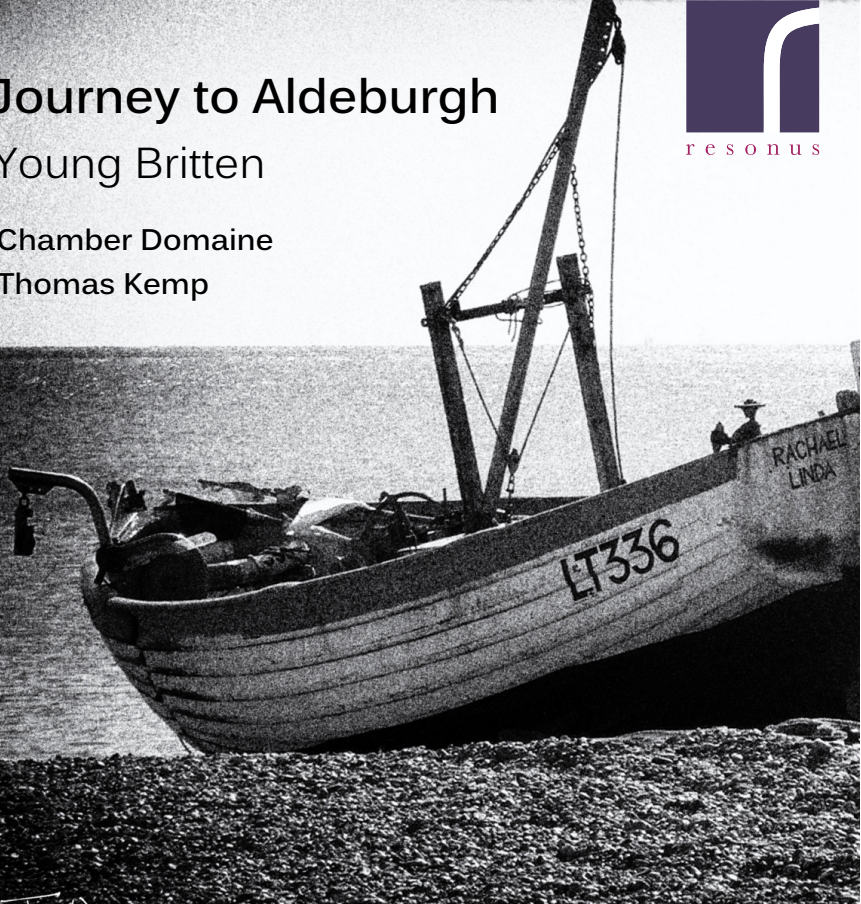


Journey to Aldeburgh

Young Britten

Chamber Domaine

Thomas Kemp



Journey to Aldeburgh: Young Britten

Chamber works composed and arranged by
Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Chamber Domaine

Thomas Kemp *conductor*^{1, 10-11} & *violin*^{2, 4-9}

Jon Mills *violin 1*^{1, 10-11}

Matt Ward *violin 2*^{1, 10-11}

Carmen Flores *viola*^{1, 10-11}

Matthew Sharp *cello*^{1, 10-11}

Ben Russell *double bass*^{1, 10-11}

Rowland Sutherland *flute*^{1, 10-11}

Ruth Bolister *oboe*^{1, 10-11}

Nicholas Cox *clarinet*^{1, 10-11}

Adam McKenzie *bassoon*^{1, 10-11}

Steve Stirling *horn*^{1, 10-11}

Laure Genthialon *harp*¹

Matthew West *percussion*¹

Adrian Bradbury *cello*²

Sophia Rahman *piano*²⁻⁹

About Chamber Domaine & Thomas Kemp:
*'Committed performances from Chamber Domaine,
definitely an ensemble from whom much can be expected,
under the incisive leadership of Thomas Kemp'*
Gramophone

'[...] superb artistry too, with pungent playing from Chamber Domaine'
The Times

Frank Bridge (1879-1941)

arr. for 12 instruments by Benjamin Britten

1. **There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook** * [10:31]

Benjamin Britten

2. **Introduction and Allegro** * [14:14]
for piano trio

3. **The Moon** * [2:59]
for violin and piano

4. **Allegro** * [1:10]
for piano

Suite for Violin and Pianoforte, Op. 6

5. Introduction [0:35]

6. March [2:35]

7. Moto perpetuo [3:39]

8. Lullaby [4:27]

9. Waltz [5:23]

Sinfonietta, Op. 1

10. Poco presto ed agitato [5:27]

11. Variations & Tarantella [11:34]

Total playing time [62:42]

