



# London Philharmonic Orchestra

**BRITTEN**

**SINFONIA DA REQUIEM**

**WINTER WORDS** ORCH. ROBIN HOLLOWAY

**THE PRINCE OF THE PAGODAS** SELECTIONS

**EDWARD GARDNER** conductor

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

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## BENJAMIN BRITTEN

### SINFONIA DA REQUIEM, OP. 20

Benjamin Britten's association with the poet W.H. Auden, with whom he undertook various collaborations, was in part behind the composer's departure with his partner Peter Pears in 1939 for the United States, where opportunities seemed plentiful, away from the petty jealousies and inhibitions of his own country, where musical facility and genius often seemed the objects of suspicion. The outbreak of war brought its own difficulties. Britten and Pears were firmly pacifist in their views, but were equally horrified at the excesses of National Socialism and sufferings that the war brought. Britten's nostalgia for his native country and region led to their return to England in 1942, when they rejected the easy option of nominal military service as musicians in uniform in favour of overt pacifism, but were able to give concerts and recitals, often in difficult circumstances, offering encouragement to those who heard them. The re-opening of Sadler's Wells and the staging of Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* started a new era in English opera. The English Opera Group was founded and a series of chamber operas followed, with larger scale works that established Britten as a composer of the highest stature, a position recognised shortly before his early death by his elevation to the peerage, the first English composer ever to be so honoured.

The *Sinfonia da Requiem* was written in response to a commission in the autumn of 1939 from the Japanese government for a work to mark the 2600th anniversary of the founding of the imperial dynasty. The occasion was to include new compositions by Richard Strauss, Jacques Ibert and Sándor Veress, but Britten's symphony was rejected by the commissioning committee, who took exception to the nature of the work and its apparent Christian content, although it had initially received approval. Britten had, in any case, resolved to write a composition imbued with as much of the spirit of pacifism as was possible. The official concert duly took place in Tokyo, with Britain unrepresented, and Strauss at his most bombastic. In the event, the *Sinfonia da Requiem*, dedicated to the memory of Britten's parents, had its first performance in March 1941 at Carnegie Hall in New York, with the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Barbirolli.

Britten, in his programme notes for the first performance, described the opening movement, *Lacrymosa*, as a slow marching lament with three principal motifs, the first heard from the cellos answered by a solo bassoon, the second based on the interval of a major seventh and the third alternating chords on flute

**BENJAMIN BRITTEN**  
**WINTER WORDS, OP. 52**  
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and trombones. The first section leads to an extended crescendo and a climax based on the first motif. The second movement, *Dies irae*, which follows without a break, he describes as a Dance of Death. It leads directly to the final *Requiem aeternam*, with its principal melody announced by the flutes, finally returning before the sustained clarinet note with which the work ends.

Programme note by Keith Anderson © Naxos 8.557196

Originally composed for tenor and piano, Britten's song-cycle *Winter Words* sets eight poems by Thomas Hardy. The cycle was premiered at the Leeds Festival in October 1953, with Peter Pears singing and Britten at the piano. This newly orchestrated version by Robin Holloway was premiered by tenor Nicky Spence and the LPO under Edward Gardner in July 2021.

Robin Holloway writes: '*Winter Words* has long been my favourite among Britten's song-cycles with piano. He and Thomas Hardy seem made for each other. There is the affinity with nature and the seasons, from the new birds of spring to the trees in autumn and the choirmaster's burial at the dead of winter. They share, too, a deep feeling for humanity – manifest in the little old table, the foundling boy on the train, the vignette with the convict, policeman and boy with the violin, and, of course, the choirmaster again, at the heart of the cycle. Hardy's satire too – in 'Wagtail and baby' – clearly suits Britten. Above all, there is the bruised pessimism of the closing number with its cry for release from the agonies of consciousness, and whose opening words, 'A time there was' gave the title to Britten's deeply touching late work based upon English folksongs.

My instrumentation aims to enhance with fidelity the piano-originals, and to capture some resonance of the composer's incomparable playing. The 'violin' part in the convict cameo is perfectly conceived for the real instrument – imagine it on a clarinet or a cornet! – although here I have discreetly amplified the sound with touches of *tutti* violins and tuned percussion. The marimba is used earlier to depict the wagtail, the xylophone helps evoke the creaking little table, and the marimba returns to add a gentle halo to the voice-line in the last song. Transparency has been my aim throughout, in what must be called an act of ardent homage.

