Jansons and the Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Sir Andrew Davis and the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, David Robertson and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and Christoph von Dohnányi and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. A particularly close artistic

relationship with Edward Gardner has yielded numerous exquisite performances on concert platforms and opera stages across the globe. www.stuartskelton.com

Acclaimed for her musicality and versatility, the soprano **Erin Wall** sings an extensive opera and concert repertoire spanning three centuries, from Mozart and Beethoven to Strauss and Britten. She has sung leading roles in many of the world's great opera houses, including The Metropolitan Opera, New York, Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Wiener Staatsoper, Opéra national de Paris, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, and appears in concert with leading *maestri* and symphony orchestras throughout the world. During the 2019/20 season, she performed and recorded two of her most noted operatic roles, Thaïs with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra under Sir Andrew Davis and Ellen Orford (*Peter Grimes*) with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Gardner. She also made her much-anticipated début, as Elsa (*Lohengrin*), at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. In concert, she performed Richard Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder* in Sydney, Berlin, and Jackson (Mississippi), and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra under Robert Spano, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Bayerische Staatsoper under Kirill Petrenko, and San Francisco Symphony

under Michael Tilson Thomas in the latter's final performances as Music Director. In Calgary, she appeared in a performance of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*. Erin Wall is scheduled in the near future to return to The Metropolitan Opera, Orchestre de Paris, and Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and to make her débuts with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra.

Roderick Williams OBE is one of the most sought-after baritones of his generation, whose wide repertoire spans baroque to contemporary music. Active in the opera house and on the concert platform, he is also in demand worldwide as a recitalist. He enjoys relationships with all the major UK opera houses and has performed in the world premiere of works by David Sawer, Sally Beamish, Michel van der Aa, Robert Saxton, and Alexander Knaifel. He performs regularly with leading conductors and orchestras throughout Europe, North America, and Australia, and has appeared at the BBC Proms as well as the Edinburgh, Cheltenham, Aldeburgh, and Melbourne festivals. He is a composer whose works have been premiered at the Wigmore Hall, Barbican, Purcell Room, and on national radio. In December 2016 he won the prize for Best Choral Composition at the British Composer Awards. Having received an OBE in June 2017, Roderick Williams was nominated for Outstanding Achievement in Opera in the 2018

Olivier Awards for his performance in the title role of Monteverdi's *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden.

Firmly established as one of the most accomplished mezzo-sopranos of her generation, **Susan Bickley** masters a repertoire encompassing the baroque, the great nineteenth- and twentieth-century dramatic roles, and contemporary works. In 2011 she received the Singer Award from the Royal Philharmonic Society, the highest recognition for live classical music in the UK. Having sung on many of the world's great stages with conductors such as Sir Mark Elder, Ingo Metzmacher, Trevor Pinnock, Sir Andrew Davis, Christian Curnyn, and Mark Wigglesworth, she has recently made notable appearances at The Dallas Opera, San Francisco Opera, English National Opera, Opéra national du Rhin, Opera Vlaanderen, Opéra national de Paris, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Staatsoper Berlin, Salzburger Festspiele, and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden. In concert she has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia under Antonio Pappano, and the Hallé; in addition she has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the BBC Proms, and Edinburgh International Festival. In recital, she has worked with Roger Vignoles, Iain Burnside, András Schiff, Julius Drake, and Graham

Johnson. A prolific recording artist, Susan Bickley has recorded works by John Eccles, Rossini, Britten, and Edmund Rubbra for Chandos Records.

Having obtained a BMus from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and attended Högskolan för scen och musik in Gothenburg and Opera Studio in Stockholm, the Swedish soprano **Hanna Husáhr** continued her studies as a trainee at the Finnish National Opera, singing roles such as Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*) and first Blumenmädchen and Knappe (*Parsifal*). She made her operatic début in 2009 as Leïla (*Les Pêcheurs de perles*) at Folkoperan in Stockholm and has since made a name for herself as Pat Nixon (*Nixon in China*) and Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) at Kungliga Operan in Stockholm, Xenia (*Boris Godunov*) with the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra under Kent Nagano, Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*) at Malmö Opera, Sophie (*Werther*), Helena (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), and Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) at Bergen Nasjonale Opera, Romilda (*Serse*) at Opéra royal de Versailles, Barbarina (*Le nozze di Figaro*) and Céphise (Rameau's *Pigmalion*) at Drottningholms slottsteater, Lucia (*Lucia di Lammermoor*) at Latvian National Opera, Woglinde (*Das Rheingold*) at Den Ny Opera in Esbjerg, and First Niece (*Peter Grimes*) with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Gardner in Oslo, Bergen, and the Royal Festival

Hall in London. She has sung Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* and Mahler's Symphony No. 8 with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Daniel Harding, Bach's St John Passion with Les Musiciens du Louvre under Marc Minkowski, Nielsen's Symphony No. 3 under Herbert Blomstedt, Kaija Saariaho's Leino Songs with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, *Messiah* with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and Haydn's *Paukenmesse* under Manfred Honeck. In 2013 Hanna Husáhr performed works by Schubert and Kraus with L'arte del mondo at the Berliner Philharmonie.

Born in Norway in 1980, the soprano **Vibeke Kristensen** was educated at Norges Musikkhøgskole, became a finalist in The Queen Sonja International Music Competition in 2003, and finished her studies at Operaakademiet of Det Kongelige Danske Musikkonservatorium in 2006. Having made her professional operatic début in 2004, as Despina (*Così fan tutte*) in a production for young singers at the Savonlinna Opera Festival, she made her début at Det Kongelige Teater, Copenhagen later that year as Amor (Gluck's *Orfeo et Euridice*) and has since returned to the opera company several times as a guest soloist. Subsequently she has been a frequent guest on opera stages in Denmark and Norway, notably as Adele (*Die Fledermaus*)

at Det Kongelige Teater, Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*) at Den Jyske Opera in Aarhus and Bergen Nasjonale Opera, and Gretel (*Hänsel und Gretel*) and Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*) at Opera Nordfjord in Norway. In 2012 she was awarded two of Denmark's most prestigious opera awards for her performance of Snow White in *Snehvides Spejl* (Snow White's Mirror), a new full-length two-act opera by the Danish composer Niels Marthinsen: the award for Best Opera Performance of the Year by the Danish magazine *Ascolta* and The Aalborg Opera Prize. Vibeke Kristensen is a frequent soloist in oratorios and masses and has performed with all the major orchestras in both Denmark and Norway, in a wide-ranging repertoire.

The tenor **Robert Murray** studied at the Royal College of Music and National Opera Studio and won second prize in the Kathleen Ferrier Awards in 2003. He was a Jette Parker Young Artist at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden where he has sung Tamino (*Die Zauberflöte*), Borsa (*Rigoletto*), Gastone (*La traviata*), Harry (*La fanciulla del West*), Lysander (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Agenore (*Il re pastore*), Belfiore (*La finta giardiniera*), Jacquino (*Fidelio*), and Don Ottavio (*Don Giovanni*). At English National Opera he has appeared as Simpleton (*Boris Godunov*), Tamino, Toni Reischmann (Henze's *Elegy for Young Lovers*), Idamante (*Idomeneo*), Don Ottavio, and Steuermann (*Der fliegende*

Holländer), amongst others. He has also performed at Welsh National Opera, Opera North, Garsington Opera, Staatsoper Hamburg, and Den Norske Opera, and appeared at the Salzburger Festspiele and with Glyndebourne on Tour. He has appeared in concert and recital at the Wigmore Hall, the Newbury, Two Moors, Brighton, Aldeburgh, and Edinburgh International festivals, and with the Orquesta Sinfónica Simón Bolívar under Gustavo Dudamel, Handel and Haydn Society under Harry Christophers, Mahler Chamber Orchestra under Alan Gilbert, London Symphony Orchestra under Sir Simon Rattle, Le Concert d'Astrée under Emmanuelle Haïm, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra under Sir Charles Mackerras, Rotterdams Philharmonisch Orkest under Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and Philharmonia Orchestra under Esa-Pekka Salonen, as well as at the BBC Proms under Sir John Eliot Gardiner. Most recently Robert Murray returned to The Royal Opera in Gerald Barry's *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, appeared in *Peter Grimes* alongside Stuart Skelton with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra under Edward Gardner, and performed Mendelssohn's *Elijah* with both the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment.

The bass-baritone **Neal Davies** studied at King's College, London and the Royal Academy of Music and in 1991 won the Lieder Prize at the

Cardiff Singer of the World Competition. He has appeared in concert with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Hallé, Cleveland Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orquesta Nacional de España, and Wiener Philharmoniker, with Sir Andrew Davis, Sir Mark Elder, Paul McCreesh, Ivor Bolton, René Jacobs, Mariss Jansons, William Christie, Edward Gardner, David Afkham, Pierre Boulez, Christoph von Dohnányi, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Frans Brüggen, and Daniel Harding. He is a regular guest at the Edinburgh International Festival, BBC Proms, and with Les Violons du Roy under Bernard Labadie and Jonathan Cohen. He has sung Figaro (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Alaska Wolf Joe (*Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny*), and in *Giulio Cesare* at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and Zebul (*Jephtha*), Publio (*La clemenza di Tito*), Ariodates (*Xerxes*), Dr Kolenatý (*The Makropulos Case*), Garibaldi (*Rodelinda*), Antigonus and Shepherd (Ryan Wigglesworth's *A Winter's Tale*), and in a production of Handel's *L'allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato*, staged and choreographed by Mark Morris, at English National Opera; he also performs with Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, Opera di Roma, and Lyric Opera of Chicago. Neal Davies appeared in performances of Charpentier's

David et Jonathas at Aix-en-Provence, available on DVD.

The mezzo-soprano **Catherine Wyn-Rogers** studied at the Royal College of Music and works with Diane Forlano. She is herself a member of the vocal faculty at the Royal Academy of Music and was made an Hon RAM in 2018. Appearing regularly at the Wigmore Hall, and at the BBC Proms, Three Choirs Festival, Edinburgh International Festival, and Aldeburgh Festival, among others, she has performed with such distinguished conductors as Daniel Barenboim, Sir Andrew Davis, Sir Colin Davis, Bernard Haitink, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zubin Mehta, Sir Roger Norrington, Sir Simon Rattle, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, and Leonard Slatkin, and has recorded extensively for the major labels. She is a regular guest of Bayerische Staatsoper, English National Opera, and The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, has also performed at Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, and, abroad, at the opera houses of Amsterdam, Chicago, Dresden, Houston, Madrid, Milan, and Paris, and made notable appearances at the Salzburger Festspiele, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and Verbier Festival. She has sung Adelaide (*Arabella*) at The Metropolitan Opera, New York and Erda and Waltraute (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) under Zubin Mehta in Valencia and Florence. Among recent highlights Catherine Wyn-Rogers numbers performances of Elgar's

The Dream of Gerontius with Staatskapelle Berlin under Daniel Barenboim, released on CD, Barber's *Vanessa* with Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under David Zinman, Frank Martin's *Le Vin herbé* in a new production at Welsh National Opera, and Britten's *Peter Grimes* at the Edinburgh International Festival under Edward Gardner. Her association with the role of Mrs Sedley in that opera spans many renowned productions, including the 'Grimes on the Beach' in Aldeburgh and performances globally from Covent Garden to Tokyo and Teatro alla Scala, Milan.

Having sung as a child in church choirs, **James Gilchrist** pursued a career in medicine, qualifying and working as a hospital doctor. But finding himself in demand as a singer, he changed course in 1996. His earlier musical experience came largely in the field of historically informed performance, and he continues to perform with orchestras and choirs such as the Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Akademie für Alte Musik, Bach Collegium Japan, Dunedin Consort, and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra. In 2000, he took part in John Eliot Gardiner's Cantata Pilgrimage, performing and recording Bach's surviving sacred cantatas. He has become well known as an interpreter of Bach, performing recently as Evangelist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Oregon Bach

Festival, NDR Elbphilharmonie Orchester, and The Bach Choir in the Royal Festival Hall. He has recorded the title role in Handel's *Jephtha* with The Sixteen and the tenor solo in *Messiah* under John Rutter.

In the field of opera, James Gilchrist has recorded the title role in Britten's *Albert Herring*, as well as roles in Britten's *Owen Wingrave* and Vaughan Williams's *The Poisoned Kiss*, all under Richard Hickox. In 2021 he will appear in *Peter Grimes* at Teatro Real in Madrid. He continues to expand his work as a recitalist, especially through his collaboration with the pianist Anna Tilbrook, with whom he has worked for more than twenty years. Their significant discography includes song cycles by Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann, Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* and *Songs of Travel*, and songs by Sir Lennox Berkeley, Benjamin Britten, and John Jeffreys. They have been involved in several new commissions from Sally Beamish, Julian Philips, Jonathan Dove (all premiered in the Wigmore Hall), Alec Roth, and Michael Zev Gordon.

Awarded First Prize in the 2009 Wigmore Hall International Song Competition and the Song Prize at the 2011 Kathleen Ferrier Competition, the baritone **Marcus Farnsworth** masters a wide range of repertoire spanning from Bach through the classical and romantic repertoire to Britten, Turnage, and Maxwell Davies. He appears frequently in recitals, symphonic

concerts, recording studios, and on the operatic stage throughout Europe, notably having collaborated with the BBC Symphony Orchestra in Turnage's *The Silver Tassie* and Adams's *Doctor Atomic*, London Symphony Orchestra in *Candide*, conducted by Marin Alsop, and Birmingham Contemporary Music Group in Maxwell Davies's *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, conducted by Sian Edwards, at the BBC Proms. Subsequent to that last appearance he was invited to perform the same piece with the Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble. In the operatic domain, he has appeared in the hugely successful production of *Iolanthe*, directed by Cal McCrystal, at English National Opera. Further afield, he has worked with Teatro Real, in Madrid, in Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*, Bergen Nasjonale Opera in *Candide*, and Boston Lyric Opera in a production of Turnage's *Greek*. Marcus Farnsworth is the Founder and Artistic Director of the Southwell Music Festival.

The British-Irish bass **Barnaby Rea** trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and National Opera Studio before becoming a Harewood Artist at English National Opera (2013–16). In 2016 he became a member of the solo ensemble of Oper Frankfurt, where his roles have included Sparafucile (*Rigoletto*), Baron Mirko Zeta (*Die lustige Witwe*), Soljony (*Tri sestry* by Péter Eötvös), Truffaldino (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), Ochsenstanz (*Schwergewicht* by Ernst Krenek), Lord Tristan Mickleford

(*Martha* by Friedrich von Flotow), Fabrizio Vingradito (*La gazza ladra*), Bosun (*Billy Budd*), Zaretsky (*Eugene Onegin*), Johann (*Werther*), Pistola (*Falstaff*), and Hobson (*Peter Grimes*). His operatic roles elsewhere have included Sparafucile, Basilio (*The Barber of Seville*), Colline (*La bohème*), Lodovico (*Otello*), Nourabad (*The Pearl Fishers*), Private Willis (*Iolanthe*), and Ben Benny (*Paul Bunyan*) at English National Opera, Colline at Opera North and Ópera de Guatemala, Masetto (*Don Giovanni*) and Mother (*The Seven Deadly Sins*) at Scottish Opera, and Alidoro (*La Cenerentola*), Bertrand (*Iolanta*), Zaretsky and Captain (*Eugene Onegin*), the Bonze (*Madama Butterfly*), and Rocco (*I gioielli della Madonna* by Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari) at Opera Holland Park. On the concert platform Barnaby Rea has sung Judge Pitkin, First Workman, and Radio Announcer (*On the Town*) at the BBC Proms, Madman and Witness 3 in the Russian premiere of *Lessons in Love and Violence* by George Benjamin at the Mariinsky Theatre Concert Hall, Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* live on BBC Radio 3, Mozart's Requiem at the Royal Festival Hall, Hobson at the George Enescu Festival, and with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra at the Bergen and Edinburgh international festivals, Mother with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra, Prince Gudal (*The Demon* by Anton Rubinstein) at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, and Bob Becket (*HMS Pinafore*) at the Edinburgh International Festival.

Although formally founded in 1919, the **Bergen Philharmonic Choir** has roots going back to 1765 when the Music Society Harmonien was established for the purpose of organising orchestral concerts. The Choir flourished during the tenure of Edvard Grieg as Music Director, his choral works still holding a special place in its repertoire. In the past decade, under its current director, Håkon Matti Skrede, it has reached a new summit of excellence, appearing regularly with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra in standard symphonic repertoire, from Mozart to Britten, while also championing more unusual repertoire and contemporary works. Highlights of its recent calendar include performances of Britten's *Peter Grimes* and *War Requiem*, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, Arne Nordheim's *Wirklicher Wald*, and Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, some of these in collaboration with other local choirs. Many discs have received excellent reviews both near and afar, the recording of the *Glagolitic Mass* even earning a Grammy nomination for Best Choral Performance.

The Norwegian vocal ensemble **Edvard Grieg Kor**, founded and based in Bergen, is the resident *a cappella* ensemble at Troidhaugen, the home of Edvard Grieg. Displaying versatility across all musical genres, it performs regularly with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and also forms the heart of the Chorus of Bergen

Nasjonale Opera. It is rapidly gaining a reputation as a leading eight-part *a cappella* ensemble, giving more than fifty performances annually throughout Norway and abroad. Leading composers have written numerous works and arrangements specially for the choir, including an eight-part arrangement of Grieg's 'Holberg' Suite by Jonathan Rathbone and a setting of *Våren* by David Lang. In addition to maintaining its busy performing schedule, EGK has devised a comprehensive development and education programme, dedicated to encouraging *a cappella* singing to the highest level; it includes seven children's choirs in Bergen (singers aged six to sixteen) and Edvard Grieg Ungdomskor (members aged sixteen to twenty-six), whose eclectic work ranges from opera and choral-orchestral repertoire to *a cappella* pieces and has even included an appearance in concert with the Rolling Stones. In 2017 the choir's recording of Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra was nominated for a Grammy award in the category Best Choral Performance. The choir's début *a cappella* album, *Edvard Grieg Kor sings Grieg*, was released by Chandos Records in 2019. Highlights from recent and forthcoming seasons of Edvard Grieg Kor include several appearances with VOCES8 in Bergen, Manchester, and in Belgium, and performances of motets by Bach conducted by Paul Agnew, Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* with the Berliner Philharmoniker conducted by Sir Simon

Rattle, and Britten's *Peter Grimes* at the Edinburgh International Festival and Royal Festival Hall in London with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Edward Gardner.

