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REJOICE IN THE LAMB

SATB SOLOS, SATB CHORUS AND ORGAN

# BENJAMIN BRITTEN

## REJOICE IN THE LAMB



BOOSEY & HAWKES

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BENJAMIN BRITTEN

REJOICE IN THE LAMB (SATB SOLOS, SATB CHORUS AND ORGAN)

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SATB a cappella

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REGIS REGUM RECTISSIMI**  
SATB and Organ

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(from *Peter Grimes*)  
SATB and Piano Reduction

**REJOICE IN THE LAMB**  
SATB with Treble, Alto, Tenor, and  
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(from *Peter Grimes*)  
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(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SATB and Harp or Piano

**THIS LITTLE BABE**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SATB and Harp or Piano

**TIME** (from *Gloriana*)  
SATB a cappella

**TIME AND CONCORD**  
(from *Gloriana*)  
SATB a cappella

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I LOV'D A LASS  
LIFT BOY**  
SATB and Piano

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Soprano, Tenor, and Baritone Solos,  
SATB, Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra,  
Boy's Choir and Organ (vocal score)

**WE ARE THE DARKNESS IN THE  
HEAT OF THE DAY**  
(from *The Heart of the Matter*)  
SMerATB a cappella

**A WEDDING ANTHEM  
(AMO ERGO SUM)**  
Soprano and Tenor Solos, SATB,  
and Organ

**WOLCUM VOLE!**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SATB and Harp or Piano

## 2-4 PART TREBLE

**AS DEW IN APRILLE**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSA and Harp or Piano

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(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSS and Harp or Piano

**A CEREMONY OF CAROLS**  
SSA and Harp or Piano

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SA a cappella

**DEO GRACIAS**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSA and Harp or Piano

**IN FREEZING WINTER NIGHT**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSA and Harp or Piano

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Boy's Voices (SSA) and Organ

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(from *Friday Afternoons*)  
SSA and Piano

**O CAN YE SEW CUSHIONS?**  
SSA and Piano

**OLD ABRAM BROWN**  
(from *Friday Afternoons*)  
SSAA and Piano

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Instruments (vocal score)

**REJOICE IN THE LAMB**  
SSAA with Solos, and Organ

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(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SS and Harp or Piano

**THERE IS NO ROSE**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSA and Harp or Piano

**THIS LITTLE BABE**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSA and Harp or Piano

**WOLCUM VOLE!**  
(from *A Ceremony of Carols*)  
SSA and Harp or Piano

## TBB/TBB

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MUSGRAVE AND LADY BARNARD**  
TBB and Piano

**RUSTICS AND FISHERMEN**  
(from *Gloriana*)  
TBB a cappella

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TBB and Piano

## UNISON

Unison Voices and Piano unless  
otherwise stated.

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(from *The Little Sweep*)  
Unison Voices and Piano Reduction

**CUCKOO!** (from *Friday Afternoons*)

**FANCIE**

**FRIDAY AFTERNOONS**

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**A NEW YEAR CAROL**  
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(from *The Little Sweep*)  
Unison Voices and Piano Reduction

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(from *Friday Afternoons*)

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## REJOICE IN THE LAMB OP. 30

Festival Cantata for Chorus (SATB) with Treble, Alto, Tenor and Bass solos, and Organ.  
Composed May–17 July 1943. Text by Christopher Smart. First published by Boosey & Hawkes in 1943.

**Dedication:** "For the Rev. Walter Hussey and the choir of St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the consecration of their church, September 21st 1943."

**First performance:** 21 September 1943, St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, England. Choir of St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, Charles Barker (organ), Benjamin Britten (conductor).

**First broadcast:** 31 October 1943, BBC Home Service. Choir of St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, Benjamin Britten (conductor).

**Duration:** 16 minutes

**Available orchestration:** Imogen Holst's orchestration, written at the request of Benjamin Britten for a concert given at the 1952 Aldeburgh Festival. Scored for small orchestra, it realizes the orchestral colors latent in the more familiar organ version with great skill and imagination.

Available on rental from Boosey & Hawkes.