Robin Holloway

## 1 AT DAY-CLOSE IN NOVEMBER

The ten hours' light is abating,  
And a late bird wings across,  
Where the pines, like waltzers waiting,  
Give their black heads a toss.

Beech leaves, that yellow the noontime,  
Float past like specks in the eye;  
I set every tree in my June time,  
And now they obscure the sky.

And the children who ramble through here  
Conceive that there never has been  
A time when no tall trees grew here,  
That none will in time be seen.

## 2 MIDNIGHT ON THE GREAT WESTERN – 'THE JOURNEYING BOY'

In the third-class seat sat  
The journeying boy.  
And the roof-lamp's oily flame  
Played down on his listless form and face,  
Bewrapt past knowing to what he was going,  
Or whence he came.

In the band of his hat the journeying boy  
Had a ticket stuck; and a string  
Around his neck bore the key of his box,  
That twinkled gleams of the  
Lamp's sad beams  
Like a living thing.



What past can be yours, O journeying boy,  
Towards a world unknown,  
Who calmly, as if incurious quite  
On all at stake, can undertake  
This plunge alone?

Knows your soul a sphere, O journeying boy,  
Our rude realms far above,  
Whence with spacious vision  
You mark and mete  
This region of sin that you find you in,  
But are not of?

### 3 WAGTAIL AND BABY – ‘A SATIRE’

A baby watched a ford, whereto  
A wagtail came for drinking;  
A blaring bull went wading through,  
The wagtail showed no shrinking.

A stallion splashed his way across,  
The birdie nearly sinking;  
He gave his plumes a twitch and toss,  
And held his own unblinking.

Next saw the baby round the spot  
A mongrel slowly slinking;  
The wagtail gazed, but faltered not  
In dip and sip and prinking

A perfect gentleman then neared;  
The wagtail, in a winking,  
With terror rose and disappeared;  
The baby fell a-thinking.

### 4 THE LITTLE OLD TABLE

Creak, little wood thing, creak,  
When I touch you with elbow or knee;  
That is the way you speak  
Of the one who gave you to me!

You, little table, she brought—  
brought me with her own hand,  
As she looked at me with a thought:  
That I did not understand.

—Whoever owns it anon,  
And hears it, will never know  
What a history hangs upon  
This creak from long ago.

### 5 THE CHOIRMASTER’S BURIAL – ‘THE TENOR MAN’S STORY’

He often would ask us  
That, when he died,  
After playing so many  
To their last rest,  
If out of us any  
Should here abide,  
And it would not task us,  
We would with our lutes  
Play over him  
By his grave-brim  
The psalm he liked best—  
The one whose sense suits

"Mount Ephraim"  
And perhaps we should seem  
To him, in death's dream,  
Like the seraphim.

As soon as I knew  
That his spirit was gone  
I thought this his due,  
And spoke thereupon.  
"I think" said the vicar,  
"A read service quicker  
That viols out-of-doors  
In these frosts and hoars.  
That old-fashioned was  
Requires a fine day,  
And it seems to me  
It had better not be."  
Hence, that afternoon,  
Though never knew he  
That his wish could not be,  
To get through it faster  
They buried the master  
Without any tune.

But t'was said that, when  
At the dead of next night  
The vicar looked out,  
There struck on his ken  
Thronged roundabout,  
Where the frost was graying  
The headstoned grass,  
A band all in white

Like the saints in church-glass,  
Singing and playing  
The ancient stave  
By the choirmaster's grave.

Such the tenor man told  
When he had grown old.

## 6 PROUD SONGSTERS – 'THRUSHES, FINCHES AND NIGHTINGALES'

The thrushes sing as the sun is going,  
And the finches whistle in ones and pairs,  
And as it gets dark loud nightingales  
In bushes  
Pipe, as they can when April wears,  
As if all Time were theirs.

These are brand-new birds of twelve months' growing,  
Which a year ago, or less than twain,  
No finches were, nor nightingales,  
Nor thrushes,  
But only particles of grain,  
And earth, and air, and rain.