The **Royal Northern College of Music Chorus** is made up of selected undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in the School of Vocal Studies and Opera at the Royal Northern College of Music, in Manchester. All students study on a combined Vocal and Opera course in which they are provided with unparalleled opportunities to develop their musicianship and their communication and performance skills. The College is delighted to have professional links with international opera companies, opera studios, and Young Artist programmes and many prize-winning graduates of the College are now performing in major opera houses and concert halls worldwide. Under its Chorus Master, Kevin Thraves, the Royal Northern College of Music Chorus has collaborated with the Edvard Grieg Kor and Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra in performances and recordings of Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, Berlioz's *Grande Messe des morts*, and Britten's *Peter Grimes*, the latter at Grieghallen in Bergen, Operahuset in Oslo, the Royal Festival Hall in London, and Edinburgh International Festival.

One of the leading musical ensembles in Bergen, **Collegium Musicum** is designed as

an arena in which professional and amateur musicians can meet and perform music together for mutual inspiration. The ensemble was founded by Professor Jan Christensen in 1978 and consists of a choir and an orchestra, totalling approximately eighty members. Its repertoire primarily features the major classical choral works, but also extends to romantic, modern, and contemporary music. In addition, it maintains a tradition of promoting and commissioning new pieces, most recently two works by the Norwegian composers Knut Vaage and Torstein Aagaard-Nilsen. Collegium Musicum enjoys musical partnerships with a number of international conductors and soloists of high profile. The Choir cooperates with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and its Choir on a regular basis, a cooperation that has resulted in several highly successful performances and CD releases. In 2017, their recording of Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass* for Chandos Records was nominated for a Grammy award in the category Best Choral Performance.

Håkon Matti Skrede trained as a violinist and singer at Griegakademiet in Bergen, Norway. As a singer he has appeared as a soloist in numerous sacred works, and taken part in several operatic productions. As a chorister and student choirmaster of the Drakensberg Boys' Choir in South Africa, he decided to develop his skills as a choral conductor. He

founded Edvard Grieg Kor in 2002, Edvard Grieg Guttekor in 2008, Edvard Grieg Jentekor in 2010, and Edvard Grieg Ungdomskor in 2013, and is currently chorus master for Bergen Nasjonale Opera and Bergen Philharmonic Choir, and conductor of Collegium Musicum. He has conducted a number of operas with children and youths, as well as many large-scale sacred works for chorus and orchestra, including Handel's *Messiah*, the Requiems of Mozart, Duruflé, Fauré, and Brahms, and Britten's *The Company of Heaven*. In 2017 Håkon Matti Skrede received a Grammy nomination for Best Choral Performance for the recording of Janáček's *Glagolitic Mass*, with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and choirs. The same year Bergen Council awarded him its cultural prize, and in 2018 he received the Alle kan synge-prize for his work with children.

One of the world's oldest orchestras, the **Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra** dates back to 1765 and celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2015. Edvard Grieg had a close relationship with the Orchestra, serving as its artistic director during the years 1880 – 82. Numbering one-hundred-and-one musicians, the Orchestra has achieved the status of a Norwegian National Orchestra. Edward Gardner has been Chief Conductor since 2015 and has taken the Orchestra on multiple international tours. These have included appearances at

the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, Edinburgh International Festival, Southbank Centre, and BBC Proms. Previous international tours have included performances at the Wiener Musikverein and Konzerthaus, Carnegie Hall, New York, and Berliner Philharmonie.

In 2015 the Orchestra established its free streaming platform, BergenPhilLive, which offers a fine selection of live streams and works performed by the Orchestra and a range of conductors and soloists. A youth symphony orchestra, Bergen Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, was also established in 2015, which gives four to six concerts per year.

The Orchestra has an active recording schedule, at the moment releasing four CDs every year. Critics worldwide applaud its energetic playing style and full-bodied string sound. Recording projects include Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*, ballets by Stravinsky, the symphonies, ballet suites, and concertos by Prokofiev, and the complete orchestral music of Edvard Grieg. Enjoying long-standing artistic partnerships with some of the finest musicians in the world, the Orchestra has recorded with Leif Ove Andsnes, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, James Ehnes, Gerald Finley, Alban Gerhardt, Vadim Gluzman, Stephen Hough, Freddy Kempf, Truls Mørk, Steven Osborne, Lawrence Power, Sara Jakubiak, and Stuart Skelton, among others.

The Orchestra has recorded Tchaikovsky's ballets and critically acclaimed series of works

by Johan Halvorsen and Johan Svendsen with Neeme Järvi, orchestral works by Rimsky-Korsakov with Dmitri Kitayenko, and music by Berlioz, Delius, Elgar, Sibelius, and Vaughan Williams with Sir Andrew Davis.

The first collaboration on disc between Edward Gardner and the Orchestra was a recording of orchestral realisations by Luciano Berio. A critically acclaimed series devoted to orchestral works by Janáček, including a Grammy-nominated recording of his *Glagolitic Mass*, has been completed, and Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder* was released in 2016. 2017 saw the release of a CD of orchestral songs by Sibelius, with Gerald Finley as soloist, and a disc of orchestral works by Bartók, including the Concerto for Orchestra. Recordings of the Piano Concerto and incidental music from *Peer Gynt* by Grieg as well as the *Grande Messe des morts* by Berlioz appeared in 2018. The latest releases by the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra have been recordings of Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with John Relyea and Michelle DeYoung, Brahms's Symphonies Nos 1 and 3, and Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande* and *Erwartung* with Sara Jakubiak. www.harmonien.no / www.bergenphillive.no

Chief Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra since October 2015, **Edward Gardner** OBE has led the musicians on multiple international tours, which have

included performances in Berlin, Munich, and Amsterdam, and at the BBC Proms and Edinburgh International Festival. He was recently appointed Principal Conductor Designate of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, his tenure commencing in September 2021. In demand as a guest conductor, during the previous two seasons he made his début with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, and Wiener Symphoniker, as well as at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden in a new production of *Kát'a Kabanová*, praised by *The Guardian* as a 'magnificent interpretation'. He returned to the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Philharmonia Orchestra, and Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala di Milano. In April 2019, he conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra at the Lincoln Center in New York.

During the 2019 / 20 season he conducted a revival of *Werther* at The Royal Opera and returned to The Metropolitan Opera for performances of *La Damnation de Faust*. In London he conducted four concerts with the London Philharmonic Orchestra and brought the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra to the Royal Festival Hall with their acclaimed *Peter Grimes*. As guest conductor, he appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, and Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, and was due to work with

the San Francisco Symphony and Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin when the COVID-19 crisis struck. He will continue his longstanding collaboration with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, of which he was Principal Guest Conductor from 2010 to 2016, and BBC Symphony Orchestra, whom he has conducted at both the First and the Last Night of the BBC Proms.

Music Director of English National Opera for ten years (2006–15), Edward Gardner has an ongoing relationship with The Metropolitan Opera, New York, where he has conducted productions of *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Werther*. He has also conducted at Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and Opéra national de Paris. A passionate supporter of young talent, he founded the Hallé Youth Orchestra in 2002 and regularly conducts the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He has a close relationship with The Juilliard School, and with the Royal

Academy of Music which appointed him its inaugural Sir Charles Mackerras Conducting Chair in 2014. He is an exclusive Chandos artist, whose recording projects with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra have explored music by Bartók, Berio, Berlioz, Brahms, Grieg, Janáček, Schoenberg, and Sibelius. With the BBC Symphony Orchestra he has focused on Elgar and Walton and released acclaimed discs of works by Lutosławski and Szymanowski. With the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra he has recorded numerous works by Mendelssohn, including the symphonies and overtures.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, he was educated at Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. He went on to become Assistant Conductor of The Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. Among many accolades, Edward Gardner was named Conductor of the Year by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2008, won an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera in 2009, and received an OBE for Services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2012.



Gudmundur Ingólfsson

Stuart Skelton

© Kristin Hoebemann



Erin Wall



Roderick Williams

Julie Kim



Susan Bickley

Britten: Peter Grimes op. 33

"Noch jemand für Peter Grimes, den sadistischen Fischer?", soll ein Londoner Bus-Schaffner seinen Passagieren vergnügt zugerufen haben, als er sie während der ersten Spielzeit von Britten's überaus erfolgreicher neuen Oper *Peter Grimes* im Juni 1945 in der Nähe des Sadler's Wells Theatre aussteigen ließ. Als Konsequenz der unerwartet positiven Aufnahme dieses Werks sowie seiner zahlreichen weiteren Erfolge in der Gattung der Oper war es Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976) beschieden, als der Komponist in die Geschichtsbücher einzugehen, dem es gelungen war, nach dem wechselhaften Los derartiger Werke im neunzehnten und frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhundert das Schicksal der englischsprachigen Oper im Alleingang gewendet zu haben. Während die jüngere Musikwissenschaft plausibel dargelegt hat, dass die historische Bedeutung Britten's in dieser Hinsicht tatsächlich eher ein Mythos ist – ein Mythos, der teils von der Publicity in Verbindung mit den Aktivitäten seines späteren Ensembles, der English Opera Group bewusst konstruiert und verbreitet wurde –, ist nicht zu leugnen, dass *Peter Grimes* in wesentlichem Maße neues Terrain betreten und andere

britische Komponisten ermutigt hat, sich ebenfalls an der Gattung zu versuchen. Britten selbst merkte an, dass der Anlass "größer war als Sadler's Wells oder auch ich selbst", und verlieh sodann der Hoffnung Ausdruck, "dass viele Komponisten den Sprung wagen und, so hoffe ich, gleich mir entdecken werden, dass das Wasser gar nicht so eisig ist wie erwartet!"

Peter Grimes war nicht Britten's erste Oper. In den drei Jahren, die er und sein Partner, der Tenor Peter Pears, zuvor in Nordamerika verbracht hatten (1939 – 1942), hatte Britten gemeinsam mit dem Dichter W.H. Auden an *Paul Bunyan* gearbeitet, einem eigenwilligen Versuch, die Geschichte des sagenumwobenen Gründers Amerikas in einem operettenhaften Stil zu erzählen, der irgendwo zwischen dem Broadway und einem Highschool-Musical lag. Das Werk wurde im Mai 1941 an der Columbia University aufgeführt und war ein schallender Misserfolg – es sollten drei Jahrzehnte vergehen, bevor es erneut zur Aufführung kam (man hatte den von Krankheit gezeichneten Britten ermutigt, das Werk für eine Produktion im Rahmen des Aldeburgh Festivals von 1976 – seinem Todesjahr – zu überarbeiten). Die Idee zu einer zweiten Oper kam Britten im Jahr 1942,

als er und Pears sich in Kalifornien aufhielten und zufällig auf einen Artikel in *The Listener* aufmerksam wurden, bei dem es sich um einen Abdruck eines Rundfunk-Features des britischen Autors E.M. Forster über den Dichter und Kleriker George Crabbe (1754 – 1832) handelte. "Über Crabbe zu sprechen, heißt über England sprechen", begann der Artikel, und die suggestive Beschreibung des in der Grafschaft Suffolk gelegenen Küstenstädtchens Aldeburgh, wo Crabbe geboren war und kurze Zeit als Vikar wirkte, hinterließ bei Britten einen außerordentlichen Eindruck. Er selbst stammte ebenfalls aus Suffolk, und die durch Forsters Artikel ausgelöste tiefe Sehnsucht nach diesem Landstrich war ein wesentlicher Beweggrund für seinen Entschluss, noch im selben Jahr in seine Heimat East Anglia zurückzukehren, wo er schon bald Aldeburgh zu seinem – auch kulturellen – Lebensmittelpunkt machte. Wenn Crabbe, wie Forster meinte, durch seine Erfahrungen in Aldeburgh "zum Dichter wurde", so trifft dies auch für Britten und seine Entwicklung zum Komponisten zu. Forsters Ausführungen zu Crabbe und dessen Beziehung zu dem Küstenstädtchen lassen sich ebenso gut auf Britten anwenden:

Selbst wenn er von anderen Dingen schreibt,
 schleichen sich in seine Verse immer wieder
 die See, das Mündungsgebiet, die flache Küste
 Suffolks und lokale Niederungen ein sowie

ein Geruch von Salzwasser und Erdreich, der
 gelegentlich vom Duft der Blumen gemildert
 wird. Also denken Sie an Aldeburgh, wenn Sie
 diesen recht eigenwilligen Poeten lesen, denn
 er gehört zu diesem trüben kleinen Ort und
 durch ihn zu England.

Forsters Artikel behandelt Crabbes Gedicht "Peter Grimes", das im Jahr 1810 als Teil einer Sammlung mit dem Titel *The Borough* veröffentlicht wurde. Es erzählt die Geschichte eines gewalttätigen Fischers aus Aldeburgh, der die jungen Gehilfen, die er aus dem Armenhaus bezieht, umbringt und später von ihren Geistern heimgesucht wird. Crabbes Grimes basierte angeblich auf der realen Person des Tom Brown, eines Fischers, dessen Gehilfen auf mysteriöse Weise verschwanden, so dass er zunehmend unter Verdacht geriet, sie ermordet zu haben. In Crabbes Gedicht wird Grimes nach dem Verschwinden von drei seiner Lehrjungen untersagt, weitere Knaben zu übernehmen; er wird aufgrund seines brutalen Verhaltens von der lokalen Gemeinschaft ausgeschlossen und verliert schließlich den Verstand – ohne zu irgendeinem Zeitpunkt auch nur die Spur einer Empfindung oder gar Reue für seine Taten gezeigt zu haben. Britten beschloss, diese faszinierende Geschichte weiter zu erkunden; er erstand in einem kalifornischen Buchladen ein Exemplar von Crabbes *Poetical Works* (1851) und begann, sich über das Potential der Geschichte als Opernsujet Gedanken zu machen.

Britten und Pears begannen mit dem Schmieden ernsthafter Pläne für eine Grimes-Oper noch während sie sich auf Long Island aufhielten, wo sie auf ihre Rückreise nach Großbritannien warteten. Es war Britten gelungen, sich bei der Stiftung, die der Dirigent Serge Koussevitzky 1942 zum Gedenken an seine verstorbene Frau Natalie gegründet hatte, einen Auftrag für die Komposition zu sichern. Koussevitzky, der kurz zuvor in Boston Brittens *Sinfonia da Requiem* dirigiert hatte, verzichtete großzügig auf seinen Plan, die Uraufführung der Oper in Tanglewood zu geben, damit die Premiere in Großbritannien stattfinden konnte. (Später sollte der Maestro – wohl auch in eigenem Interesse – erklären, dass *Peter Grimes* die großartigste Oper seit Bizets *Carmen* sei.) Britten und Pears kehrten im März 1942 planmäßig mit dem Linienschiff *Axel Johnson* nach Hause zurück. Während der Überfahrt beschäftigte Britten sich mit der Komposition (oder, genauer, der Rekonstruktion) seiner Chorwerke *Hymn to St Cecilia* und *A Ceremony of Carols*, nachdem amerikanische Zollbeamte zu seinem Verdruss bei seiner Abreise einige seiner Manuskripte konfisziert hatten, da sich nicht ausschließen ließ, dass diese möglicherweise kodierte Informationen für die Kriegsgegner der Alliierten enthielten. Außerdem begann Pears mit ersten Notizen zu Crabbes Gedicht, in denen er das Meer, das er als "(das Unkalkulierbare – Unkontrollierte)

vgl. Krieg, Gewalt" mit dem Land verglich, "(sicher, unveränderlich) Frieden usw.". Als die Oper Gestalt anzunehmen begann, ergab sich eine unmittelbare Entsprechung zwischen der Instabilität und Unberechenbarkeit des Meeres und Grimes, der der See seinen Lebensunterhalt verdankte, während die Stabilität des Landes durch die Figur der Schullehrerin Ellen Orford symbolisiert wurde, die einer anderen von Crabbes Geschichten entnommen war. Die zum Scheitern verurteilte Beziehung zwischen Grimes und Ellen, die er liebt und heiraten möchte, um eine respektable Existenz aufzubauen, bildet den Kern der Oper. Wie Forster die Opernfigur Grimes 1948 beschrieb, hatte der Fischer sich unter Brittens Händen von dem Rohling aus Crabbes Gedicht in einen "missverstandenen byronischen Helden" verwandelt, der "sensibel, voller Mitgefühl und reuegeplagt ist und den sein Schamgefühl zu einem besseren Menschen macht". Wenn man bedenkt, dass Pears in der ersten Inszenierung des Werks die Titelrolle schuf und schon bald unauslöschlich mit ihr assoziiert wurde, ist es umso interessanter, sich daran zu erinnern, dass die Figur des Grimes ursprünglich für einen Bariton und nicht für einen Tenor intendiert war; die Partie scheint also zunächst nicht auf Pears gemünzt gewesen zu sein.

Nachdem der vorläufige Plan für die Szenenfolge der Oper stand, musste Britten sich

als nächstes die Dienste eines kompetenten Librettisten sichern. Nach dem Desaster von *Paul Bunyan* zögerte er, erneut mit Auden zusammenzuarbeiten, und wandte sich daher zunächst an Christopher Isherwood, den er gut kannte, seit er die Bühnenmusik zu zwei von Isherwood und Auden gemeinsam verfassten Schauspielen komponiert hatte, die in den späten 1930er Jahren in London aufgeführt worden waren. Als Isherwood ablehnte, wandte Britten sich an seine zweite Wahl, den links-intellektuellen Schriftsteller und Journalisten Montagu Slater, einen begabten Amateurmusiker, den er kennengelernt hatte, als sie 1935 gemeinsam an der Dokumentation *Coal Face* der GPO Film Unit arbeiteten; danach hatte Britten die Musik zu mehreren politisch aufgeladenen Schauspielen von Slater geschrieben. Slater war von der gesellschaftspolitischen Thematik der Handlung angetan und erklärte sich bereit, das Libretto zu schreiben, an dem er dann vor allem zwischen Juni 1942 und Ende 1943 arbeitete; ein Großteil der Oper entstand daraufhin zwischen Januar 1944 und Februar 1945. Slater erwies sich als langsamer Autor, und da er zudem einer Vollzeitbeschäftigung nachging, konnte er sich dem Libretto nur in seiner Freizeit widmen. Dies führte bei Britten immer wieder zu Verdruss und es kam wiederholt vor, dass er Teile der Musik komponierte, ohne dass bereits der zugehörige Text vorlag – einige der eingängigsten

musikalischen Einfälle der Oper entstanden zu unbeholfenen textlichen Zwischenlösungen, die zu einem späteren Zeitpunkt dann noch nachgebessert werden mussten.