**Other Britten compositions from this period:** *Now sleeps the crimson petal* (Tenor, Horn and Strings, completed 22 March 1943); *Serenade*, Op. 31 (Tenor, Horn and Strings, March–April 1943); *Prelude and Fugue*, Op. 29 (18-part String Orchestra, May 1943); *The Rescue* (incidental music to the radio drama, September–November 1943); *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard* (Male Voices and Piano, completed 13 December 1943).<sup>1</sup>



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It was in 1937 that Rev. Walter Hussey, then Vicar of St. Matthew's Church, Northampton, and later Dean of Chichester Cathedral had the idea of bringing artists and the Church back together — something extraordinary in England at that time. "How sad it was," he said, "that the arts had become largely divorced from the Church; Sad, because artists think and meditate a lot and are in the broadest sense of the word 'religious'. They create fine expressions of the human spirit which can symbolize and express worship, as well as conveying the truth of God to mankind in a vivid and memorable way."

Hussey began to think about the 50th anniversary of the consecration of St. Matthew's Church and his desire to "get a piece of music written for the occasion." He wrote to Benjamin Britten in March, 1943: "I have been wondering whether you would consider the possibility of a commission to write some music for our Jubilee celebrations next September — perhaps a four-part anthem for our voluntary choir of men's and boys' voices. I have had a great 'bee' about a closer connection between the Church and the arts." Britten responded that he "also had a 'bee' about a closer connection between the arts and the Church and am thinking about something lively for such an occasion."<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, the piece was begun shortly thereafter (in May) and completed in July, 1943. The poem which Britten chose, "Rejoice in the Lamb" by Christopher Smart is a long poem from which Britten selected certain parts totaling 10 sections. Smart, an 18th-century poet in whom genius and madness were nearly together, was practically unknown at that time. The theme is 'Benedicite Omnia opera' with some of God's humblest creations being called upon to testify to the glory of God. When Hussey expressed reservations about the 'cat' section, Britten replied: "I've used a bit about the cat Jeffrey, but don't see how it could hurt anyone — he is such a nice cat." *The Times* of London reviewed the concert and felt that 'the spirit of the curious, vivid poem has been caught and the outcome of a commission by the Church for a modern work of religious art' is beautiful.

The title, "Rejoice in the Lamb" is the same that Smart used, only his was in Latin — "Jubilate Agno." The title comes from a passage in the book of Revelation: "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." Smart wanted "Jubilate Agno" to be closely parallel to portions of the Order for Morning Prayer and the Psalter and was intended as a responsive reading, which is why the Let and For sections are physically distinct while corresponding verse for verse. He was admitted to St. Luke's Hospital for the insane in 1757 and "Jubilate Agno" was begun after this time and took four years to complete, the last line being written on 30 January 1763 very near the date of Smart's release from a second asylum.

Britten came to St. Matthew's and conducted final rehearsals and the premiere. He later wrote to Rev. Hussey: "I do hope that I have given you something which will be of more lasting value than just for this particular occasion." And, indeed, he had!

— Philip Brunelle

<sup>1</sup> *Benjamin Britten: Britten: A Catalogue of the Published Works*, compiled and edited by Paul Banks (Aldeburgh: published by The Britten-Pears Library for the Britten Estate Limited, 1999), 65 – 69

<sup>2</sup> *Letters from a Life: Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten Volume Two 1939 – 45* edited by Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1991), 1139, 1142, 1143, 1157, 1161, 1162



## NOTE FROM THE ORIGINAL PUBLICATION

The words of the Cantata – “Rejoice in the Lamb” – are taken from a long poem of the same name. The writer was Christopher Smart, an eighteenth century poet, deeply religious, but of a strange and unbalanced mind.

“Rejoice in the Lamb” was written while Smart was in an asylum, and is chaotic in form but contains many flashes of genius.

It is a few of the finest passages that Benjamin Britten has chosen to set to music. The main theme of the poem, and that of the Cantata, is the worship of God, by all created beings and things, each in its own way.