## 7 AT THE RAILWAY STATION, UPWAY – ‘THE CONVICT AND THE BOY WITH THE VIOLIN’

‘There is not much that I can do,  
For I’ve no money that’s quite my own!’  
Spoke up the pitying child—

A little boy with a violin  
At the station before the train came in—  
‘But I can play my fiddle to you,  
And a nice one ‘tis, and good in tone!’

The man in the handcuffs smiled;  
The constable looked, and he smiled, too,  
As the fiddle began to twang;  
And the man in the handcuffs  
Suddenly sang  
With grimful glee:  
‘This life so free  
Is the thing for me!’

And the constable smiled, and said no word,  
As if unconscious of what he heard;  
And so they went on till the train came in—  
The convict, and boy with the violin.

## 8 BEFORE LIFE AND AFTER

A time there was—as one may guess  
And as, indeed, earth’s testimonies tell—  
before the birth of consciousness,  
When all went well.

None suffered sickness, love, or loss,  
None knew regret, starved hope, or heart-burnings;  
None cared whatever crash or cross  
Brought wrack to things.

If something ceased, no tongue bewailed,  
If something winced and waned, no heart was wrung;  
If brightness dimmed, and dark prevailed.  
No sense was stung.

But the disease of feeling germed,  
And primal rightness took the tinct of wrong:  
Ere nescience shall be reaffirmed  
How long, how long?

Thomas Hardy (1840–1928)



## BENJAMIN BRITTEN

### THE PRINCE OF THE PAGODAS, OP. 57

SELECTIONS FROM THE BALLET, ABRIDGED BY EDWARD GARDNER

In 1939, Benjamin Britten met the Canadian composer and ethnomusicologist Colin McPhee (1900–64) when Britten and his partner Peter Pears were then living on Long Island, New York at the home of their friends William and Elizabeth Mayer. McPhee, who was a frequent visitor to the house, had recently returned from a six-year stay in Bali where he had made an exhaustive study of the island's native musical traditions. He transcribed a number of authentic Balinese pieces for two pianos under the title *Balinese Ceremonial Music* which he and Britten performed and recorded in April 1940. McPhee inscribed Britten's copy of the score with the words, 'To Ben – hoping he will find something in this music after all'. It appears that Britten was sceptical that Balinese music had much to interest him, and it was not until he visited Bali for himself some 16 years later that he indeed found something in the music of what he described in an enthusiastic letter to his assistant Imogen Holst as 'a remarkable culture'. At that time Britten was struggling to complete a full-length ballet for the Sadler's Wells company in London, scheduled for performance towards the end of 1955. The composition of the work was causing Britten particular difficulties and when he set off on a world tour with Pears in November 1955, he was only halfway through the second of the ballet's three acts. It was his first-hand

encounter with Balinese gamelan music in January 1956 that gave him the inspiration he needed to complete the score, as well as providing an appropriate aural model for portraying the fantastical and colourful world of 'Pagoda Land'. After several postponements, *The Prince of the Pagodas* was finally premiered on 1 January 1957, with choreography by John Cranko, the principal roles danced by David Blair and Svetlana Beriosova, and the composer conducting. The ballet had only a limited success, however, and was not seen on the British stage again until 1989 when it was successfully revived by the Royal Ballet in a new choreography by Kenneth MacMillan (featuring Darcey Bussell in her first major role).

The original scenario by John Cranko is briefly described as follows: an ageing Emperor must appoint one of his two daughters as his successor. The wicked Belle Epine usurps the throne, but her younger sister Belle Rose is magically swept away by four winged frogs to Pagoda Land where she meets a handsome Prince disguised as a green salamander. The salamander follows Belle Rose back to the Court where Belle Epine has imprisoned the Emperor in a cage. Belle Rose is about to be seized by guards when the Prince, assuming human form, comes to her rescue. The Court disappears in a clap of thunder

and the lights come up on the Pagoda Palace. Happiness prevails and, following a large-scale divertissement, the ballet ends triumphantly.