Seine Befürchtungen bezüglich des Librettos und seine eigenen klar umrissenen Vorstellungen von dem Werk bewogen Britten, sich hinter dem Rücken seines Librettisten an andere Autoren zu wenden und deren Hilfe bei der Umformulierung bestimmter Passagen zu suchen. Zwei dieser Freunde, die Britten halfen, Slaters Text zu modifizieren, arbeiteten für ihn später selbst als Librettisten. Eric Crozier, der die erste Inszenierung von *Peter Grimes* produzierte und später das Libretto für *Albert Herring* (1947) schrieb, wurde zu einem ständigen Vertrauten auf diesem Gebiet; er erinnerte sich, dass Slater unwillig war, sich auf eine "aktive Zusammenarbeit" einzulassen – allerdings war dies vielleicht ein unfairer Kommentar, wenn man bedenkt, wie Slater keine Mühen scheute bei seinem – erfolgreichen – Versuch, Britten davon zu überzeugen, das die erste Szene des Zweiten Akts beschließende ergreifend-liebliche Quartett der Frauen nicht zu verwerfen. Ronald Duncan (der 1946 das Libretto zu *The Rape of Lucretia* schrieb) arbeitete heimlich die kulminierende "Wahnsinns"-Szene um; Britten informierte ihn im Februar 1945, "Montagu hat die neue Verrückt-Szene akzeptiert & ich habe deine Beteiligung daran sehr tief gestapelt,

habe aber durchblicken lassen, dass du uns ein wenig geholfen hast!" Es war wohl weder Zufall noch der Vergesslichkeit geschuldet, dass Britten Slater von der endgültigen Fassung des Librettos keine Korrekturfahnen zur Durchsicht sandte. Im August 1945 sah er sich dann gezwungen, ihm eine Entschuldigung zu schicken, in der er behauptete: "Ich belästige Dichter nie mit meinen Korrekturen ihrer Texte – Wystan [Auden] jedenfalls hat seine nie gelesen. Aber es tut mir leid, wenn ich das verpatzt habe." Slater verübelte Britten inzwischen dessen kontrollierenden Umgang mit seinem Text; Crozier erinnerte sich, dass er einmal die Fassung verlor und brüllte, "aber das ist *meine* Arbeit, das ist *meine* Arbeit", als Britten sein Missfallen äußerte, nachdem er erfahren hatte, dass Slater sein Libretto in einer allein von ihm selbst gebilligten Form zu veröffentlichen gedachte. Doch Slater ließ sich nicht beirren und publizierte die unverfälschte Fassung seines Texts in dem Band *Peter Grimes and Other Poems* (1946), in dem das Libretto von all den überaus sinnvollen Revisionen befreit erscheint, die Britten vorgenommen hatte, um eine möglichst lebensnahe Umsetzung des Dramas auf der Opernbühne zu garantieren.

Brittens Verleger Boosey & Hawkes hatten gehofft, dass *Peter Grimes* in Covent Garden inszeniert würde anlässlich der Wiedereröffnung der (von ihnen gepachteten)

Spielstätte als seriöses Theater, nachdem das Haus während des Kriegs als Tanzsaal gedient hatte. Letztlich aber bekundete die Sadler's Wells Opera Company großes Interesse an dem Werk und erklärten sich bereit, unter der Leitung von Crozier die erste Inszenierung zu produzieren, mit Pears (der schon früher an diesem Haus gesungen hatte) in der Titelrolle und Joan Cross in der Rolle der Ellen Orford. Dirigent war Reginald Goodall, und Kenneth Green zeichnete für das Bühnenbild verantwortlich. Britten hatte nicht nur Slater während des Schreibprozesses viel abverlangt, er hatte auch zu Green engen Kontakt gepflegt, da er während des Kompositionsprozesses eine genaue Vorstellung von Bühnenbild und Kostümen vor Augen haben wollte. Auch Green stammte aus Suffolk, seine Sets waren allerdings weniger von Aldeburgh als von dem nahegelegenen Städtchen Southwold inspiriert, das sich ungewöhnlicher Weise durch einen mitten im Stadtzentrum stehenden Leuchtturm auszeichnet. Greens Entwürfe wurden von einem Rezensenten der ersten Inszenierung als "ausgesprochen suggestiv" beschrieben; sie seien verantwortlich dafür, eine "Atmosphäre gespenstischer Stimmungen" zu schaffen, "die einem Angst machen könnte, wäre sie nicht so poetisch".

Als Werbung für die bevorstehende Produktion präsentierten Mitglieder des Ensembles am 31. Mai 1945 Auszüge der Oper

in der Londoner Wigmore Hall (mit Britten am Klavier). Die Oper selbst wurde dann am 7. Juni uraufgeführt, fast genau einen Monat nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Europa. Die vom VE Day (Victory in Europe Day) ausgelöste Euphorie lag noch in der Luft und trug zweifellos zu dem berauschenden Enthusiasmus bei, mit dem das neue Werk vom Publikum und den Repräsentanten der Presse gleichermaßen aufgenommen wurde. Hinter den Kulissen von Sadler's Wells war es allerdings zu großen Spannungen gekommen. Es gab offene Ressentiments seitens verschiedener Mitglieder des Ensembles, die monierten, dass alle drei Hauptverantwortlichen des Projekts (Britten, Pears und Crozier) den Kriegsdienst verweigert hatten – was es zumindest fragwürdig erscheinen ließ, dass ihre schöpferische Arbeit bei den Siegesfeiern eine so prominente Rolle spielen sollte. Cross hatte neben ihrer Partie der Ellen auch die Leitung des Ensembles inne, und so gab es schnell Gerüchte, dass sie der Inszenierung der Oper nur zugestimmt hatte, weil sie sich diese sehr prominente neue Rolle sichern wollte. Trotz des großen Erfolgs zog Britten die Oper daher schon bald nach den ersten Aufführungen aus dem Repertoire von Sadler's Wells zurück und Cross, Crozier und Pears verließen gemeinsam das Ensemble.

Im November 1947 lief unter der Leitung von Tyrone Guthrie an der wesentlich größeren

Bühne von Covent Garden eine neue und großzügiger inszenierte Produktion von *Peter Grimes* an, wobei Pears und Cross wiederum ihre jeweiligen Rollen übernahmen. Inzwischen war die Oper – erstaunlicherweise – bereits in Antwerpen, Basel, Berlin, Brno, Budapest, Kopenhagen, Graz, Hamburg, Mannheim, Mailand, Stockholm und Zürich zur Aufführung gekommen sowie von Rundfunkanstalten in Australien, Großbritannien und Italien ausgestrahlt worden. Im Sommer 1946 hatte unter der Leitung des umtriebigen Leonard Bernstein auch die verschobene Aufführung in Tanglewood stattgefunden. 1948 folgten Inszenierungen in Brüssel, Paris und New York, und das Plattenlabel EMI spielte unter Mitwirkung von Pears, Cross, dem BBC Theatre Chorus und dem Orchester des Royal Opera House unter Goodalls Leitung Auszüge des Werks ein. (Diese Aufnahmen wurden seinerzeit nicht veröffentlicht, ein Teil erschien zuerst 1972 im Rahmen einer LP-Anthologie, und 1993 schließlich wurden alle Auszüge auf CD veröffentlicht.) 1958 dirigierte Britten seine eigene Einspielung mit dem Chor und Orchester des Royal Opera House für Decca; für die Aufnahme wurde die vergleichsweise neue Stereo-Technologie benutzt, die die Operaufnahmen von Decca zu dieser Zeit weithin bekannt machte; wiederum übernahm Pears die Titelrolle, während Claire Watson die Ellen gab. Später dirigierte Britten eine eigens

für BBC Television inszenierte Produktion, die 1969 auf der Bühne des Konzertsaaes von Snape Maltings bei Aldeburgh in Farbe auf Video gebannt wurde und heute ein wertvolles Dokument von Pears' denkwürdiger Interpretation der Titelrolle darstellt.

Die Nordsee, die sowohl sanft als auch wild sein kann, spielt unbestreitbar eine zentrale Rolle in der Oper; ihre gegensätzlichen Facetten kommen besonders in den Zwischenspielen des Orchesters zum Tragen, deren Konzertsfassung (unter dem Titel *Four Sea Interludes* op. 33a) – nur eine Woche nach der Premiere der Oper – vom London Philharmonic Orchestra unter der Leitung des Komponisten im Rahmen des Cheltenham Festivals zum ersten Mal aufgeführt wurde. In seiner 1945 verfassten Einführung in die Oper erklärte Britten, "Ich wollte mein Bewusstsein des ständigen Kampfes zum Ausdruck bringen, den die Männer und Frauen auszustehen haben, deren Lebensunterhalt von der See abhängt"; später jedoch spielte er diesen Aspekt herunter und behauptete, die Oper drehe sich vor allem um die Aktionen der in ihr vorkommenden Menschen und diese hätten sich genauso verhalten, wenn sie sich ganz woanders befunden hätten. Die konzertante Erstaufführung eines fünften Orchester-Zwischenspiels, der *Passacaglia* op. 33b, fand am 29. August 1945 in der Royal Albert Hall statt, ausgeführt vom BBC

Symphony Orchestra unter Sir Adrian Boult. Dieses Zwischenspiel trug ursprünglich den Arbeitstitel "Boy's suffering" (Leiden eines Jungen) und begann mit einem *Fugato*, in seiner endgültigen Form wurde daraus jedoch eine kraftvoll-beharrliche Umsetzung des Motivs, das zu den Worten "And God have mercy upon me!" (Möge Gott Mitleid mit mir haben!) erklingt; diese Worte spricht Grimes nach dem fatalen Augenblick, als er Ellen geschlagen und damit sein Schicksal besiegelt hat.

In einer Einführung zu *Peter Grimes* anlässlich der ersten Rundfunkausstrahlung im Jahr 1946 beschrieb Pears das Werk als "eine Oper, die den Konflikt zwischen der Gesellschaft und dem Individuum thematisiert". Die im Titel genannte Figur des Fischers charakterisierte er als "einen ganz gewöhnlichen schwachen Charakter", der bei dem Versuch, von der lokalen Gemeinschaft akzeptiert zu werden, "gegen den allgemeinen Verhaltenskodex verstößt". "Von der Gemeinschaft als Krimineller klassifiziert", so Pears, wird er schließlich "als solcher vernichtet". Die eindringliche Darstellung der Stadtbewohner mittels der eingängigen Partien des Opernchors und die Unerbittlichkeit, mit der sie Grimes in sein nasses Grab treiben und die sie an seinem tragischen Untergang mitschuldig (und bis zu einem gewissen Punkt direkt für diesen verantwortlich) werden lässt, ist sicherlich einer der überzeugendsten

Aspekte des Werkes. Die Intensität dieses Konflikts lässt vermuten, dass er für den Komponisten eine besondere persönliche Bedeutung hatte; Britten gab zu erkennen, dass er und Pears sich als Kriegsdienstverweigerer "ausgegrenzt" gefühlt hatten und dass das Werk deshalb eine "zentrale Empfindung ... des Einzelnen gegenüber der Menge verkörpert, mit ironischen Andeutungen bezüglich unserer eigenen Situation". Britten fuhr fort:

Man kann nicht sagen, dass wir physisch gelitten hätten, aber wir verspürten natürlich eine ungeheure Anspannung. Ich denke, es war zum Teil diese Empfindung, die uns dazu brachte, Grimes zu einem Charakter von tiefer Erkenntnis und voller konfliktbeladener Impulse zu machen, also zu dem gepeinigten Idealisten, der er hier ist, und nicht zu dem Schurken, als den Crabbe ihn darstellte.

Doch die Spannungen hatten auch noch tiefere Gründe – schließlich waren Britten und Pears schwul zu einer Zeit, als Homosexualität noch als Straftat galt. Der Musikwissenschaftler Philip Brett legte – im Rahmen einer in den frühen 1980er Jahren durchgeführten eingehenden Untersuchung des primären Quellenmaterials – als erster dar, dass Brittens Kommentar mit großer Wahrscheinlichkeit auch ein hohes Maß an Ausgrenzung wegen seiner und Pears' Sexualität implizierte. In jedem Fall aber erwies Grimes sich als der erste in einer langen Reihe von unvergesslichen

Operncharakteren, die im späteren Schaffen des Komponisten für die dramatische Bühne gezwungen waren, mit unlösbaren Problemen von Konformität versus Nonkonformismus, von mit gesellschaftlicher Verantwortung in Widerspruch stehenden privaten Begierden und mit der Misere des einsamen Außenseiters zu ringen.

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Übersetzung: Stephanie Wolny

Synopsis

Prolog

Im Versammlungssaal

Die Oper beginnt mit einer Befragung von Grimes im Rahmen einer gerichtlichen Untersuchung zur Klärung der Ursache für den Tod seines Lehrjungen. Der Untersuchungsrichter Swallow (der auch Bürgermeister und führender Jurist des Bezirks ist) bewertet den Tod als Unfall, doch Grimes beklagt sich, dass dieses Urteil seinen Namen nicht wirklich reinwasche und die Klatschmäuler der Gemeinde fortfahren würden, ihn zu beschuldigen. Der Gerichtssaal leert sich. Grimes und die Lehrerin Ellen Orford singen ein versöhnliches Duett.

Zwischenspiel I

Eine musikalische Darstellung der Morgendämmerung leitet unmittelbar über zu

Akt I

Szene 1

Eine Straße an der See, einige Tage später
Die Bewohner der Stadtgemeinde gehen ihrem Tagesgeschäft nach. Als Grimes auftaucht und darum bittet, dass man ihm helfe, sein Boot an Land zu ziehen, weichen ihm alle aus, außer Balstrode und dem Apotheker Ned Keene, der für ihn einen neuen Lehrjungen aufgetrieben hat. Trotz der in der Gemeinde verbreiteten Missbilligung erklärt Ellen sich bereit, den Jungen mit dem Karren des Lastenträgers aus dem Armenhaus zu holen.

Kurz nachdem sie sich entfernt, zieht ein Sturm auf, der umso bedrohlicher ist, als eine Springflut erwartet wird. Während die Ortsansässigen sich in Sicherheit bringen, bleiben Grimes und Balstrode allein zurück. Balstrode versucht Grimes zu überreden, die Stadt zu verlassen, aber der Fischer erklärt, er sei "ein Einheimischer, hier verwurzelt" und offenbart seinen Traum von einer Zukunft ohne wirtschaftliche Probleme mit Ellen als Gemahlin an seiner Seite.

Zwischenspiel II

Eine Beschwörung der Schrecken des Sturms. Die Musik des Interludiums bildet den klanglichen Hintergrund von

Akt I

Szene 2

Im Gasthaus "The Boar", am selben Abend

Die Fischer suchen Zuflucht vor dem Sturm. Neu Hinzustoßende berichten von Überflutungen in der Gegend. Grimes erscheint und wartet auf Ellen und den Lehrjungen. Die Ressentiments der Gemeinde gegenüber dem Fischer erreichen einen Höhepunkt mit Boles' Anklage: "Er befasst sich nicht mit Männern, er bringt stattdessen Jungen um!" Um den Frieden zu wahren und von Grimes abzulenken, fängt Ned Keene einen Kanon an. Pudelnass tauchen Ellen und der Lehrjunge auf und Grimes besteht zur allgemeinen Empörung darauf, den Jungen sofort mit in die stürmische Nacht hinaus zu nehmen und in seine armselige Hütte zu bringen.

Akt II

Zwischenspiel III

Ein strahlend sonniger Sonntagmorgen einige Wochen später. Die Musik geht ohne Unterbrechung über zu

Szene 1

Szene wie in Akt I, Szene 1

Ellen und Grimes' neuer Lehrjunge sitzen in der Sonne am Meer, während in der Pfarrkirche die Morgenandacht abgehalten wird. Zufällig entdeckt Ellen, dass die Kleider des Jungen zerrissen sind und sein Körper Prellungen aufweist. Als Grimes naht, um ihn zum Fischen mitzunehmen, tritt Ellen ihm entgegen. Vor den Augen einiger Ortsbewohner konfrontiert sie

ihn, ihre Fragen führen zu einem offenen Streit und es endet damit, dass Grimes sie schlägt. Aufgebracht folgt die Ortsgemeinschaft dem Rektor und Swallow zu Grimes Hütte, um die Wahrheit herauszufinden. Vier der Frauen (Ellen, Tantchen und die Nichten) stellen Betrachtungen über das Verhältnis zwischen den Geschlechtern an.

Zwischenspiel IV
Passacaglia

Akt II

Szene 2

In Grimes' Hütte, ein umgedrehtes altes Boot
Grimes kommandiert den Jungen grob herum, was diesen verängstigt. Der Mann versucht, den verschreckten Knaben zu beschwichtigen, und entwirft ein Zukunftsbild, wie ihr Leben sich entwickeln könnte, wenn alles gut läuft. Diese paradiesische Vision verkehrt sich in ihr höllisches Gegenteil, als Grimes sich in einer Vorahnung seines sich andeutenden Wahnsinns an den gestorbenen letzten Lehrjungen erinnert. Als er hört, dass die Ortsleute sich auf der Straße zu seiner Behausung nähern, verliert er die Nerven, wirft seine Netze und Gerätschaften aus der zur Klippe gewandten Tür und schiebt den Jungen hinterher. Dieser rutscht aus, stürzt in die Tiefe und ist tot. Grimes klettert ihm nach. Als die Ortsleute die Hütte erreichen, finden sie diese zu ihrer Überraschung leer vor und

sind sehr erstaunt, wie sauber und ordentlich alles ist. Alle verlassen den Raum durch die Vordertür, nur Balstrode nimmt den Ausgang zur Klippenseite.

Akt III

Zwischenspiel V

Ein Sommerabend im Mondlicht

Szene 1

Szenenbild wie in Akt I, Szene 1. Einige Tage nach Grimes' Verschwinden

Im Versammlungssaal findet ein Tanz statt und es herrscht ein ständiges Kommen und Gehen zwischen dem Saal und dem Gasthaus "The Boar". Swallow versucht sein Glück bei Tantchens Nichten. Mrs. Sedley, eine der aktivsten Klatschbasen vor Ort, belauscht Ellen, als diese Balstrode erzählt, sie habe den Pullover des Jungen am Strand angespült gefunden. Als sie sieht, dass Grimes' Boot zurückgekehrt ist, teilt Mrs. Sedley Swallow mit, was sie gehört hat, und bringt ihre ernsthaften Sorgen um die Sicherheit des Jungen zum Ausdruck. In seiner Funktion als Bürgermeister wendet Swallow sich an Hobson, den Wachtmeister des Ortes, und weist ihn an, eine Gruppe von Männern zu organisieren, um Grimes festzunehmen.