* *world premiere recording*



Chamber Domaine record in St Augustine's Church, Kilburn, London

Journey to Aldeburgh: Young Britten

Britten by all accounts was a complex and contradictory personality. Paul Kildea in his book, *Benjamin Britten – A Life in the Twentieth Century*, neatly summarises the opinions of Britten's contemporaries: 'Loving, spontaneous, loyal, corrupt, humorous, humourless, soulless, courageous, weak, abnormal, flawed, beautiful, ugly, petulant, secretive, wonderful, crippled, sadistic, charming, great, hateful. To those who knew him, and knew him well, Benjamin Britten displayed all these characteristics, and more besides.'

This summary chimes with Britten at the pinnacle of his career. Darling of the British establishment, yet an outsider. A public figure. An intensely private man. A ruthless operator. A profoundly creative artist. Urbane yet parochial. A contradiction. Performer – composer – entrepreneur. Someone that is not easy to pigeon hole.

Early on, Britten had one eye on posterity. His mother Edith wanted him to be the Fourth B – after Bach, Beethoven and Brahms – recognising Benjamin's prodigious talents as a performer and composer. Perhaps with such a sense of destiny, he kept a diary between September 20th,

1928, when he began his studies at Gresham School, Holt, and June 16th, 1938 when he was blazing a trail as a composer. All of his compositions – numbering over 600 before he finished his studies in 1933 at the Royal College of Music, London (RCM) – were kept and carefully stored by the composer. Later, they were to form part of the collection of his life and works – an exhaustive collection brilliantly promoted and preserved by the Britten-Pears Foundation. Another legacy is Britten's Aldeburgh Festival, an English Bayreuth. Britten allowed his life and work to be fastidiously documented. He wanted a lasting monument to his achievements – even in his lifetime there was an entire industry built around him which continued after his death in 1976. Witness the extraordinary Britten 100 celebrations which took place in 2013 across the world.

Robert Tear – the great British Tenor who worked with the composer – described Aldeburgh when Britten was at the helm: 'Pope, King, a couple of sycophantic academics and perhaps a handmaiden or two strewing palms [...] an atmosphere laden with waspishness, bitterness, cold, hard eyes, with cabalistic meetings under the Cherry Tree with Pimms, with the inscrutability of the elite. It was an atmosphere of secrecy.' Britten as Pope,

Peter Pears as the King, a cabal of assorted courtiers and plotters – it is the stuff of opera!

What is obscured with such anecdotal evidence is that the music and some of the music that Britten wrote as a youngster is remarkable: fresh, varied, eclectic and idiomatic.

Perhaps the single biggest game changer for the precocious Britten was his meeting with Frank Bridge. Britten's viola teacher, Audrey Alston – a college friend of Frank Bridge – took Britten to hear *The Sea* at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival in 1924. It was an event which, according to Britten, knocked him sideways. By 1927, he was studying with Bridge and this was to have a profound influence on his development as a person, performer, composer and even thinker.

Frank Bridge came from a different background and era. Born in 1879 in Brighton, Bridge was from a working class background and had to earn his living – performing as a violist and conductor and composing. His strong work ethic and total immersion in music was something that rubbed off on Britten, who performed internationally as a pianist and conducted in tandem with his composing activities. Bridge

was a pacifist and this deeply influenced Britten – who was to later write the *War Requiem* (1961) and *Owen Wingrave* (1970) – works which expose the horror and futility of war. Bridge was also strongly influenced by composers such as Alban Berg and Maurice Ravel and this too left a deep mark on Britten's artistic outlook. Indeed, Britten nearly studied with Alban Berg at Bridge's suggestion but in the event this did not happen.

Bridge successfully combined the harmonic and textural elements of Berg and Ravel with an English lyricism rooted in late romanticism. This can clearly be heard in **There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook** – a work Bridge composed for chamber orchestra in 1926. Britten first heard this piece and *Enter Spring* at a BBC Symphony concert of contemporary music in March 1931, commenting in his diary that the music was 'rather badly played, but magnificent, inspired works.'