It was always Britten's hope that he might devise a concert suite from *The Prince of the Pagodas*, but this never materialised. Towards the end of his life, he did authorise publication of the *Prelude and Dances*, a selection compiled by the conductor Norman Del Mar, and a more comprehensive suite was assembled by Britten scholars Donald Mitchell and Mervyn Cooke in 1997. However for this performance, Edward Gardner chose his own sequence of extracts.

The 'Prelude' introduces the trumpet fanfares that will recur at important moments in the ballet, as well as a slow-moving texture of superimposed ostinati depicting the Prince in his guise as the green salamander. As the ballet opens, the Fool is preparing for the arrival of the Court but is constantly thwarted by the evil Dwarf (sliding trombones). A fight ensues which is broken up by the entrance of the Emperor. In 'The Variation of Princess Belle Epine', her proud, haughty manner is characterised by the strings alone in vaunting, neo-Baroque style. On her journey to Pagoda Land, Belle Rose watches the clouds, stars and moon dance a somewhat unsteady waltz. Exhausted from her travels, she is borne in to Pagoda Land by the frogs where the

Pagodas (small porcelain figures with movable heads) revolve gaily to Britten's gamelan-inspired accompaniment (with tuned percussion prominent).

The Pagodas blindfold Belle Rose, and the Prince sheds his salamander skin and appears in human form. He hides, however, when Belle Rose tears off the blindfold. She hunts for the Prince who, re-emerging as the salamander, follows her back to the Court. The final part of this selection consists of the 'Pas de Deux of Belle Rose and the Prince' from the Act 3 divertissement, and the ballet's Finale, an elegant Tchaikovskian waltz culminating in a grand 'Apotheosis' based on the trumpet fanfares from the Prelude. The Fool, though, has the last word, leading the Prince and Princess by the hand to the final curtain.

Programme note © Lloyd Moore

## EDWARD GARDNER CONDUCTOR

© Benjamin Ealovega



Edward Gardner has been Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra since 2021, recently extending his contract until at least 2028. He is also Music Director of the Norwegian Opera & Ballet, and Honorary Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, following his tenure as Chief Conductor from 2015–24.

This is Edward Gardner's sixth release on the LPO Label: previous recordings include Tippett's *The Midsummer Marriage*, captured live at his first concert as Principal Conductor, which won a 2023 Gramophone Award; Berlioz's *The Damnation of Faust*; and works by Dvořák, Schumann and Rachmaninov, as well as a second Tippett disc.

In demand as a guest conductor, Edward has appeared with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Vienna Symphony. He also continues

his longstanding collaborations with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, where he was Principal Guest Conductor from 2010–16, and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Music Director of English National Opera from 2006–15, Edward has an ongoing relationship with New York's Metropolitan Opera, where he has conducted *The Damnation of Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier* and *Werther*. He made his debut at London's Royal Opera House in 2019 in *Káťa Kabanová*, returning for *Werther* the following season and the world premiere of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Festen* in 2025. He has also conducted at the Bavarian State Opera, La Scala, Chicago Lyric Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Opéra National de Paris and Teatro di San Carlo.

Born in Gloucester in 1974, Edward was educated at the University of Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. He went on to become Assistant Conductor of the Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. His many accolades include Royal Philharmonic Society Award Conductor of the Year (2008), an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera (2009) and an OBE for services to music in The Queen's Birthday Honours (2012).

Edward Gardner's position at the LPO is generously supported by Aud Jebsen.

## NICKY SPENCE

### TENOR



© Ki Price

Hailed by *The Daily Telegraph* as 'a voice of real distinction', Nicky Spence's unique skills as a singing actor and the rare honesty of his musicianship have earned him a place at the top of the classical music profession. *BBC Music Magazine* named him 'Personality of the Year' in 2022, he was made an OBE in The King's Birthday Honours List 2023, and in 2024 he was the winner of the RPS Singer Award.

Noted in particular for his interpretations of Janáček's music, Nicky has appeared worldwide in the composer's operas, notably as Laca in *Jenůfa* for the Royal Ballet and Opera, Boris in *Kat'a Kabanova* for the Glyndebourne Festival, Albert Gregor in *The Makropulos Affair* for the Deutsche Staatsoper, and the title role in *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček to the Moon and to the 15th Century* at the Brno Janáček Festival. In 2024, he was awarded the Leoš Janáček Memorial Medal at the Janáček Brno Festival for his contribution to the performance and

promotion of the composer's works on the international opera and concert stages.