Zwischenspiel VI

Leitet direkt über zu

Akt III

Szene 2

*Wie in Szene 1, einige Stunden später. Dichter
Nebel ist aufgezogen.*

Nur das Nebelhorn und die Rufe der an der
Fahndung beteiligten Ortsleute unterbrechen
die Stille der Nacht, als der erschöpfte,
hungrige, durchnässte und inzwischen
wahnsinnige Grimes versucht, zu seiner Hütte
zurückzukehren. Ellen und Balstrode finden
ihn, doch es ist zu spät, ihm ist nicht mehr zu

helfen. Balstrode schlägt einen Ausweg vor:
Grimes soll auf die See hinaussegeln, sein Boot
versenken und mit ihm untergehen.

Als die Morgendämmerung anbricht, geht
das Leben in der Gemeinde wieder seinen
üblichen Gang. Es gibt Berichte, dass weit
draußen auf dem Meer – unerreichbar – ein
Boot gesunken ist. Niemand schert sich darum.

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Übersetzung: Stephanie Wollny



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019



Anna Thorbjörnsson

Hanna Husáhr

POZE Photography



Vibeke Kristensen



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Robert Murray

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Neal Davies

Britten: Peter Grimes, op. 33

"Encore quelqu'un pour Peter Grimes le pêcheur sadique?", criait, dit-on, un conducteur de bus londonien, le sourire au coin des lèvres, à ses passagers qu'il faisait descendre près du Sadler's Wells Theatre. En ce mois de juin 1945, les premières représentations du nouvel opéra *Peter Grimes* étaient en cours, et le succès était immense. En raison du profil exceptionnel, inattendu, de cette œuvre et de ses nombreuses réalisations dans le genre par la suite, son compositeur, Benjamin Britten (1913 – 1976), fut appelé à entrer dans l'histoire pour avoir réussi, seul, à donner un élan nouveau à la composition d'opéras écrits en langue anglaise, après que diverses œuvres dans le genre eurent connu un destin quelque peu mitigé au cours du dix-neuvième siècle et du début du vingtième. Si selon des recherches récentes, la signification historique de la contribution de Britten à cet égard relève quelque peu du mythe – un mythe adroitement construit et entretenu en partie par la publicité associée aux activités de la compagnie lyrique qu'il fonda plus tard, l'English Opera Group –, on ne peut nier que *Peter Grimes* fit significativement œuvre de pionnier et encouragea d'autres compositeurs anglais

à se lancer eux-mêmes dans la composition d'opéras. Britten nota que l'événement que fut la création de l'opéra "fut plus important que Sadler's Wells ou moi-même" et exprima le souhait "que de nombreux compositeurs fassent le plongeon, et j'espère aussi que, comme moi, ils trouveront que l'eau n'est pas aussi glaciale qu'il n'y paraît!".

Peter Grimes n'était pas le premier opéra de Britten. Pendant les trois années qu'il avait passées, avec son compagnon, le ténor Peter Pears, en Amérique du Nord (1939 – 1942), il avait travaillé avec le poète W.H. Auden à *Paul Bunyan*, une curieuse tentative de relater l'histoire du fondateur mythique de l'Amérique dans un style d'opérette se situant à mi-chemin entre Broadway et la comédie musicale de collège. Jouée à la Columbia University en mai 1941, l'œuvre fut un échec retentissant et elle dut attendre plus de trois décennies avant de revoir la lumière du jour (quand Britten, souffrant, fut instamment invité à la revoir pour une production à l'Aldeburgh Festival en 1976, l'année de son décès). En 1942, l'idée d'un deuxième opéra vint à Britten lorsqu'il était avec Pears en Californie et qu'il tomba par hasard sur un article dans *The Listener*

qui reprenait un exposé à la radio de l'auteur anglais E.M. Forster sur le poète et clergyman George Crabbe (1754 – 1832). "Parler de Crabbe, c'est parler de l'Angleterre", disait l'article en guise d'introduction, et sa description imagée de la ville côtière d'Aldeburgh dans le Suffolk, où Crabbe naquit et fut brièvement vicaire du culte anglican, eut un impact immense et immédiat sur Britten. Lui aussi naquit dans le Suffolk, et la profonde nostalgie de cette contrée que fit naître chez lui l'article de Forster s'avéra déterminante dans sa décision de retourner dans son pays natal plus tard cette année-là et de s'enraciner domestiquement et culturellement en Est-Anglie, où il décida bientôt de s'établir lui-même à Aldeburgh. Si, comme le suggéra Forster, l'expérience d'Aldeburgh "façonna Crabbe en tant que poète", elle façonna aussi Britten en tant que compositeur. La description par Forster de Crabbe et de sa relation avec la ville pourrait s'appliquer mot pour mot à Britten:

Même lorsqu'il écrit sur d'autres sujets,
sa poésie reflète encore et encore la mer,
l'estuaire, le littoral plat du Suffolk, mais
aussi les mesquineries locales, et une odeur
d'embruns et de saleté – que vient adoucir de
temps à autre un parfum de fleurs. Souvenez-
vous donc d'Aldeburgh quand vous lirez ce
poète étrange, car il appartient à ce sombre
coin perdu, et par là à l'Angleterre.

L'article de Forster commentait le poème de Crabbe "Peter Grimes", publié en 1810 dans

une collection intitulée *The Borough*. Le poème raconte l'histoire d'un pêcheur violent, habitant Aldeburgh, qui tuait les mousses qu'il faisait venir des ateliers sociaux et qui reçut ensuite la visite de leurs fantômes. Crabbe se serait inspiré pour ce poème de la vie du personnage de Tom Brown, un pêcheur dont les apprentis disparaissaient mystérieusement et sur lequel pesèrent de plus en plus de soupçons. Dans le poème de Crabbe, après la disparition de trois de ses mousses, Grimes se voit interdire d'encore en engager. Son comportement l'isole de plus en plus de la communauté locale et il finit par perdre la raison – à aucun stade ses actes n'ont suscité chez lui le moindre sentiment, le moindre remords. Britten qui voulait en savoir plus sur cette histoire singulière acheta une copie des *Poetical Works* (1851) de Crabbe dans une librairie californienne et commença à réfléchir au potentiel opératique du récit.

C'est un peu plus tard, alors qu'ils se trouvaient à Long Island attendant de regagner le Royaume-Uni, que Britten et Pears se mirent sérieusement à donner forme au projet d'un opéra sur le sujet de Grimes. Britten avait eu la chance de pouvoir s'assurer une commande de l'œuvre par la fondation que le chef d'orchestre Serge Koussevitzky avait créée en 1942 en mémoire de son épouse, Natalie. Koussevitzky qui avait récemment dirigé la *Sinfonia da Requiem* de Britten à

Boston renonça généreusement à son projet de créer l'œuvre à Tanglewood pour que la première puisse avoir lieu au Royaume-Uni. (Plus tard – même s'il y vit en même temps son propre intérêt – le maestro déclara que *Peter Grimes* était le plus grand opéra depuis *Carmen* de Bizet.) Britten et Pears réembarquèrent effectivement pour l'Angleterre en mars 1942, sur le *SS Axel Johnson*. À bord, Britten composait (ou, plus exactement, reconstruisait) ses œuvres chorales *Hymn to St Cecilia* et *A Ceremony of Carols*, après la confiscation malencontreuse de certains de ses manuscrits par le Service des douanes américain sous prétexte qu'ils auraient pu contenir des informations codées pour les ennemis des forces alliées en cette période de guerre. Pendant le voyage, Pears s'occupait en prenant quelques notes inspirées par le poème de Crabbe, et il y opposait la mer qu'il décrivait comme "(Imprévisible – Sauvage) cf. la guerre, la violence", et la terre "(Sûre – Immuable), la paix etc.". Comme l'opéra prenait forme, l'instabilité et l'imprévisibilité de la mer furent associées directement au personnage de Grimes, qui lui devait son gagne-pain de pêcheur, tandis que la stabilité de la terre était symbolisée par le personnage de la maîtresse d'école Ellen Orford, emprunté à un autre récit de Crabbe. La relation maudite de Grimes avec Ellen, la femme qu'il aime et souhaite épouser pour assurer sa respectabilité, se trouve au cœur de l'opéra. Forster, dans sa description

de la version opératique de Grimes en 1948, souligne que le pêcheur, par l'entremise de Britten, est transformé de la brute qu'il était dans le poème de Crabbe en un "héros byronien incompris" qui "est sensible, plein de compassion, dévoré par le remords et la honte". Comme Pears créa le rôle-titre lors de la première et devint vite indéfectiblement associé à ce rôle, il est intéressant de noter que le rôle de Grimes, à l'origine, était prévu pour un baryton plutôt que pour un ténor, ce qui laisse supposer qu'il ne fut pas conçu pour lui initialement.

Une fois terminé le schéma préliminaire du scénario de l'opéra, Britten eut besoin d'un librettiste compétent. Il hésitait à travailler de nouveau avec Auden, après le désastre de *Paul Bunyan*, et donc il se tourna tout d'abord vers son collaborateur au théâtre, Christopher Isherwood, qu'il connaissait bien pour avoir composé de la musique de scène pour deux de ses pièces écrites en collaboration avec Auden et mises en scène à Londres à la fin des années 1930. Lorsqu'Isherwood déclina son invitation, Britten fit appel à son second choix, l'auteur et journaliste de gauche Montagu Slater, un amateur de musique talentueux dont il avait fait la connaissance lorsqu'ils travaillaient ensemble sur le documentaire *Coal Face* de la GPO Film Unit en 1935; Britten avait ensuite écrit de la musique pour plusieurs pièces de Slater à forte tendance politique. Slater, attiré par les

thèmes sociaux de l'intrigue, accepta d'écrire le livret auquel il travailla principalement entre juin 1942 et fin 1943, et la plus grande partie de la musique de l'opéra fut composée entre janvier 1944 et février 1945. Slater avançait lentement, car il avait un emploi à temps plein et ne pouvait travailler à l'opéra qu'en dehors de son activité professionnelle. Ceci fut à l'origine de beaucoup de frustration pour Britten qui parfois composa certains passages sans en avoir le texte: plusieurs épisodes parmi les plus mémorables de l'opéra furent écrits sur base de textes provisoires, maladroits qu'il fallut modifier plus tard.

Les angoisses de Britten par rapport au livret et la vision très personnelle qu'il avait de la pièce l'amenèrent à consulter d'autres personnes parmi ses proches derrière le dos de son librettiste, et même à leur demander de l'aide pour remanier certains passages. Deux des amis qui contribuèrent à modifier le texte de Slater devinrent par la suite eux-mêmes librettistes. Eric Crozier, auteur de la première mise en scène de *Peter Grimes* et qui écrivit ensuite le livret d'*Albert Herring* (1947), devint une personne de confiance en la matière; il rappela que Slater se montrait réticent à "collaborer activement", mais ce fut sans doute un reproche immérité si l'on sait de quelle persuasion Slater fit preuve pour convaincre Britten – et il y réussit – de ne pas abandonner le quatuor des jeunes femmes qui conclut

l'Acte II, Scène 1, d'une beauté envoûtante. Ronald Duncan (auteur plus tard, en 1946, du livret de *The Rape of Lucretia*) remania discrètement la scène paroxystique de la folie, et Britten lui dit en février 1945: "Montagu a donné son accord pour la nouvelle scène de la folie; je n'ai pas dit grand-chose au sujet de votre contribution, tout en laissant entendre quand même que vous nous aviez un peu aidés!". Ce ne fut probablement ni par accident, ni par oubli que Britten omit d'envoyer les épreuves du livret définitif à Slater pour correction, et le compositeur fut obligé de lui écrire en août 1945 pour s'excuser: "Je n'importune jamais les poètes en leur envoyant les épreuves de leur travail – en tout cas, Wystan [Auden] n'a jamais lu les siennes. Mais excusez-moi s'il s'agit d'un faux-pas." Slater commençait à être contrarié par le contrôle qu'exerçait Britten sur son texte, et Crozier se souvient qu'il se fâcha et cria, "mais ceci est *mon* travail, ceci est *mon* travail" quand Britten lui fit comprendre que cela ne lui plaisait pas qu'il veuille publier son livret sous une forme qu'il était seul à approuver. Déterminé, Slater alla de l'avant et publia le texte tel quel dans le volume *Peter Grimes and Other Poems* (1946), sans aucune des révisions d'ordre très pratique que Britten avait apportées pour rendre le drame plus vivant sur la scène opératique.

Les éditeurs de Britten, Boosey & Hawkes, espéraient que *Peter Grimes* soit mis en scène

à Covent Garden pour marquer la réouverture du lieu (qu'ils avaient acquis par bail) comme théâtre sérieux après sa transformation pendant la guerre en salle de danse. Mais il se fit que la Sadler's Wells Opera Company fut fort enthousiasmée par l'œuvre et accepta d'en monter la première production sous la direction de Crozier, avec Pears (qui avait déjà chanté pour la compagnie) dans le rôle-titre et Joan Cross dans celui d'Ellen Orford. Le chef d'orchestre était Reginald Goodall, et Kenneth Green était chargé de la mise en scène et des costumes. Britten, dont les exigences adressées à Slater au cours du processus d'écriture du livret avaient été importantes, restait aussi en contact régulier avec Green parce qu'il voulait pouvoir visualiser les décors et costumes pendant qu'il composait la musique de l'opéra. Green était aussi natif du Suffolk, mais ses décors étaient moins inspirés par Aldeburgh que par la ville toute proche de Southwold au centre de laquelle, étrangement, se dresse un phare. Les décors de Green furent décrits par l'un des critiques de la première production comme "très évocateurs" et contribuant à créer "une atmosphère tourmentée qui aurait été lugubre si elle n'avait été aussi poétique".

Dans l'intention d'annoncer la production à venir, certains artistes faisant partie de la distribution jouèrent des extraits de l'opéra (avec Britten au piano) au Wigmore Hall de

Londres le 31 mai 1945. Les représentations elles-mêmes commencèrent le 7 juin, pratiquement un mois jour pour jour après la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale en Europe. L'euphorie déclenchée par le VE Day (Victory in Europe Day, souvent appelé V Day dans les pays francophones européens) était toujours dans l'air, et cette atmosphère contribua sans aucun doute à l'enthousiasme effréné que suscita la nouvelle œuvre tant auprès du public que des représentants de la presse. Mais au sein du Sadler's Wells de fortes tensions étaient nées. Certains membres de la compagnie ne cachaient pas qu'ils ne voyaient pas d'un bon œil que les trois principaux intéressés dans le projet (Britten, Pears et Crozier) aient tous été objecteurs de conscience pendant la guerre, un aspect sans doute peu compatible avec le fait que leur œuvre soit tellement mise en valeur lors des célébrations de la victoire. Cross, qui jouait le rôle d'Ellen, était aussi directrice de la compagnie, et le bruit courait qu'elle avait accepté de monter l'opéra uniquement pour s'assurer d'avoir à son palmarès ce nouveau rôle de prestige. Assez vite après cette première série de représentations, en dépit du grand succès de l'opéra, Britten le retira du répertoire du Sadler's Wells, et Cross, Crozier et Pears quittèrent tous trois la compagnie.

Une nouvelle production de *Peter Grimes*, de plus d'envergure, dirigée par Tyrone Guthrie

avec Pears et Cross reprenant leur rôle, fut montée sur la scène, beaucoup plus vaste, de Covent Garden en novembre 1947. Et à ce moment-là, l'opéra avait déjà été mis en scène (fait extraordinaire) à Anvers, Bâle, Berlin, Brno, Budapest, Copenhague, Graz, Hambourg, Mannheim, Milan, Stockholm et Zurich, et avait été diffusé sur les ondes des radios australienne, britannique et italienne. La représentation à Tanglewood, qui avait été reportée, avait eu lieu, elle aussi, pendant l'été de 1946, avec le dynamisme Leonard Bernstein à la direction d'orchestre. Des mises en scène suivirent à Bruxelles, Paris et New York en 1948, l'année au cours de laquelle EMI enregistra des extraits de l'œuvre avec Pears, Cross, le BBC Theatre Chorus et l'Orchestra of the Royal Opera House dirigé par Goodall. (Ces enregistrements ne furent par publiés à l'époque. Certains virent le jour en tant que partie d'une anthologie LP en 1972 et tous sortirent finalement en CD en 1993.) Britten dirigea son propre enregistrement avec le Chorus and Orchestra of the Royal Opera House pour Decca en 1958, un enregistrement utilisant la relativement nouvelle technologie stéréo qui faisait petit à petit la réputation des enregistrements d'opéra par Decca, avec Pears une fois encore dans le rôle-titre et Claire Watson dans le rôle d'Ellen. Britten dirigea plus tard une production spécialement conçue pour la BBC Television, enregistrée en couleur en

1969 sur la scène du Snape Maltings Concert Hall près d'Aldeburgh, qui reste un témoin de choix de l'interprétation mémorable par Pears du rôle-titre.

La mer du Nord, tantôt calme, tantôt déchaînée, joue indéniablement un rôle central dans l'opéra, et ses facettes contrastées sont célébrées dans les interludes orchestraux dont les versions de concert furent créées (sous le titre *Four Sea Interludes*, op. 33a), au Cheltenham Festival – une semaine exactement après la première représentation de l'opéra –, par le London Philharmonic Orchestra sous la direction du compositeur. Dans son introduction à l'opéra, en 1945, Britten déclara: "J'ai voulu exprimer combien j'étais conscient de la lutte perpétuelle menée par les hommes et les femmes dont la subsistance dépend de la mer"; mais plus tard, il atténua ses propos en disant que l'opéra avait essentiellement pour sujet les actes des protagonistes, et qu'ils se seraient comportés de la même manière s'ils s'étaient trouvés ailleurs. Un cinquième interlude orchestral, la *Passacaglia*, op. 33b, fut créé au Royal Albert Hall par Sir Adrian Boult et le BBC Symphony Orchestra, le 29 août 1945. Cet interlude portait à l'origine le titre provisoire de "Boy's suffering" et commençait par un *fugato*, mais dans sa forme définitive, il devint une invention puissamment obsédante sur le motif mettant en musique les mots "And God have mercy

upon me!", que hurle Grimes après le moment fatidique, lorsqu'il frappe Ellen et que son destin est effectivement scellé.