There is a Willow grows aslant a Brook is based on Queen Gertrude's monologue in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reporting that Ophelia has died. The music is based on the following lines and brilliantly captures the sombre and mysterious atmosphere of the text:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook,
That shows his hoar leaves in the
glassy stream;
Therewith fantastic garlands did she make
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long
purples
That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers
call them:
There, on the pendent boughs her coronet
weeds
Clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke;
When down her weedy trophies and herself
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes
spread wide;
And, mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up:
Which time she chanted snatches of old
lauds;
As one incapable of her own distress,
Or like a creature native and indued
Unto that element: but long it could not be
Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,
Pull'd the poor wretch from her
melodious lay
To muddy death.

The chamber version of *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook*, arranged by Britten, was premiered at the inaugural Aldeburgh Festival in 1948. Britten annotated a score, removing some of the wind instruments and adding percussion to fill out the more dramatic sections of the work. He also redistributes some of the solo lines to fit the ensemble of twelve musicians.

Frank Bridge died in 1941, whilst Britten was in New York. A period when the rather prim and proper Britten and Pears lived in a colourful, bohemian household at 7 Middaugh Street, Brooklyn, with W.H. Auden, Gypsy Rose Lee, Christopher Isherwood and many others. Britten was to champion Bridge's music, which was almost completely shunned at the time, writing the Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op.10 in 1937 and performing several of his works despite him being so unfashionable.

Something of the mysterious opening of *There is a Willow Grows Aslant a Brook* seems to have influenced the opening bars of the piano trio – **Introduction and Allegro**, which was written in the autumn of 1932, whilst he was a student at the Royal College of Music. It was a period when rehearsals for his *Sinfonietta* Op.1 were going particularly badly.

Britten's Introduction and Allegro shows the influence of Ravel, particularly his Piano Trio in A (1914) and the Introduction and Allegro for Harp, Clarinet, Flute and String Quartet (1905), which Britten first heard as a teenager. The jaunty sections of the work echo the lyrical pastoralism of Frank Bridge's Phantasy Piano Quartet and interestingly Britten was writing his own Phantasy Oboe Quartet, Op. 2

concurrently with the Introduction and Allegro – an entry for the Cobbett Prize for chamber music at the Royal College of Music – an award which Bridge himself had previously won with the Phantasy Quartet.

Britten studied with John Ireland at the RCM but it was still from Frank Bridge that he regularly sought advice – almost on a weekly basis. Britten’s music was modern. When he won a scholarship to the RCM at the age of sixteen, one of the professors asked him why a public school boy was writing that kind of music. The institution in the 1930s was starchy, conservative and traditional, and Britten did not particularly enjoy his lessons at the RCM. There were very few performances of his music at the college. But he had the wit to generate professional performances and develop the contacts to perform elsewhere, a fact which Britten recognised stating: ‘My musical education was more outside the college than in it.’

He did make several friends including the violinist Remo Lauricella, who performed the Introduction and Allegro as well as **The Moon**, a short, exquisite miniature written in June 1931.

The short piano **Allegro** is also full of

youthful optimism but has some of the asymmetry and crystalline qualities of Stravinsky, another influence. This particular influence is most heard in the **Suite for Violin and Piano** Op. 6, which was composed between 1934 and 1935 and which received its premiere in March 1936 as part of a BBC broadcast, during a period when Britten was collaborating with W.H. Auden at the GPO Film Unit in Blackheath, making groundbreaking films such as *Night Mail*. The death of his father in 1934 profoundly affected Britten, and something of this can be heard in the ‘Elegy’ of the Suite. Stravinsky’s Duo Concertant of 1932 seems to be a model; one of the most lyrical works that Stravinsky wrote, and one that Britten had performed in 1936. His great admiration for Stravinsky shows in much of his music and some of the procedures he uses – particularly pastiching the music of others, for example the brilliant Rossini pastiche in *Soirees Musicales* Op. 9. Composed for the violinist Antonio Brosa, the violin Suite is a brilliant show case – in particular the ‘Moto perpetuo’ and the ‘Finale’, a rollicking waltz.