Other operatic roles include Siegmund in Wagner's *Die Walküre* for the Hamburg State Opera; Loge in *Das Rheingold* at La Monnaie; Edmundo, Marquès de Nobile in Thomas Adès's *The Exterminating Angel* for the Opéra national de Paris; and the title role in Britten's *Peter Grimes* for Welsh National Opera.

Nicky gives recitals internationally, and has curated a residency at Wigmore Hall. His extensive discography includes Strauss Lieder with Roger Vignoles (Hyperion), Brahms's *Liebeslieder-Walzer* with Joseph Middleton and Dylan Perez (Resonus Classics), the title role in *La clemenza di Tito* (Alpha), Handel's *Brockes-Passion* with the Academy of Ancient Music/Richard Egarr (AAM Records) and works by Britten, Jonathan Dove, Pavel Haas, Alun Hoddinott, Buxton Orr, Robert Schumann, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Wagner, Wolf and Vaughan Williams. In 2020, he won the *BBC Music Magazine* Vocal Award and *Gramophone's* Solo Vocal Award for his critically acclaimed recording of Janáček's *The Diary of One Who Disappeared*.



# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trailblazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In September 2021 Edward Gardner became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, succeeding Vladimir Jurowski, who became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his transformative impact on the Orchestra as Principal Conductor from 2007–21.

The Orchestra is based at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for 60 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including those with LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti, Tennstedt and Masur, to Jurowski and Gardner.

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## BENJAMIN BRITTEN (1913–76)

### 18:05 Sinfonia da Requiem, Op. 20

- 01 07:16 Lacrymosa
- 02 05:08 Dies irae
- 03 05:41 Requiem aeternam

### 20:44 Winter Words, Op. 52 (orch. Robin Holloway)

- 04 01:26 At day-close in November
- 05 04:20 Midnight on the Great Western – ‘The journeying boy’
- 06 02:28 Wagtail and baby – ‘A satire’
- 07 01:13 The little old table
- 08 04:10 The choirmaster’s burial – ‘The tenor man’s story’
- 09 01:06 Proud Songsters – ‘Thrushes, finches and nightingales’
- 10 02:57 At the railway station, Upway – ‘The convict and the boy with the violin’
- 11 03:04 Before life and after

### 26:05 The Prince of the Pagodas, Op. 57 (Selections, abridged Edward Gardner)

- 12 02:09 Prelude
- Act I: The Palace of the Emperor of the Middle Kingdom*
- 13 01:29 The Fool and the Dwarf
- 14 02:32 Variation of Princess Belle Epine
- Act 2, Scene 1: The Strange Journey of Belle Rose to the Pagoda Land*
- 15 01:32 Introduction
- 16 04:48 Waltz: Clouds, Stars and Moon
- 17 01:12 Belle Rose borne in by the Frogs
- Act 2, Scene 2: The arrival of Belle Rose in the Kingdom of the Pagodas*
- 18 02:39 The Pagodas
- 19 02:35 The Hunt
- Act 3: The Palace of the Middle Kingdom*
- 20 02:43 Pas de Deux: Belle Rose and the Prince of the Pagodas
- 21 04:26 Finale and Apotheosis

**Edward Gardner** *conductor*  
**Nicky Spence** *tenor*  
**London Philharmonic Orchestra**  
**Pieter Schoeman** *leader*

*Sinfonia da Requiem* & Selections from *The Prince of the Pagodas* recorded at the Southbank Centre’s Royal Festival Hall on 27 & 30 April 2022 respectively. *Winter Words* recorded at Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden on 17 July 2021.

**Producers:** Nick Parker, Floating Earth (*Sinfonia da Requiem*); Andrew Walton, K&A Productions (*Winter Words* & Selections from *The Prince of the Pagodas*)

**Engineers:** Mike Hatch, Floating Earth (*Sinfonia da Requiem*); Deborah Spanton, K&A Productions (*Winter Words* & Selections from *The Prince of the Pagodas*)

#### **Executive Producers:**

Elena Dubinets, David Burke, Graham Wood

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