Dans une introduction à *Peter Grimes*, à l'occasion de sa première diffusion radiophonique en 1946, Pears le décrit comme "un opéra basé sur le conflit entre la société et l'individu". Il continua en décrivant le pêcheur éponyme comme "un faible, tout à fait ordinaire" qui, en essayant de se faire accepter par la communauté locale, "enfreint le code conventionnel". "Relégué par la société aux rangs des criminels", nota Pears, il est finalement "éliminé en tant que tel". Certes, la force avec laquelle les habitants du village sont évoqués par l'écriture vivante de la partie chantée par le chœur dans l'opéra, associée à la manière impitoyable dont ils conduisent Grimes vers la mer, sa sépulture, et deviennent ainsi eux-mêmes impliqués (et jusqu'à un certain point directement responsables) de sa fin tragique, est l'un des aspects les plus fascinants de l'œuvre. L'intensité de ce conflit suggère qu'il avait une signification personnelle particulière pour le compositeur qui révéla que, lors de leur retour au Royaume-Uni, Pears et lui-même se sentaient "comme étrangers" en tant qu'objecteurs de conscience, et que pour cette raison l'œuvre exprimait un "sentiment dominant... d'opposition entre l'individu et le peuple, avec des connotations ironiques en lien avec notre propre situation". Et Britten poursuivit:

Nous ne pouvions pas dire que nous souffrions physiquement, mais naturellement nous ressentions une tension extrême. Je pense que c'est en partie ce sentiment qui nous conduisit à faire de Grimes un visionnaire et un homme de conflit, l'idéaliste qu'il est, plutôt que le bandit qu'il était dans le poème de Crabbe.

Mais les tensions étaient bien plus profondes du fait que Britten et Pears étaient homosexuels à une époque où l'homosexualité était encore considérée comme un acte délictueux. Le musicologue Philip Brett – dans une étude exhaustive, au début des années 1980, sur les sources originales de l'opéra – fut le premier à soutenir que le commentaire de Britten faisait allusion aussi selon toute probabilité au degré significatif d'ostracisme ressenti en raison de sa sexualité et de celle de Pears. Quoiqu'il en soit, Grimes s'avéra n'être que le premier d'une longue lignée de personnages opératiques mémorables qui, dans la production prolifique d'œuvres dramatiques par Britten plus tard, furent obligés de composer avec des questions inextricables de conformité et de non-conformité, d'aspirations personnelles et de responsabilités publiques, sans oublier la détresse expérimentée par l'outsider solitaire.

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Traduction: Marie-Françoise de Meeüs

Synopsis

Prologue

L'intérieur du Moot Hall

L'opéra commence par un contre-interrogatoire de Grimes dans l'enquête sur la cause du décès de son apprenti. Le verdict de mort accidentelle prononcé par le médecin légiste Swallow (qui est aussi le maire du village et un homme de loi éminent) ne fait pas l'affaire de Grimes qui se plaint que ce verdict ne l'innocente pas vraiment, et que les villageois continuent à commenter l'affaire et à l'accuser. La cour se vide. Grimes et la maîtresse d'école Ellen Orford chantent un duo de réconciliation.

Interlude I

Une description du lever du jour menant directement au cœur de l'action.

Acte I

Scène 1

Une rue en bord de mer, quelques jours plus tard

Les habitants du village vaquent à leurs occupations quotidiennes. Lorsque Grimes arrive et demande de l'aide pour tirer son bateau sur la plage, tout le monde l'évite, sauf Balstrode et l'apothicaire Ned Keene qui lui a trouvé un nouveau mousse. Indifférente à la désapprobation générale des villageois, Ellen accepte d'aller chercher le jeune homme à l'atelier social avec la charrette du transporteur.

Peu après leur départ, un orage éclate; il est d'autant plus menaçant qu'il s'agit d'un orage d'équinoxe. Les villageois fuient devant la tempête, abandonnant Grimes et Balstrode. Balstrode tente de persuader Grimes de quitter le village, mais le pêcheur déclare qu'il "y est né et y a ses racines", et il lui dévoile ses rêves d'un futur prospère avec Ellen comme épouse.

Interlude II

Une évocation des dangers de la tempête, la musique étayant toute la scène qui suit.

Acte I

Scène 2

À l'intérieur de "The Boar" le soir du même jour

Les pêcheurs se sont mis à l'abri de la tempête. Il en arrive d'autres qui annoncent des inondations dans le voisinage. Grimes apparaît à son tour pour y attendre Ellen et l'apprenti. L'attitude de rejet du village atteint son paroxysme avec l'accusation de Boles: "Ce n'est pas avec nous qu'il travaille, son occupation est de tuer des jeunes mousses!" Pour maintenir la paix et détourner l'attention de l'assemblée qui ne cesse d'observer Grimes, Ned Keene commence un canon. Ellen et l'apprenti arrivent trempés; à la consternation générale, Grimes insiste pour partir tout de suite, dans la nuit tempétueuse, avec le jeune mousse qu'il veut emmener, chez lui, dans sa hutte lugubre.

Acte II

Interlude III

Un beau dimanche matin ensoleillé, quelques semaines plus tard; l'épisode conduisant directement à la scène qui suit.

Scène 1

Scène identique à l'Acte I, Scène 1

Ellen et le nouvel apprenti de Grimes sont assis au soleil le long de la mer, et pendant ce temps, l'office du matin est célébré dans l'église paroissiale. Le fait que les vêtements du mousse soient déchirés et que son corps soit contusionné n'échappe pas à Ellen, heureusement. Quand Grimes arrive pour forcer le jeune garçon à partir à la pêche, Ellen s'adresse à lui; ses questions conduisent à une querelle ouverte entre eux qu'observe et entend une partie de la communauté, et Grimes finit par la frapper. Le village est révolté et les habitants suivent le recteur et Swallow qui se dirigent vers la cabane de Grimes afin de découvrir toute la vérité sur cette affaire. Quatre femmes du village (Ellen, Auntie et les Nièces) observent les relations entre hommes et femmes.

Interlude IV

Passacaglia

Acte II

Scène 2

À l'intérieur de la cabane de Grimes, qui n'est autre qu'un vieux bateau retourné

Grimes donne des ordres brusques au garçon, et le mousse est terrifié. Pour essayer de dissiper sa peur, Grimes évoque ce que pourrait être leur vie si tout allait bien. Le paradis qu'il dépeint se transforme en un enfer lorsque, faisant allusion à la folie qui finira par le gagner, Grimes rappelle l'épisode de la mort de son précédent apprenti. Quand il entend les villageois gravir le chemin qui conduit à sa cabane, il perd son calme, jette ses filets et tout son attirail de pêche par la porte donnant sur la falaise, et pousse le garçon dehors. Le mousse glisse et c'est la chute fatale. Grimes se précipite derrière lui. Quand les villageois arrivent à la cabane, ils sont surpris de la trouver vide, et assez étonnés de la voir propre et en ordre. Tous quittent par la porte principale, sauf Balstrode, qui sort par celle donnant sur la falaise.

Acte III

Interlude V

Clair de lune par une soirée d'été.

Scène 1

Scène identique à celle de l'Acte I, Scène 1.

Quelques jours après la disparition de Grimes

Une soirée dansante a lieu au Moot Hall, et il y a beaucoup de va-et-vient entre le Moot Hall et "The Boar". Swallow tente sa chance avec les Nièces d'Auntie. Mrs Sedley, l'une des plus

grandes commères du village, écoute Ellen raconter qu'elle a trouvé la veste de l'apprenti sur la plage. Voyant que le bateau de Grimes est rentré, Mrs Sedley informe Swallow de ce qu'elle a entendu et de sa grande inquiétude pour la sécurité du garçon. Swallow, en tant que maire, convoque Hobson, gendarme du lieu, et le charge de prendre les mesures nécessaires pour l'arrestation de Grimes.

Interlude VI

Conduisant directement à la scène suivante.

Acte III

Scène 2

Scène identique à celle de la Scène 1, quelques heures plus tard. Un brouillard épais est tombé.

Seule la corne de brume et les cris des habitants du village partis à la recherche de Grimes rompent la tranquillité de la nuit. Grimes, épuisé, affamé, trempé, et ayant maintenant perdu la raison, essaye de regagner sa cabane. Ellen et Balstrode le trouvent, mais il est trop tard: il ne peut plus être aidé. Balstrode propose à Grimes une issue: prendre la mer, saborder son bateau et couler avec lui.

Quand le jour se lève, la vie reprend son cours au village. On parle d'un bateau qui sombre au large, très loin. Personne ne se sent concerné.

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Barnaby Rea



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019

Peter Grimes

COMPACT DISC ONE

Prologue

Interior of the Moot Hall arranged as for Coroner's Inquest. Coroner, Mr Swallow, at table on dais, clerk at table below. A crowd of townspeople in the body of the hall is kept back by Hobson acting as Constable. Mr Swallow is the leading lawyer of the Borough and at the same time its Mayor and its Coroner. A man of unexceptionable career and talents, he nevertheless disturbs the burgesses by his air of a man with an *arrière-pensée*.

Hobson (*shouts*)

1 Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

(Peter Grimes steps forward from among the crowd.)

Swallow (*reading*)

Peter Grimes, we are here to investigate the cause of death of your apprentice William Spode, whose body you brought ashore from your boat, 'The Boy Billy', on the twenty-sixth ultimo. Do you wish to give evidence?

(Peter nods.)

Will you step into the box.

(Peter steps into the witness box. Hobson brings him a large Bible.)

Peter Grimes! Take the oath! After me! 'I swear by Almighty God'

Peter

'I swear by Almighty God'

Swallow

'That the evidence I shall give'

Peter

'That the evidence I shall give'

Swallow

'Shall be the truth'

Peter

'Shall be the truth'

Swallow

'The whole truth and nothing but the truth!'

Peter

'The whole truth and nothing but the truth!'

Swallow

Tell the court the story in your own words.

(Peter is silent.)

You sailed your boat round the coast with the intention of putting in to London.

Why did you do this?

Peter

We'd caught a huge catch, too big to sell here.

Swallow

And the boy died on the way?

Peter

The wind turned against us, blew us off our course. We ran out of drinking water.

Swallow

How long were you at sea?

Peter

Three days.

Swallow

What happened next?

Peter

He died, lying there among the fish.

Swallow

What did you do?

Peter

Threw them all overboard, set sail for home.

Swallow

You mean, you threw the fish overboard?...
(laughter)

When you landed, did you call for help?

Peter

I called Ned Keene.

Swallow

The apothecary here?

(indicates Ned)

Was there anybody else called?

Peter

Somebody brought the parson.

Swallow

You mean the Rector, Mister Horace Adams?

(The Rector steps forward. Swallow waves him back.)

All right, Mister Adams.

(He turns back to Peter.)

Was there a certain amount of excitement?

Peter

Bob Boles started shouting.

(Boles gesticulates from the crowd.)

Swallow

There was a scene in the village street, from which you were rescued by our landlady?

Peter

Yes. By Auntie.

Swallow

We don't call her that here...

(Auntie laughs from the crowd.)

You then took to abusing a respectable lady?

(Peter glares.)

Answer me! You shouted abuse at a certain person?

(Mrs Sedley pushes forward. Mrs Sedley is the widow of a retired factor of the East India Company and is known locally as Mrs Nabob. She is sixty-five, self-assertive, inquisitive, unpopular.)

Mrs Sedley
Say who! Say who!

Swallow
Missis Sedley here.

Peter (*fiercely*)
I don't like interferers!

(A slight hubbub among the spectators resolves itself into a chorus which is more like the confused muttering of a crowd than something fully articulate.)

Men's Chorus
When women gossip, the result
Is someone doesn't sleep at night.

Hobson (*shouting*)
Silence! Silence!

Swallow
Now tell me this. Who helped you carry the boy home?
(The crowd indicates Ellen.)
The schoolmistress, the widow, Mrs Ellen Orford?

(Renewed hubbub. Ellen steps forward to Swallow.)

Women's Chorus
O when you pray you shut your eyes
And then can't tell the truth from lies.

Hobson (*shouts*)
Silence! Silence!

Swallow
Mrs Orford, as the schoolmistress, the widow, how did you come into this?

Ellen
I did what I could to help.

Swallow
Why should you help this kind of fellow – callous, brutal, and coarse?
(Swallow waves her away.)
(to Grimes)
There's something here perhaps in your favour. I'm told you rescued the boy from drowning in the March storms.
(Peter is silent.)
Have you something else to say?
No? – Then I have.
Peter Grimes, I here advise you – do not get another boy apprentice. Get a fisherman to help you – big enough to stand up for himself. Our verdict is – that William Spode, your apprentice, died in accidental circumstances. But that's the kind of thing people are apt to remember.

(hubbub again)

Chorus

But when the crowner sits upon it,
Who can dare to fix the guilt?

Hobson *(shouts)*

Silence! Silence!

(Peter has stepped forward and is trying to speak.)

Peter

Your honour! Your honour! Like every other
fisherman I have to hire an apprentice. I must
have help –

Swallow

Then get a woman help you look after him.

Peter

That's what I want – but not yet –

Swallow

Why not?

Peter

Not till I've stopped people's mouths.

(Swallow rises with slow dignity – everyone else stands. The hubbub begins again.)

Swallow *(makes a gesture of dismissal)*

Stand down! Clear the court! Stand down!

Peter

'Stand down!' you say. You wash your hands.
The case goes on in people's minds.
The charges that no court has made
Will be shouted at my head.
Then let me speak, let me stand trial.
Bring the accusers into the hall.
Let me thrust into their mouths,
The truth itself, the simple truth!

(He shouts this excitedly against the hubbub chorus.)

Chorus

When women gossip, the result
Is someone doesn't sleep at night.
But when the crowner sits upon it,
Who can dare to fix the guilt?

(Against them all Constable Hobson shouts his:)

Hobson

Clear the court!

*(Swallow makes his ceremonial exit.
The crowd then begins to go out.
Peter and Ellen are left alone.)*

Peter

2 The truth – the pity – and the truth.

Ellen *(comes up to Peter)*

Peter, come away!

Peter

Where the walls themselves
Gossip of inquest.

Ellen

But we'll gossip, too,
And talk and rest.

Peter

While Peeping Toms
Nod as you go.
You'll share the name
Of outlaw, too.

Ellen

Peter, we shall restore your name.
Warmed by the new esteem
That you will find.

Peter

Until the Borough hate
Poisons your mind.

Ellen

There'll be new shoals to catch;
Life will be kind.

Peter

Ay! only of drowning ghosts!
Time will not forget:
The dead are witness
And Fate is blind.

Ellen

Unclouded,
The hot sun
Will spread his rays around.

Both

My / Your voice out of the pain,
Is like a hand
That I / you can feel and know:
Here is a friend!

(They walk off slowly as the curtain falls.)

Curtain

3 [Interlude I]

Act I

Scene 1

Curtain

Street by the sea; Moot Hall exterior with its
outside staircase, next door to which is 'The
Boar'. Ned Keene's apothecary's shop is at the
street corner. On the other side breakwaters run
down to the sea.

It is morning, before high tide, several days later.
Two fishermen are turning the capstan, hauling
in their boat. Prolonged cries as the boat is
hauled ashore. Women come from mending nets
to take the fish baskets from other fishermen
who now disembark.

Captain Balstrode sits on the breakwater
looking out to sea through his glass. Balstrode
is a retired merchant sea-captain, shrewd as
a travelled man should be, but with a general
sympathy that makes him the favourite rentier
of the whole Borough. He chews a plug of
tobacco while he watches.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

4 Oh hang at open doors the net, the cork,
While squalid sea-dames at their mending work.
Welcome the hour when fishing through the tide
The weary husband throws his freight aside.

Fishermen

O cold and wet, and driven by the tide,
Beat your tired arms against your tarry side.
Find rest in public bars where fiery gin
Will aid the warmth that languishes within.

*(Several fishermen cross to 'The Boar' where
Auntie stands in the doorway.)*

First Fisherman

Auntie!

Auntie

Come in, gentlemen, come in!

Boles *(protesting)*

Her vats flow with poisoned gin!

*(Boles the Methodist fisherman stands aside
from all this dram drinking.)*

Balstrode

Boles has gone Methody!

(points and laughs)

Auntie

A man should have
Hobbies to cheer his private life!

*(Fishermen go into 'The Boar'. Others remain
with their wives at the nets and boats.)*

Women's Chorus

Dabbling on shore half-naked sea-boys crowd,
Swim round a ship, or swing upon a shroud.
Or in a boat purloined with paddles play
And grow familiar with the watery way.

*(While the second boat is being hauled in, boys
are scrambling over the first.)*

Balstrode

Shoo, you little barnacles!
Up your anchors, hoist your sails!

*(Balstrode chases them from the boat. A more
respectable figure now begins, with much
hat-raising, his morning progress down the High
Street. He makes straight for 'The Boar'.)*

First Fisherman *(touches cap)*

Doctor Crabbe!

Boles *(points as the swing door closes)*

He drinks! 'Good Health' to all diseases!

Second Fisherman
Storm?

A Few Fishermen
Storm?

(They shade their eyes looking out to sea.)

Balstrode *(glass to his eye)*
A long way out. Sea horses.
The wind is holding back the tide.
If it veers round, watch for your lives.

Chorus of Fishers
And if the spring tide eats the land again
Till e'en the cottages and cobbled walls of
fishermen
Are billets for the thieving waves which take
As if in sleep, thieving for thieving's sake –

(The Rector comes down the High Street. He is followed as always by the Borough's second most famous rentier, the widow, Mrs (Nabob) Sedley. From 'The Boar' come the two 'nieces' who give Auntie her nickname. They stand in front of the pub, taking the morning sun. Ned Keene, seeing Mrs Sedley, pops out of his shop door.)

Rector *(right and left)*
Good morning, good morning!

Nieces
Good morning!

Mrs Sedley
Good morning, dear Rector!

Keene
Had Auntie no nieces we'd never respect her!

Swallow
Good morning! Good morning!

Nieces
Good morning!

Mrs Sedley
Good morning, your worship, Mister Swallow!

Auntie *(to Keene, from 'The Boar')*
You jeer, but if they wink, you're eager to follow!

(The Rector and Mrs Sedley continue towards the church.)

Chorus
For us sea-dwellers, this sea-birth can be
Death to our gardens of fertility,
Yet only such contemptuous spring tide can
Tickle the virile impotence of man.

Keene *(shouts across to Auntie)*
I'm coming tonight to see your nieces!

Auntie *(dignified)*
The 'Boar' is at its patrons' service.

Boles

God's storm will drown your hot desires!

Balstrode

God stay the tide, or I shall share your fears.

Peter (*calls off*)

Hi! Give us a hand!

(*Everyone stops working.*)

Haul the boat!

(*Nobody will help him.*)

Boles (*shouts back*)

Haul it yourself, Grimes!