The Cantata is made up of ten short sections. The first sets the theme. The second gives a few examples of one person after another being summoned from the pages of the Old Testament to join with some creature in praising and rejoicing in God. The third is a quiet and ecstatic Hallelujah. In the fourth section Smart takes his beloved cat as an example of nature praising God by being simply what the Creator intended it to be. The same thought is carried on in the fifth section with the illustration of the mouse. The sixth section speaks of the flowers – “the poetry of Christ.” In the seventh section Smart refers to his troubles and suffering, but even these are an occasion for praising God, for it is through Christ that he will find his deliverance. The eighth section gives four letters from an alphabet, leading to a full chorus in section nine which speaks of musical instruments and music’s praise of God. The final section repeats the Hallelujah.

— Walter Hussey



### Text from *Jubilate Agno* by Christopher Smart

#### CHORUS

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.

Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.

Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.

Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter, bind a Leopard to the altar, and consecrate his spear to the Lord.

Let Ishmael dedicate a Tyger, and give praise for the liberty in which the Lord has let him at large.

Let Balaam appear with an Ass, and bless the Lord his people and his creatures for a reward eternal.

Let Daniel come forth with a Lion, and praise God with all his might through faith in Christ Jesus.

Let Ithamar minister with a Chamois, and bless the name of Him, that cloatheth the naked.

Let Jakim with the Satyr bless God in the dance.

Let David bless with the Bear – The beginning of victory to the Lord – to the Lord the perfection of excellence – Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty.

BENJAMIN BRITTEN was born in Lowestoft, Suffolk, on the east coast of England, on 22 November 1913. Although he was already composing vigorously as a child, he nonetheless felt the importance of some solid guidance and in 1928 turned to the composer Frank Bridge; two years later he went to the Royal College of Music in London, studying with Arthur Benjamin, Harold Samuel and John Ireland. While still a student, he wrote his 'official' Op. 1, the *Sinfonietta* for chamber ensemble, and the *Phantasy Quartet* for oboe and string trio, and in 1936 he composed *Our Hunting Fathers*, an ambitious song-cycle for soprano and orchestra, which confirmed Britten's virtuosic vocal and instrumental technique. He was already earning his living as a composer, having joined the GPO (Post Office) Film Unit the previous year; the collaboration he began there with the poet W. H. Auden was to prove an important one throughout his career.

Britten found himself in the United States at the outset of World War II and stayed there for three more years, returning to Britain in 1942. In America he produced a number of important works, among them the orchestral *Sinfonia da Requiem*, the song-cycle *Les Illuminations* for high voice and strings, and his *Violin Concerto*. With the opera *Paul Bunyan* he also made his first essay in a genre that would be particularly important to him.

Back in Britain, where as a conscientious objector he was excused military service, he began work on the piece that would establish him beyond question as the pre-eminent British composer of his generation – the opera *Peter Grimes*, premiered to an ecstatic reaction on 7 June 1945. The *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra: Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell* – a cornerstone of the orchestral repertoire – was first performed in the following year. Indeed, Britten now composed one major work after another, among them the operas *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), *Albert Herring* (1947), *Billy Budd* (1951), *Gloriana* (1953), *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), *Noye's Fludde* (1957), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960), *Owen Wingrave* (1970–71) and *Death in Venice* (1971–73); the *Nocturne* for tenor and orchestra (1958), the *War Requiem* (1961–62), a *Cello Symphony* (1963) for Rostropovich and his *orchestral Suite on English Folk Tunes* (1974).

Britten's importance in post-War British cultural life was enhanced by his founding of the English Opera Group in 1946 and the Aldeburgh Festival two years later. His career as a composer was matched by his outstanding ability as a performer: he was both a refined pianist and a spontaneous and fluent conductor – his Mozart was particularly highly esteemed. Britten's later career was clouded by bouts of ill-health, culminating in heart disease. He never fully recovered from open-heart surgery in 1973, and died on 4 December 1976, at the age of 63, a few months after being appointed a Life Peer, 'Baron Britten of Aldeburgh in the County of Suffolk' – the first composer ever to know that honor.

**On the Recording:**

Andrew Lumsden/  
The Finzi Singers/  
Paul Spicer

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