Peter (*off*)

Hi! Somebody bring the rope!

(*Nobody does. Presently he appears and takes the capstan rope himself and pulls it after him (off) to the boat. Then he returns. The Fishermen and Women turn their backs on him and slouch away awkwardly.*)

Balstrode and Keene move to the capstan and start pushing it round.)

Balstrode

I'll give a hand, the tide is near the turn.

Keene

We'll drown the gossips in a tidal storm.

(*Grimes goes back to the boat.*)

Auntie and Boles stand aside, commenting.)

Auntie (*at the door of 'The Boar'*)

Parsons may moralise and fools decide,
But a good publican takes neither side.

Balstrode

O haul away! The tide is near the turn.

Keene

Man invented morals but tides have none.

Boles (*with arms akimbo watches their labour*)

This lost soul of a fisherman must be

Shunned by respectable society!

O let the captains hear, let the scholars learn;

Shielding the sin, they share the people's scorn!

Auntie

I have my business. Let the preachers learn

Hell may be fiery but the pub won't burn!

Balstrode and Keene

The tide that floods will ebb, the tide, the tide
will turn!

(*The boat is hauled up. Grimes appears.*)

Keene

Grimes, you won't need help from now.

(*Grimes sits quietly on his boat, cleaning nets.*)

I've got a prentice for you.

Balstrode

A workhouse brat?

Keene

I called at the workhouse yesterday.
All you do now is fetch the boy.
We'll send the carter with a note.
He'll bring your bargain on his cart!
(He calls Hobson from the crowd.)
Jim Hobson, we've a job for you!

Hobson *(enters)*

Cart's full, sir. More than I can do.

Keene

Listen, Jim. You'll go to the workhouse
And ask for Mister Keene his purchase.
Bring him back to Grimes!

Hobson

Cart's full, sir. I have no room.

Keene *(angrily)*

Hobson, you'll do what there is to be done!

(It is near enough to an argument to attract a crowd. Fishermen and Women gather round. Boles takes his chance.)

Boles

Is this a Christian country? Are
Pauper children so enslaved
That their bodies go for cash?

(Ellen Orford has come in, and stands listening. She is a widow of about forty. Her children have died, or grown up and gone away, and in

her loneliness she has become the Borough schoolmistress. A hard life has not hardened her. It has made her more charitable.)

Keene

Hobson, will you do your job?

Hobson

6 I have to go from pub to pub,
Picking up parcels, standing about.
My journey back is late at night.
Mister, find some other way
To bring your boy back.

Chorus

He's right! Dirty jobs!

Hobson

Mister, find some other way...

Ellen

Carter! I'll mind your passenger.

Chorus

What! And be Grimes's messenger?
You'll be Grimes's messenger!

Ellen

Whatever you say, I'm not ashamed.
Somebody must do the job.
The carter goes from pub to pub,
Picking up parcels, standing about.
The boy needs comfort late at night,
He needs a welcome on the road,

Coming here strange, he'll be afraid.
I'll mind your passenger!

Keene

Missis Orford is talking sense.

Chorus

Ellen – you're leading us a dance,
Fetching boys for Peter Grimes,
Because the Borough is afraid,
You who help will share the blame!

Ellen

Whatever you say...
Let her among you without fault
Cast the first stone –
And let the Pharisees and Sadducees
Give way to none.
But whosoever feels his pride
Humbled so deep,
There is no corner he can hide
Even in sleep.
Will have no trouble to find out
How a poor teacher,
Widowed and lonely, finds delight
In should'ring care.
(as she moves up the street)
Mr Hobson, where's your cart?
I'm ready.

Hobson

Up here, ma'am. I can wait.

(The crowd stands round and watches. Some follow Ellen and Hobson. On the edge of the crowd are other activities.)

Mrs Sedley *(beckons Ned Keene and whispers to him)*

Have you my pills?

Keene

I'm sorry, ma'am.

Mrs Sedley

My sleeping draught?

Keene

The laudanum
Is out of stock and being brought
By Mister Carrier Hobson's cart.
He's back tonight.

Mrs Sedley

Good Lord! Good Lord!

Keene

Meet us both in the pub, 'The Boar',
Auntie's we call it. It's quite safe.

Mrs Sedley

I've never been in a pub in my life.

Keene

You'll come?

Mrs Sedley
All right!

Keene
Tonight?

Mrs Sedley
All right!

*(She moves off up the street, sedately bowing –
there is some tittering among the crowd.)*

Keene
If the old dear takes much more laudanum, she'll
land herself one day in Bedlam!

Balstrode *(looks seaward through his glass)*
Look! The storm cone!
(consternation in the crowd)
The wind veers
In from the sea
At gale force!

All
Now the flood tide
And sea-horses
Will gallop over
The eroded coast.
Look! The storm cone!
Now it's veering in from sea.
A high tide coming
Now will eat the land.
A tide no breakwaters can withstand.

Chorus
Look out for squalls!
Look, the storm cone!
The wind veers
In from the sea
At gale force.
Make your boat fast!
Shutter your windows
And bring in all the nets!
Flooding, flooding!
Our seasonal fears.
The springtide's here
With a gale behind.

Is there much to fear?

Keene
Only for the goods you're rich in!
It won't drown your conscience, it might
Flood your kitchen.

Boles *(passionately)*
God has his ways which are not ours,
His high tide swallows up the shores.
Repent!

Keene
And keep your wife upstairs!

Omnes
O tide that waits for no man,
Spare our coasts!

(There is a General Exeunt – mostly through the swing doors of 'The Boar'. Dr Crabbe's hat blows away, is rescued for him by Ned Keene who bows him into the pub. Finally only Peter and Balstrode are left, Peter gazing seaward, still working at his boat, Balstrode hesitating at the pub door, then coming up to him.)

Balstrode

8 And do you prefer the storm
To Auntie's parlour and the rum?

Peter

I live alone. The habit grows.

Balstrode

Grimes, since you're a lonely soul,
Born to blocks, and spars and ropes,
Why not try the wider sea,
With merchantman, or privateer?

Peter

I am native, rooted here.

Balstrode

Rooted by what?

Peter

By familiar fields,
Marsh and sand,
Ordinary streets,
Prevailing wind.

Balstrode

You'd slip these moorings, if you had the mind.

Peter

By the shut faces
Of the Borough clans,
And by the kindness
Of a casual glance.

Balstrode

You'll find no comfort there!

When an urchin's quarrelsome,
Brawling at his little games,
Mother stops him with a threat,
'You'll be sold to Peter Grimes!'

Peter

Selling me new apprentices,
Children taught to be ashamed
Of the legend or their faces –
'You've been sold to Peter Grimes!'

Balstrode

Then the Crowner sits to hint,
But not to mention crimes,
And publishes an open verdict
Whispered about this 'Peter Grimes'.

Your boy was workhouse starved –
Maybe you're not to blame he died.

Peter

Picture what that day was like,
That evil day!
We strained into the wind,
Heavily laden.
We plunged into the wave's
Shuddering challenge.
Then the sea rose to a storm
Over the gunwales,
And the boy's silent reproach
Turned to illness.
Then home
Among fishing nets,
Alone, alone, alone
With a childish death.

Balstrode

This storm is useful; you can speak your mind
And never mind the Borough comment'ry.
There is more grandeur in a gale of wind
To free confession, set a conscience free.

Peter

They listen to money,
These Borough gossips.
I have my visions,
Fiery visions.
They call me dreamer,
They scoff at my dreams
And my ambition.
But I know a way
To answer the Borough.
I'll win them over.

Balstrode

With the new prentice?

Peter

We'll sail together,
These Borough gossips
Listen to money,
Only to money.
I'll fish the sea dry,
Sell the good catches.
That wealthy merchant
Grimes will set up
Household and shop.
You will all see it!
I'll marry Ellen!

Balstrode

Man – go and ask her,
Without your booty,
She'll have you now.

Peter

No – not for pity!

Balstrode

Then the old tragedy
Is in store.
New start with new prentice
Just as before!

Peter

What Peter Grimes decides
Is his affair!

Balstrode

You fool, man, you fool!

(The wind has now risen to gale height, Balstrode is shouting above it. Peter faces him angrily.)

Peter

Are you my conscience?

Balstrode

Might as well

Try shout the wind down as to tell

The obvious truth!

Peter

Take your advice –

Put it where your money is!

Balstrode

The storm is here, O come away!

Peter

The storm is here, and I shall I stay!

(The storm is rising. Auntie comes out of 'The Boar' to fasten the shutters, in front of the windows. Balstrode goes to help her. He looks back towards Peter, then goes into the pub. Peter stands alone, gazing intently into the sea and approaching storm.)

What harbour shelters peace,
Away from tidal waves, away from storms?

What harbour can embrace

Terrors and tragedies?

With her there'll be no quarrels,

With her the mood will stay,

A harbour evermore

Where night is turned to day.

(The wind rises. He stands a moment as if leaning against the wind.)

Curtain

9 Interlude II

Scene 2

Curtain

Interior of 'The Boar', typical main room of a country pub. No bar. Upright settles, tables, log fire. When the curtain rises Auntie is admitting Mrs Sedley. The gale has risen to hurricane force and Auntie holds the door with difficulty against the wind which rattles the windows and howls in the chimney. They both push the door closed.

Auntie

10 Past time to close!

Mrs Sedley

He said half past ten.

Auntie

Who?

Mrs Sedley
Mister Keene.

Auntie
Him and his women!

Mrs Sedley
You referring to me?

Auntie
Not at all, not at all!
What do you want?

Mrs Sedley
Room from the storm.

Auntie
That is the sort of weak politeness
Makes a publican lose her clients.
Keep in the corner out of sight.

*(Balstrode and some Fishermen enter. They
struggle with the door.)*

Balstrode *(whistles)*
Phew, that's a bitch of a gale all right!

Auntie *(nods her head towards Mrs Sedley)*
Sh-h-h.

Balstrode
Sorry, I didn't see you, missis.
You'll give the regulars a surprise.

Auntie
She's meeting Ned.

Balstrode
Which Ned?

Auntie
The quack!
He's looking after her heart attack.

Balstrode
Bring us a pint.

Auntie
It's closing time.

Balstrode
You fearful old female – why should you mind?

Auntie
The storm!

*(Bob Boles and some other Fishermen and
Women enter. The wind howls through the door
and again there is difficulty in closing it.)*

Boles
Did you hear the tide
Has broken over the Northern Road?

*(He leaves the door open too long with
disastrous consequences. A sudden gust howls
through the door, the shutters of the window fly
open, a pane blows in.)*

Balstrode
Get those shutters.

Auntie
O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode
You fearful old female, why do you
Leave your windows naked?

Auntie
O-o! O-o!

Balstrode
Better strip a niece or two
And clamp your shutters!

(The two 'Nieces' run in. They are young, pretty enough though a little worn, conscious that they are the chief attraction of 'The Boar'. At the moment they are in mild hysterics, having run downstairs in their night clothes, though with their unusual instinct for precaution they have found time to don each a wrap. It is not clear whether they are sisters, friends, or simply colleagues; but they behave like twins, as though each has only half a personality, and they cling together always to sustain their self-esteem.)

Nieces
Oo! Oo!
It's blown our bedroom windows in.
Oo! Oo!
We'll all be drowned.

Balstrode
Perhaps in gin!

Nieces
I wouldn't mind if it didn't howl.
It gets on my nerves!

Balstrode
D'you think we
Should stop our storm for such as you?
Coming all over palpitations! – 'Oo! Oo!
Auntie! Get some new relations!

Auntie *(takes it ill)*
Loud man, I never did have time
For the kind of creature who spits in his wine!
A joke's a joke and fun is fun!
But say your grace and be polite for all that we
have done.

Nieces
For his peace of mind.

Mrs Sedley
This is no place for me!

Auntie
Loud man, you're glad enough to be
Playing your cards in our company.
A joke's a joke and fun is fun!
But say your grace and be polite for all that we
have done!

Nieces
For his peace of mind.

Mrs Sedley

This is no place for me!

Auntie

Loud man! –

*(Some more Fishermen and Women come in.
The usual struggle with the door)*

First Fisherman

There's been a landslide up the coast!

Boles *(rising unsteadily)*

I'm drunk! Drunk!

Balstrode

You're a Methody wastrel!

Boles *(staggers up to one of the Nieces)*

Is this a niece of yours?

Auntie

That's so.

Boles

Who's her father?

Auntie

Who wants to know?

Boles

I want to pay my best respects

To the beauty and misery of her sex.

Balstrode

Old Methody, you'd better tune

Your piety to another hymn!

Boles

I want her!

Balstrode

Sh-h-h.

Auntie *(cold)*

Turn that man out.

Balstrode

He's the local preacher.

He's lost the way of carrying liquor.

He means no harm.

Boles

No, I mean love!

*(Boles hits him. Balstrode quietly overpowers
Boles and sits him in a chair.)*

Balstrode

Come on, boy!

(Mrs Sedley screams.)

Balstrode

We live and let live,

And look, we keep our hands to ourselves.

(Boles struggles to his feet, Balstrode sits him down again, laying the law down.)

Balstrode

Pub conversation should depend
On this eternal moral;
So long as satire don't descend
To fisticuff or quarrel.
We live and let live, and look –
We keep our hands to ourselves.

(And while Boles is being forced into his chair again the bystanders comment:)

Chorus

We live and let live, and look –
We keep our hands to ourselves!

Balstrode

We sit and drink the evening through
Not deigning to devote a
Thought to the daily cud we chew
But buying drinks by rota!

Chorus

We live and let live, and look –
We keep our hands to ourselves.

All and Chorus

We live and let live, and look!

(The door opens again. The struggle with the wind is worse than before as Ned Keene and some Fishermen get through.)

Keene

Have you heard? The cliff is down
Up by Grimes's hut.

Auntie

Where is he?

Mrs Sedley

Thank God you've come!

Keene

You won't blow away.

Mrs Sedley

The carter's over half an hour late!

Keene

He'll be later still; the road's under flood.

Mrs Sedley

I can't stay longer. I refuse!

Keene

You'll have to stay, if you want your pills.

Mrs Sedley

With drunken females, and in brawls!

Keene

They're Auntie's nieces, that's what they are,
And better than you for kissing, ma!
Mind that door!

Balstrode
Mind that door!

Chorus
Mind that door!

(The door opens again. Peter Grimes has come in. Unlike the rest he wears no oilskins. His hair looks wild. He advances into the room, shaking off the raindrops from his hair. Mrs Sedley faints. Ned Keene catches her as she falls. Balstrode and others push the door closed.)

Keene
Get the brandy, Aunt!

Auntie
Who'll pay?

Keene
Her! I'll charge her for it.

(As Peter moves forward, the others shrink back.)

Nieces and Chorus
Talk of the devil and there he is
And a devil he *is*, a devil he *is*!
Grimes is waiting his apprentice.

Keene
This widow's as strong as any two
Fishermen I have met.
Everybody's very quiet!

(No-one answers. Silence is broken by Peter, as if thinking aloud.)

Peter
12 Now the Great Bear and Pleiades
where earth moves
Are drawing up the clouds
of human grief,
Breathing solemnity in the deep night.

Who can decipher
in storm or starlight
The written character
of a friendly fate –
As the sky turns, the world for us to change?

But if the horoscope's
bewildering,
Like a flashing turmoil
of a shoal of herring,
Who can turn skies back and begin again?

(Silence again. Then muttering in undertones)

Chorus
13 He's mad or drunk,
Why's that man here?

Nieces
His song alone would sour the beer!

Chorus
His temper's up.
Oh, chuck him out!

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if he didn't howl!

Chorus

He looks as if he's nearly drowned.

Boles (*staggers up to Grimes*)

You've sold your soul, Grimes!

Balstrode (*pulling Boles away*)

Come away!

Boles

Satan's got no hold on me.

Balstrode

Leave him alone, you drunkard!

Boles

I'll hold the gospel light before
The cataract that blinds his eyes.

Peter (*as the drunk stumbles up to him*)

Get out!

(Grimes thrusts Boles aside roughly and turns away.)

Boles

His exercise
Is not with men but killing boys!

(Boles picks up a bottle and is about to bring it down on Grimes's head when Balstrode knocks it out of his hand and it crashes on the floor.)

Auntie

For God's sake, help me keep the peace.
D'you want me up at the next Assize?

Balstrode

For peace sake, someone start a song!

(Keene starts a round. 'That's right, Ned!' says Auntie. The round is:)

Keene and the Others

¹⁴ Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and
You Know has gone fishing and
Found them a shoal.
Pull them in in handfuls,
And in canfuls,
And in panfuls,
Bring them in sweetly,
Gut them completely,
Pack them up neatly,
Sell them discreetly,
Oh, haul a-way!

(Peter comes in, which upsets the course of the round.)

Peter

When I had gone fishing,
When he had gone fishing,
When You Know'd gone fishing,
We found us Davy Jones!
Bring him in with horror!
Bring him in with terror!

And bring him in with sorrow!
Oh, haul a-way!

(This breaks the round, but Peter is overwhelmed and the round continues. At the climax of the round the door opens to admit Ellen Orford, Hobson the Carrier, and the Boy, Grimes's new apprentice. All three are soaked, muddy, and bedraggled.)

Hobson
15 The bridge is down, we half swam over.

Keene
And your cart? Is it seaworthy?

Ellen
We're chilled to the bone.

(The Women go to Ellen and the Boy. Auntie fusses over him. Boles reproaches.)

Boles (to Ellen)
Serves you right, woman.

Auntie
My dear,
There's brandy and hot water to spare.

Nieces
Let's look at the boy.

Ellen (rising)
Let him be.

Nieces (admiring)
Nice sweet thing!

Ellen (protecting him)
Not for such as you.

Peter (beckoning the Boy)
Let's go. You ready?

Auntie
Let them warm up,
They've been half drowned.

Peter
Time to get off!

Auntie
Your hut's washed away.

Peter
Only the cliff.
Young prentice, come!

(The Boy hesitates, but Ellen leads him to Peter at the door.)

Ellen
Goodbye, my dear, God bless you.
Peter will take you home.

Omnes
Home? Do you call that home?

(Peter takes the Boy out of the door into the howling storm.)

Curtain

End of Act I

Act II

16 Interlude III

Scene 1

Curtain

Scene as in Act I. The Street

A fine sunny morning, some weeks later, with church bells ringing. Some of the villagers are standing outside the church door. Ellen and the Boy, John, come in against the stream of villagers crossing towards the church. Ellen is carrying a work-basket. One or two late-comers cross and hurry into the church.

Ellen

17 Glitter of waves
And glitter of sunlight
Bid us rejoice
And lift our hearts on high.

Man alone

Has a soul to save,
And goes to church
To worship on a Sunday.
(The organ starts a voluntary in church, offstage.)

As the organ sounds from the church, Ellen sits down between a boat and a breakwater and takes her knitting from the basket. The Boy quietly plays by her side.)

Shall we not go to church this Sunday,
But do our knitting by the sea?
I'll do the work, you talk.

(John says nothing but goes on playing quietly. The bell stops and in church the hymn starts.)

Chorus (off)

Now that the daylight fills the sky,
We lift our hearts to God on high,
That He in all we do or say
Would keep us free from harm today.

Ellen

Nothing to tell me,
Nothing to say? Then shall I
Tell you what your life was like?
See if I'm right! I think
You liked your workhouse with its grave
Empty look. Perhaps you weren't
So unhappy in your loneliness?

Chorus (off)

May He restrain our tongues from strife,
Shield from anger's din our life,
And guard with watchful care our eyes
From earth's absorbing vanities!

Ellen

When first I started teaching,
The life at school to me seemed bleak and
empty...

But soon I found a way of knowing children, –
Found the woes of little people
Hurt more, but are more simple.

(She goes on with her work. John says nothing.)

Chorus (off)

So we, when this day's work is done
And shades of night return once more

Ellen

John, you may have heard the story
Of the prentice Peter had before.
But when you came, I said,
Now this is where we
Make a new start.

Chorus (off)

...Amen.

Ellen

Every day I pray it may be so.

(Morning prayer begins and the Rector's voice is heard from the church.)

Rector

18 Wherefore I pray and beseech you,
as many as are here present, to
accompany me with a pure heart and
humble voice, saying after me,

Rector and Congregation

Almighty and most merciful Father;
We have erred and strayed from thy
ways like lost sheep.

(The church service continues through the ensuing scene.)

Ellen

There's a tear in your coat. Was that done
Before you came?
Badly torn.

(Mrs Sedley stops to listen on her way to church.)

Rector and Congregation

And we have done those things which
we ought not to have done.

Ellen

That was done recently.
Take your hand away,
Your neck, is it?

Rector and Congregation

And grant, O most merciful Father...

Ellen

John, what are you trying to hide?

(Ellen undoes the neck of the boy's shirt.)

Rector and Congregation (*in church*)
O Lord, open Thou our lips;
And our mouth shall show forth Thy praise.
O God, make speed to save us!
O Lord, make haste to help us.

Ellen
A bruise...
Well, it's begun.

Rector and Congregation
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now...

(Ellen gently seats the Boy at her feet.)

Ellen
Child, you're not too young to know
Where roots of sorrow are;
Innocent, you've learned how near
Life is to torture.

Rector and Congregation
Praise ye the Lord!
The Lord's name be praised.

Ellen
Let this be a holiday,
Full of peace and quietness
While the treason of the waves
Glitters like love.

Storm and all its terrors are
Nothing to the heart's despair.
After the storm will come a sleep,
Like oceans deep!

(Ellen rises and fastens the Boy's shirt.)

Congregation
19 O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord,
O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord,
O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord,
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

(Peter Grimes comes in excitedly from the harbour.)

Peter
Come, boy!

Ellen
Peter – what for?

Peter
I've seen a shoal. I need his help.

Congregation
O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord,
O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord,
O ye Lightnings and Clouds, bless ye the Lord,
Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Ellen
But if there were then all the boats
Would fast be launching.

Peter

I can see

The shoals to which the rest are blind.

Congregation

O ye Wells, bless ye the Lord,

O ye Seas and Floods, bless ye the Lord,

O ye Whales and all that move in the Waters,

Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Ellen

This is a Sunday, his day of rest.

Peter

This is whatever day I say it is!

Come, boy!

Congregation

O all ye Fowls of the Air, bless ye the Lord,

O all ye Beasts and Cattle, bless ye the Lord,

O ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord,

Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Ellen

You and John have fished all week,

Night and day without a break,

Painting boat, mending nets, cleaning fish,

Now let him rest.

Congregation

O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord,

O ye holy and humble, bless ye the Lord,

Ananias, Azarias, Misael, bless ye the Lord,

Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Peter

Come, boy!

Ellen

But your bargain?...

Peter

My bargain?

Ellen

His weekly rest.

Peter

He works for me, leave him alone, he's mine!

Ellen

Hush, Peter, hush!

Congregation

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,

and to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now,

And ever shall be,

World without end. Amen!

(The sound dies down. In church the lesson is being read.

Ellen speaks to Peter, away from the Boy.)

Ellen

This unrelenting work,

This grey, unresting industry,

What aim, what future, what peace

Will your hard profits buy?

Peter

Buy us a home, buy us respect
And buy us freedom from pain
Of grinning at gossip's tales.
Believe in me, we shall be free!

Congregation

I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth;
And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
Who was conceived...

(fades into background)

Ellen

Peter, tell me one thing, where
The youngster got that ugly bruise?

Peter

Out of the hurly burly!

Ellen

Oh, your ways
Are hard and rough beyond his days.
(Ellen goes to Peter and puts her hand on his arm.)
Peter, were we right in what we planned
To do? Were we right, were we right?

Peter *(roughly)*

Take away your hand!
(then quietly)
My only hope depends on you.
If you – take it away – what's left?

(Ellen moves unhappily away from him.)

Ellen

Were we mistaken when we schemed
To solve your life by lonely toil?

(Auntie is seen peering through the 'Boar' window.)

Peter *(in anger)*

Wrong to plan?
Wrong to try?
Wrong to live?
Right to die?

Ellen

Were we mistaken when we dreamed
That we'd come through and all be well?

(Boles and Keene walk down the street. They stop for a moment to listen.)

Peter

Wrong to struggle?
Wrong to hope?
Then the Borough's
Right again!

Ellen

Peter! You cannot buy your peace,
You'll never stop the gossip's talk,
With all the fish from out the sea.
We were mistaken to have dreamed...
Peter! We've failed. We've failed.

Peter (*cries out as if in agony*)
Ah!

(He strikes Ellen, whose work-basket falls to the ground.)

Congregation
Amen!

Peter
So be it! – And God have mercy upon me!

(The Boy runs from him. Peter follows, then drives him fiercely out in front of him. Ellen watches, then goes out the other way, weeping. Behind closed doors and half-open windows neighbours have been watching. Three now emerge. First Auntie, then Ned Keene, finally Boles)

Auntie
²⁰ Fool! to let it come to this!
Wasting pity, squand'ring tears.

Keene
See the glitter in his eyes!

Keene and Auntie
Grimes is at his exercise!

Boles
What he fears is that the Lord
Follows with a flaming sword.

Auntie
You see all through crazy eyes.

All
Grimes is at his exercise!

Boles
Where's the pastor of this flock?
Where's the guardian shepherd's hook?

All
Parson, lawyer, all at prayers!

(The service is over and people gradually collect outside the church door.)

Keene, Boles, and Auntie
Now the church parade begins.
Fresh beginning for fresh sins.
Ogling with a pious gaze,
Each one's at his exercise.

(Dr Crabbe comes first.)

Auntie
Doctor!

Keene
Leave him out of it!

Mrs Sedley (*coming from church*)
What is it?

Keene
Private business!

Mrs Sedley

I heard two voices during Psalms;
One was Grimes, and one more calm.

Boles

While you worshipped idols there,
The Devil had his Sabbath here!

Mrs Sedley

Maltreating that poor boy again!

Balstrode

Grimes is weatherwise and skilled
In the practice of his trade.
Let him be. Let us forget
What slander can invent!

Chorus

What is it? What is it?

Auntie, Boles, and Keene

What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

*(As people come out two by two they circulate
the village green, singing their couplets as they
reach the centre. First come Swallow and a
fellow lawyer.)*

Chorus

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

A Lawyer

Dullards build their self-esteem
By inventing cruelties.

Swallow

Even so, the law restrains
Too impetuous enterprise.

A Fisherwoman

Fishing's a lonely trade,
Single men have much to bear.

First and Second Nieces

If a man's work can not be made
Decent, let him stay ashore.

Chorus (overall)

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

Rector

My flock - ah, what a weight is this,
My burden pastoral.

Mrs Sedley

But what a dang'rous faith is this
That gives souls equality!

*(Balstrode pauses by Ned Keene as he walks
round.)*

Balstrode

When the Borough gossip starts
Somebody will suffer!

Chorus (*overall*)

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

*(During the hubbub Boles climbs a little way
up the steps of the Moot Hall. Keene tries to
prevent Boles from addressing the crowd.)*

Boles

21

People –
...No! I will speak!...
This thing here concerns you all.

Chorus (*clustering round Boles*)

Whoever's guilty gets the rap!
The Borough keeps its standards up.

Balstrode

Tub-thumping.

Boles

This prentice system's
Uncivilised, and unchristian.

Balstrode

Something of the sort befits
Brats conceived outside the sheets.

Boles

Where's the Parson in his black?
Is he here or is he not,
To guide a sinful, straying flock?

Chorus

Where's the Parson?

Rector

Is it my business?

Boles

Your business? to ignore
Growing at your door,
Evils, like your fancy flowers?

Chorus

Evils!

Rector

Calm now! Tell me what it is.

*(Ellen comes in to collect her things. She is met
by Auntie who has picked up Ellen's abandoned
basket and its contents.)*

Auntie

Ellen dear, see I've gathered
All your things. Come, rest inside!

Boles and Chorus

She can tell you, Ellen Orford,
She helped him in his cruel games!

Rector (*going to Ellen, holding his hand up for
silence*)

Ellen, please!

Ellen

What am I to do?

Boles and Chorus

Speak out in the name of the Lord!

Ellen

²² We planned that their lives should
Have a new start,
That I, as a friend, could
Make the plan work,
By bringing comfort where
Their lives were stark.

Rector

You planned to be worldly-wise
But your souls were dark.

Ellen

We planned this time to
Care for the boy;

Mrs Sedley

O little care you for the prentice
Or his welfare!

Ellen

To save him from danger
And hardship sore,

Boles

Call it danger, call it hardship,
Or plain murder!

Ellen

And mending his clothes and giving him
Regular meals.

Keene

But thanks to flinty hearts
E'en quacks can make a profit!

Swallow

You planned to heal sick souls
With bodily care!

Nieces

Perhaps his clothes you mended
But you work his bones bare!

Auntie

You meant just to be kind
And avert fear!

Balstrode

You interfering gossips, this
Is not your business!

Ellen

O pity those who try to bring
A shadowed life into the sun.

Hobson

Pity the boy!

Chorus

Who lets us down must take the rap;
The Borough keeps it standards up.

(Auntie and Balstrode move towards Ellen in sympathy.)

Ellen, Auntie, and Balstrode
O hard, hard hearts!

Omnes *(without Ellen, Auntie, and Balstrode)*
Tried to be kind!
Murder!
Tried to be kind and to help!
Murder!

(Auntie leads Ellen away through the crowd, to 'The Boar'.)

Rector
23 Swallow – shall we go and see Grimes in his hut?

Swallow
Popular feeling's rising!

Rector
Balstrode, I'd like you to come.

Balstrode
I warn you we shall waste our time.

Rector
I'd like your presence just the same!

Mrs Sedley
Little do the suspects know,
I've the evidence. I've a clue!

Nieces, Keene, Hobson, and Chorus
Now we will find out the worst!

Swallow *(points to the Nieces who join the crowd)*
No ragtail, no bobtail, if you please!

Boles *(pushes them away roughly)*
Back to the gutter – you keep out of this.

Rector
Only the men, the women stay.

Swallow
Carter Hobson, fetch the drum.
Summon the Borough to Grimes's hut.

Boles, Rector, Keene, Mrs Sedley, and Chorus
To Grimes's hut!
To Grimes's hut!

(Hobson sounds the drum and the men line up behind Swallow, Rector, and Mrs Sedley. Ellen, Auntie, and the Nieces remain aside. Balstrode stays hesitating. Behind them come the rest of the crowd.)

Mrs Sedley, Boles, Rector, Keene, Swallow, and Chorus
Now is gossip put on trial,
Now the rumours either fail,
Or are shouted in the wind,
Sweeping furious through the land.

(The procession sets off up the hill, with the women following.)

Now the liars shiver, for
Now if they've cheated we shall know!
We shall strike and strike to kill,
At the slander or the sin!

(Ellen motions to Balstrode to follow the procession.)

Now the whisperers stand out,
Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife:
What's done now is done for life.

*(The sound of the crowd, still singing loudly, disappears.
Ellen, Auntie, and the Nieces remain dejectedly on the empty stage.)*

Nieces

24 From the gutter, why should we
Trouble at their ribaldries?

Auntie

And shall we be ashamed because
We comfort men from ugliness?

All

Do we smile or do we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

Auntie

When in storm they shelter here,
And we smooth their fears away!

Nieces

We know they'll whistle their good-byes
Next fine day and put to sea!

Ellen

On the manly calendar
We only mark heroic days!

All

Do we smile or do we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

Ellen

They are children when they weep;
We are mothers when they strive,
Schooling our own hearts to keep
The bitter treasure of their love.

All

Do we smile or do we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

(The women look out after the procession, their eyes slowly rising as it mounts the hill.)

Slow curtain

COMPACT DISC TWO

1 Interlude IV

Scene 2

Curtain

Grimes's hut is an upturned boat. It is on the whole shipshape, though bare and forbidding. Ropes coiled, nets, kegs, and casks furnish the place. It is lighted by a skylight. There are two doors, one (back centre) opens on the cliff, the other (downstage) opens on the road. Later the same morning. The Boy staggers into the room through the street door as if thrust from behind. Peter follows, in a towering rage. He pulls down the Boy's fishing clothes which are neatly stacked on a shelf.

Peter

- 2** Go there! Go there!
Here's your sea boots.
(He throws the sea boots down in front of the Boy.)
Take those bright
And fancy buckles off your feet!
There's your oilskin, and sou-wester!
Stir your pins, we must get ready!
There's the jersey that she knitted,
With the anchor that she patterned.
(He throws the clothes to the Boy. They fall on the floor around him.)
I'll tear the collar off your neck!
(The Boy is crying silently. Peter shakes his shoulder.)

Steady! Don't take fright, boy! Stop!
(Peter opens the cliff-side door and looks out.)
Look! Now is our chance!
The whole sea's boiling! Get the nets!
Come, boy!
They listen to money,
These Borough gossips,
Listen to money,
Only to money,
I'll fish the sea dry,
Flood the market.
Now is our chance to get a good catch,
Get money to choke
Down rumour's throat!
I will set up
With house and home and shop.
I'll marry Ellen,
I'll marry Ellen,
I'll...
(He turns to see the Boy still sitting on the rope coil, weeping. He tears off his coat and throws the jersey at him.)
Coat off! Jersey on! My boy,
We're going to sea!

*(The Boy is still weeping.
Peter gives the Boy a shove, which knocks him over; he lies sobbing miserably.
Peter changes tone and breaks into another song.)*

- 3** In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home,
Warm in my heart and in a golden calm,
Where there'll be no more fear and no more
storm.

And she will soon forget her schoolhouse ways,
Forget the labour of those weary days,
Wrapped round in kindness like September
haze.

The learned at their books have no more store
Of wisdom than we'd close behind our door,
Compared with us the rich man would be poor.

I've seen in stars the life that we might share:
Fruit in the garden, children by the shore,
A whitened door step, and a woman's care!

But dreaming builds what dreaming can disown,
Dead fingers stretch themselves to tear it down.
I hear those voices that will not be drowned

Calling, there is no stone
In earth's thickness to make a home,
That you can build with and remain alone.

*(Hobson's drum, at the head of the Borough
procession, can be heard very distantly coming
towards the hut. Peter doesn't notice.)*

4 Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut,
He's there now, I can see him, he is there!
His eyes are on me as they were that evil day.

(The drum sounds louder.)

Stop moaning boy. Water?
There's no more water...
You had the last yesterday.

You'll soon be home!
In harbour still and deep.

*(In the distance can be heard the song of the
neighbours coming up the hill.)*

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, and Chorus (off)
Now! Now!...

*(Peter rises, goes quickly to the street door and
looks out.)*

Peter
There's an odd procession here.
Parson and Swallow coming near.
*(Suddenly he turns on the Boy, who doesn't
move.)*
Wait! You've been talking,
You and that bitch were gossiping!
What lies have you been telling?
The Borough's climbing up the hill,
To get me! Me! Oh, I'm not scared!
I'll send them off with a flea in their ear.
I'll show them. Grimes ahoy!

(The procession is steadily approaching.)

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, and Chorus (off)
...Or are shouted in the wind,
Sweeping furious through the land.

Peter

You sit there watching me
And you're the cause of everything.
Your eyes, like his, are watching me
With an idiot's drooling gaze!

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, and Chorus (off)

Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife:
What's done now is done for life!

Peter

Will you move
Or, must I make you dance?
*(The Boy jumps up and begins dragging nets
and other tackle up through the cliff door.)*
Step boldly, step boldly!
For here's the way we go to sea.
Down the cliff to find that shoal
That's boiling in the sea!

(The procession is now quite near.)

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, and Chorus (off)

Now the liars shiver, for
Now if they've cheated we shall know!
We shall strike and strike to kill
At the slander or the sin!

*(Rope in hand, Peter drives the Boy through the
door onto the cliff edge.)*

Peter

Careful, or you'll break your neck!
Down the cliff-side to the deck.
I'll pitch the stuff down. Come on!
(He pitches ropes and nets.)
Now...
Shut your eyes and down you go!

*(There is a knock at the street door. Peter turns
towards it, then retreats. When Peter is between
the two doors, the Boy loses his hold, screams,
and falls out of sight. Peter runs to the cliff door,
feels for his grip, and then swings quickly after
him. The cliff-side door is open. The street door
still resounds with the Rector's knock. Then it
opens and the Rector puts his head round the
door.)*

Rector

5 Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!
Nobody here?

*(Next come Swallow, Ned, and Balstrode, and
some of the crowd follow them in.)*

Swallow

What about the other door?

*(Swallow and the Rector look out of the cliff-
side door, but do not climb out. Silence for a
moment)*

Rector

Was this a recent landslide?

Swallow

Yes.

Rector

It makes almost a precipice.
How deep?

Swallow

Say forty feet.

Rector

Dangerous to leave the door open!

Keene

He used to keep his boat down there,
Maybe they've both gone fishing.

Rector

Yet,
His hut is reasonably kept.
Here's order. Here's skill.

(Swallow draws the moral.)

Swallow

The whole affair gives Borough talk its – shall
I say quietus? Here we come pell-mell,
Expecting to find out – we know not what.
But all we find is a neat and empty hut.
Gentlemen, take this to your wives:
Less interference in our private lives.

Rector

There's no point certainly in staying here,
And will the last to go please close the door.

(They go out – all save Balstrode, who hesitates, looks round the hut, sees the Boy's Sunday clothes lying around, examines them, then goes to the street door to shut it. He goes up to the cliff-side door, looks out, and hurriedly climbs down the way Peter and the Boy went.)

Quick curtain

End of Act II

Act III

6 Interlude V

Scene I

Curtain

Scene as in Act I, a few days later
The time is summer evening. One of the season's
subscription dances is taking place in the Moot
Hall which is brightly lit and from which we can
hear the band playing a polka and the rhythm of
the dancers' feet. 'The Boar' too is brightly lit and,
as the dance goes on, there will be a regular
passage – of the males at any rate – from the
Moot Hall to the Inn.

The stage is empty but presently there is a little squeal and the First Niece scampers down the exterior staircase of the Moot Hall, closely followed by Swallow.
A barn dance is being played in the Moot Hall.

Swallow (to Niece 1)

7 Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll seal the deed and take no fee;
My signature, your graceful mark,
Are witnessed by the abetting dark.

(The Second Niece joins the First, arm in arm.)

Both Nieces

Together we are safe
As any wedded wife,
For safety in number lies.
A man is always lighter,
His conversation's brighter,
Provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes...

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll call it real property.
Your sister shan't insist upon
Her stay of execution!

Nieces

Save us from lonely men,
They're like a broody hen,
With habits but with no ideas.

But in their choice of pleasures
They show their coloured feathers,
Provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

Swallow

I shall take steps to change her mind.
She has first option on my love.
If my appeal should be ignored
I'll take it to the House of Lords!

Nieces

Oh, pairing's all to blame
For awkwardness and shame,
And all these manly sighs and tears,
Which wouldn't be expended
If people condescended
Always to have their tête-à-têtes in threes.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
We'll make an absolute decree
Of quiet enjoyment, which you'll bless
By sending sister somewhere else!

(Swallow captures the First Niece.)

Second Niece

Ned Keene is chasing me, gives me no peace!

Swallow

He went to The Boar to have a glass –
Sister and I will join him there.
If you don't want Ned you'd better stay here.

(He opens the Inn door. First Niece is about to enter when...)

First Niece *(to Swallow, aside)*
They're all watching. I must wait
Till Auntie's turned her back.

(She escapes from Swallow and runs half way up the Moot Hall stairs to join her Sister, leaving Swallow holding the door of 'The Boar' open. The Barn Dance stops – applause.)

Swallow
Pah!

(He goes into 'The Boor' alone. Ned Keene comes out of the Moot Hall at the top of the stairs. The Nieces fly, giggling, and hide behind one of the boats on the shore. Three boats can be seen as at the end of Act I.)

Keene *(calls after them)*
Ahoy! Ahoy!

(He is half way to their hiding place when a peremptory voice stops him in mid career. Mrs Sedley is at the top of the Moot Hall stairs, which she descends. A slow waltz starts from the Moot Hall.)

Mrs Sedley
8 Mister Keene! Can you spare a moment?
I've something to say that's more than urgent!
About Peter Grimes and that boy!

(She is downstairs by now and has him buttonholed.)

Neither of them was seen yesterday.
It's more than suspicion now, it's fact!
The boy's disappeared.

Keene
Do you expect me to act
Like a Bow Street runner – or a constable?

(The Two Nieces trip quietly back to the dance.)

Mrs Sedley
At least you can trouble to hear what
I've got to say!
For two days I've kept my eyes open;
For two days I've said nothing,
Only watched and taken notes,
Pieced clue to clue, and bit by bit
Reconstructed all the crime.
Everything points to Peter Grimes:
He is the murderer!

Keene
Old woman, you're far too ready
To yell 'Blue Murder'!
If people poke their noses into others' business –
No! They won't get me to help them –
They'll find there's merry hell to pay!
You just tell me, where's the body?

Mrs Sedley

In the sea the prentice lies,
Whom nobody has seen for days!
Murder most foul it is,
Eerie I find it;
My skin's a prickly heat,
Blood cold behind it!
In midnight's loneliness
And thrilling quiet
The history I trace,
The stifling secret.
Murder most foul it is,
And I'll declare it!

Keene (*who is getting bored, thirsty, and angry*)

Are you mad, old woman,
Or is it too much laudanum?

Mrs Sedley

Has Peter Grimes been seen?

Keene

He's away.

Mrs Sedley

And the boy?

Keene

They're fishing, likely.

Mrs Sedley (*like a cross-examining counsel*)

Has his boat been seen?

Keene

Why should it?

Mrs Sedley

His hut's abandoned.

Keene

I'm dry. Good night.

(The waltz stops; applause from the dance. He breaks away from her grasp, goes into 'The Boar', and bangs the door after him. Dr Crabbe emerges from 'The Boar'. Mrs Sedley accosts him, but he firmly raises his hat and moves away. She retires into the shadow of the boats. A Hornpipe starts up in the Moot Hall. The Rector and other burgesses come down the Moot Hall stairs.)

First Burgess

Come along, Doctor!
(indicates 'The Boar')
We're not wanted here, we oldsters!

Burgesses

Good night! It's time for bed...
Good night! Good night! Good night, good sirs,
good night!
Good night, good people, good night!

Rector

I looked in a moment, the company's gay,
With pretty young women and youths on the
spree;
So parched like my roses, but now the sun's
down
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine!

Burgesses

Good night! Good night! Good night, good
people, good night!

Rector

Good night, Doctor Crabbe, all good friends,
good night.
Don't let the ladies keep company too late!
My love to the maidens, wish luck to the men!
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine!

Burgesses

Good night! Good night! Good night, good
people, good night!

*(The Rector, Dr Crabbe, and the Burgesses
gradually disperse to their houses.
The Hornpipe fades out.)*

Mrs Sedley *(still in the shadow of the boats,
goes on with her brooding)*
Crime, which my hobby is,
Sweetens my thinking;
Men who can breach the peace
And kill convention –

So many guilty ghosts,
With stealthy body,
Trouble my midnight thoughts...

*(Ellen and Balstrode walk up slowly from the
beach. It is clear they have been in earnest talk.
Mrs Sedley remains to listen but doesn't show
herself.)*

Ellen

10 Is the boat in?

*(As they approach, Balstrode shines his lantern
on the name of the nearest boat: Boy Billy.)*

Balstrode

Yes! For more than an hour.
Peter seems to have disappeared.
Not in his boat. Not in his hut.

Ellen *(holds out the Boy's jersey)*

This I found,
Down by the tide-mark.

*(It is getting dark. To see the garment properly,
Balstrode holds it to his lantern.)*

Balstrode

The boy's?...

Ellen

My broidered anchor on the chest!
(*meditative*)

¹¹ Embroidery in childhood was
A luxury of idleness.
A coil of silken thread giving
Dreams of a silk and satin life.
Now my broiderery affords
The clue, whose meaning we avoid.

My hand remembered its old skill –
These stitches tell a curious tale.
I remember I was brooding
On the fantasies of children...
And dreamt that only by wishing I
Could bring some silk into their lives.
Now my broiderery affords
The clue, whose meaning we avoid.

(*The jersey is wet. Balstrode wrings the water out.*)

Balstrode

¹² We'll find him, maybe give him a hand.

Ellen

We have no power to help him now.

Balstrode

We have the power. We have the power.

In the black moment
When your friend suffers
Unearthly torment,
We cannot turn our backs.
When horror breaks one heart
All hearts are broken.

Ellen and Balstrode

We shall be there with him.

(*They slowly walk out together.*)

Balstrode

Nothing to do but wait,
Since the solution
Is beyond life – beyond
Dissolution.

(*The dance music starts up again.
When Ellen and Balstrode have gone, Mrs Sedley
goes quickly to the door of 'The Boar'.*)

Mrs Sedley (*calling breathlessly through the door*)

¹³ Mister Swallow! Mister Swallow!
(*Auntie comes to the door of 'The Boar'.*)
I want the lawyer Swallow!

Auntie

What do you want?

Mrs Sedley

I want the lawyer Swallow!

Auntie
He's busy!

Mrs Sedley
Fetch him, please, this is official.
Business about the Borough criminal.
Please do as I tell you!

Auntie
My customers come here for peace,
For quiet, away from you
And all such nuisances!

Mrs Sedley
This is an insult! an insult!

Auntie
You'll find as long as I am here, you'll find
That I always speak my mind!
My customers come here.
They take their drink, they take their ease.

*(Swallow comes to the door of 'The Boar', wiping
his mouth.)*

Mrs Sedley
I'll have you know your place,
You baggage!

Swallow
Hi! What's the matter?
Tell me, what's the matter.
What is it? What's all this noise about?

Auntie
Good night!

(Auntie goes in and slams door.)

Mrs Sedley *(points dramatically)*
Look!

Swallow
I'm short-sighted, you know.

Mrs Sedley
Look! It's Grimes's boat, back at last!

Swallow
That's different! Hey!
(shouts into 'The Boar')
Is Hobson there?

(Hobson appears.)

Mrs Sedley
Good!

Hobson
Ay, ay, sir!

Mrs Sedley
Now things are moving; and about time too!

Swallow
You're constable of the Borough,
Carter Hobson.

Hobson
Ay, ay, sir!

Swallow
As the mayor,
I ask you to find Peter Grimes!
Take whatever help you need.

Hobson
Now, what I claims
Is, he's out at sea.

Swallow (*points*)
But here's his boat.

Hobson
Oh! We'll send a posse to his hut.

Swallow
If he's not there, you'll search the shore,
The marsh, the fields, the streets, the Borough.

Hobson
Ay, ay, sir!

(*He goes back to 'The Boor'.*)

Mrs Sedley
Crime – that's my hobby – is
By cities hoarded.
Rarely are country minds
Lifted to murder,
The noblest of the crimes,
Which are my study.

And now the crime is here
And I am ready!

Hobson (*hailing*)
Hey, there! Hey! Come out and help!
Grimes is around! Come on! Come on!

(*As the dance band fades out, the dancers and
drinkers crowd out of the Moot Hall and 'The
Boar' and congregate on the green.*)

Chorus
Who holds himself apart,
Lets his pride rise,
Him who despises us,
We'll destroy!

And cruelty becomes
His enterprise,
(*Swallow, Boles, Ned Keene, and Fishermen
come from 'The Boar', carrying guns and
lanterns.*)

Him who despises us,
We'll destroy!
(*with Two Nieces, Mrs Sedley, Boles, Keene,
Swallow, then also Hobson*)

Our curse shall fall on his evil day. We shall
Tame his arrogance!
Who holds himself apart,
Lets his pride rise.
And cruelty becomes
His enterprise.
Our curse shall fall on him!
Him who despises us,
We'll destroy!

Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,
We'll make the murderer pay for his crime!

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Grimes!

*(The crowd, still shouting, hurries off to the hunt
in all directions.)*

Quick curtain

14 Interlude VI

Curtain

Scene 2

Scene as in Scene 1, some hours later. The stage
is quite empty – a thick fog. Fog horn and the
cries of the searchers can be heard distantly.

Voices

15 Grimes! Grimes!

(Peter comes in, weary and demented.)

Peter

Steady! There you are! Nearly home!
What is home? Calm as deep water.
Where's my home? Deep in calm water.
Water will drink my sorrows dry,
And the tide will turn.

Voices

Grimes!

Peter

Steady! There you are! Nearly home!
The first one died, just died...
The other slipped, and died...
And the third will...
'Accidental' circumstances.'
Water will drink his sorrows – my sorrows – dry,
And the tide will turn.

Voices

Grimes! Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

Peter

Peter Grimes!... Here you are! Here I am!
Hurry, hurry!
Now is gossip put on trial.
Bring the branding iron and knife,
For what's done now is done for life!...
Come on! Land me!
'Turn the skies back and begin again!'

Voices

Peter Grimes!

Peter

'Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and
You'll know who's gone fishing when
You land the next shoal!'

Voices

Peter Grimes!

Peter

Ellen! Ellen! Give me your hand.
There now – my hope is held by you...
If you leave me alone, if you...
Take away your hand!
The argument's finished,
Friendship lost,
Gossip is shouting,
Everything's said.

Voices

Peter Grimes!

Peter

To hell with all your mercy!
To hell with your revenge,
And God have mercy upon you!

Voices

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

Peter

Do you hear them all shouting my name?
D'you hear them? D'you hear them?
(The voices are now close at hand and very distinct.)
Old Davy Jones shall answer:
Come home! come home!

Voices

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

(Peter roars back at the shouters.)

Peter

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Grimes! Grimes!

(Ellen and Balstrode come in, and stand waiting till Peter has calmed.)

Voices

Grimes!

(Ellen goes up to Peter.)

Ellen

16 Peter,

We've come to take you home.
O come home out of this dreadful night!
See, here's Balstrode. Peter, don't you hear me?

(Peter does not notice her and sings a tone almost like prolonged sobbing. The voices shouting 'Peter Grimes' can still be heard but now very distantly.)

Peter *(sweetly)*

What harbour shelters peace,
Away from tidal waves,
Away from storms!
What harbour can embrace
Terrors and tragedies?
Her breast is harbour too –
Where night is turned to day.

Balstrode *(crosses to lift Peter up, and speaks)*

Come on, I'll help you with the boat.

Ellen
No!

Balstrode
Sail out till you lose sight of land. Then sink the boat.
D'you hear? Sink her! Good-bye, Peter.

(There is a crunch of shingle as Balstrode leads Peter down to his boat, and helps him push it out.

After a short pause, Balstrode returns and waves goodbye. He takes Ellen, who is sobbing quietly, calms her, and leads her carefully down the main street home.

Dawn slowly comes to the Borough by a gentle sequence of sights and sounds.

A candle is lighted and shines through a bare window. A shutter is drawn back.

Hobson and his posse meet severally on the green by the Moot Hall. They gossip together, shake their heads, indicate the hopelessness of the search, extinguish their lanterns, and while some turn home, others go to the boats.

Dr Crabbe comes from a confinement case with his black bag. He yawns and stretches.

The Rector comes to early morning prayer.

Mrs Sedley follows.

Ned Keene draws the shutters of his shop.)

Chorus, led by Soprano

17 To those who pass, the Borough sounds betray
(Nets are brought down from the houses by Fisherwomen. Cleaners open the front door of

the Inn and begin to scrub the steps. Dr Crabbe nods to the cleaners. More and more of the Borough people come casually to their daily jobs.)

*The cold beginning of another day.
(Swallow comes in and speaks to some Fishermen.)*

*And houses sleeping by the waterside
Wake to the measured ripple of the tide;*

Swallow

*There's a boat sinking out at sea,
Coastguard reports.*

Second Fisherman

Within reach?

Swallow

No!

Second Fisherman

Let's have a look through the glasses.

(Fishermen go with Swallow to the beach and look out. One of them has a glass.)

Chorus

*Or measured cadence of the lads who tow
Some entered hoy to fix her in her row,
Or hollow sound that from the passing bell
To some departed spirit bids farewell.*

(Auntie comes out of the door to 'The Boar'.)

Auntie
What is it?

Boles
Nothing I can see.

Auntie
One of those rumours!

*(Nieces emerge and begin to polish the brasses
outside 'The Boar'. The stage is now filled with
people singing at their daily work.)*

Omnes
In ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide.
Flowing it fills the channel broad and wide,
Then back to sea with strong majestic sweep
It rolls in ebb yet terrible and deep.

Slow curtain

End of Opera

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**Bergen Philharmonic
Orchestra, at Grieg's home,
Troidhaugen, in Bergen**



Oddleiv Apneseth



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019



From the dress rehearsal at Grieghallen, Bergen, in November 2019

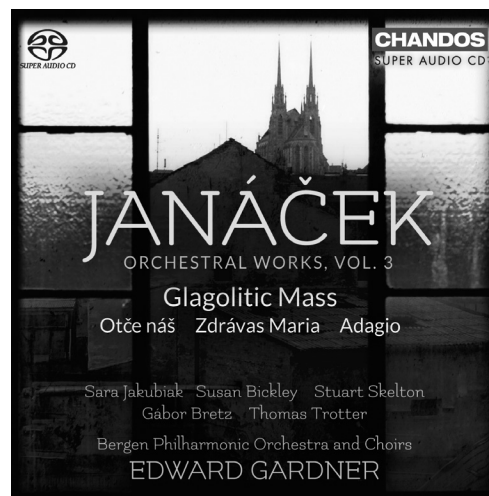


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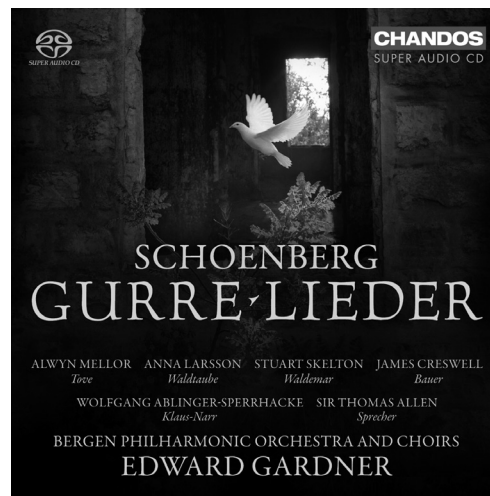
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BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913 – 1976)
 PETER GRIMES, OP. 33 (1944 – 45)

An Opera in a Prologue and Three Acts

Libretto by Montagu Slater (1902 – 1956)
 after the poem of the same title, published in the collection *The Borough* (1810),
 by George Crabbe (1754 – 1832)

Peter Grimes, a fisherman Stuart Skelton *tenor*
 Boy (John), his apprentice Samuel Winter
 Ellen Orford, a widow, schoolmistress of the Borough Erin Wall *soprano*
 Captain Balstrode, retired merchant skipper Roderick Williams *baritone*
 Auntie, landlady of 'The Boar' Susan Bickley *mezzo-soprano*
 Nieces Hanna Husáhr • Vibeke Kristensen *sopranos*
 Bob Boles, fisherman and Methodist Robert Murray *tenor*
 Swallow, a lawyer Neal Davies *bass-baritone*
 Mrs (Nabob) Sedley, a rentier widow of an
 East India Company's factor Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mezzo-soprano*
 Reverend Horace Adams, the Rector James Gilchrist *tenor*
 Ned Keene, apothecary and quack Marcus Farnsworth *baritone*
 Hobson, carrier Barnaby Rea *bass*

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