The period after the RCM was one of leaps and strides, yet his **Sinfonietta** was written whilst still a student at college; a great work and one that Britten felt confident to call his Op.1. Aged just 19, he penned this assured

and taught work in just three weeks. Again, contemporary music from the continent is an influence, notably the Schoenberg Chamber Symphony, which Britten knew. The horn solo heard at the opening of the first movement echoes that in the Schoenberg. The Sinfonietta is dedicated to Frank Bridge and the Variations again hark back to the pastoral lyricism of early Bridge and even Vaughan Williams, the latter a composer Britten later detested.

The Tarantella that ends the work is a riot – all the musical material comes from the opening of the first movement and this gives the work a compact construction, coherence and unity. It is very assured and an early masterpiece.

What strikes the listener of these early works is the freshness of ideas, the embrace of the new music by Stravinsky and the Second Viennese School, yet with a sense of lyricism and even pastoralism, something that we would not associate with Britten, but certainly something that is there and is very touching in its employment. Something that seems to be lacking in much of his later music. Written within a few short years of each other each of the early works in this programme demonstrate a composer with

a real voice, imagination and flair. Music that brims with passion and energy but that can equally be moving and profound.

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Chamber Domaine

Under its artistic director, Thomas Kemp, Chamber Domaine has become renowned for its virtuosity and its ambitious and distinctive programming that range from the Baroque through to the Contemporary. Chamber Domaine bring passion and commitment to a diverse repertoire that makes music come alive whilst placing it into its cultural context.

Gramophone magazine recently commented on the group: '[...] a wealth of timbral subtlety [...] utterly magical [...] a tremendous sense of vitality and commitment.' *The Guardian* described a recent concert as '[...] an extraordinary performance [...] with a fluency that came over brilliantly under the baton of Thomas Kemp, while *The New York Times* praised the ensemble for its '[...] intriguing programming and unabashed lushness.'

The ensemble gave its highly praised South Bank and Wigmore Hall debuts in 1999 and has since performed at leading festivals and concert series in the United Kingdom, Europe and North America.

Chamber Domaine have a distinguished and highly acclaimed discography. Their recordings regularly receive five star

reviews and have been picked as 'Editors Choice' in *Gramophone*. The ensemble has regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3, ORF, Austria; SR, Sweden; WNYC, New York.

Chamber Domaine are resident at Music@Malling – an international festival of music in West Malling, Kent and have received much acclaim for their work with many of the world's leading composers.

Chamber Domaine are recording artists with Resonus Classics.

www.chamberdomaine.com



Thomas Kemp *conductor & solo violin*
(Photographer: Anders Nyman)

'[...] utterly magical [...] a tremendous sense of vitality and commitment'
Gramophone

www.thomaskemp.eu

Thomas Kemp

Thomas Kemp is a highly acclaimed musician and one of the most versatile and eclectic conductors of his generation acclaimed for his innovative programming and passionate advocacy in concerts and opera.

Thomas is the Music Director of the internationally acclaimed ensemble Chamber Domaine, which is at the forefront of ensembles focussing on 20th and 21st century music. He made his conducting debut in a series of concerts celebrating Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. He has directed Chamber Domaine in festivals and concert series in the UK, Europe and North America and has an acclaimed discography with the ensemble.

He is also Artistic Director of Music@Malling – an international festival that promotes the works of contemporary composers alongside masterworks from the classical and romantic periods.

In 2012, he made his operatic debut in a new production of *Così fan tutte* for Opera Holland Park with the City of London Sinfonia to widespread praise.

Thomas is a recording artist for Resonus Classics. His recordings of Judith Bingham

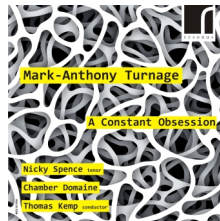
and Mark-Anthony Turnage have received much acclaim. Thomas made his recording debut as a conductor in 2009 with world premiere recordings of Henryk Górecki, which received universal five star reviews. Thomas has also recorded for ASV, Blackbox and Sony Classics and has frequently been Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*.

Thomas has conducted and performed at many leading festivals in the UK and overseas. He has broadcast regularly on BBC Radio 3, Classic FM, ORF (Austria), ABC (Australia), WNYC (USA), RNZ (New Zealand) and SR (Sweden). He is a guest artist at Bargemusic, New York and since his debut in 2000, Thomas has been a regular performer at Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre and Carnegie Hall, New York.

Thomas has given many world premieres and has worked closely with composers such as Arvo Part, Thomas Ades, Julian Anderson, Mathew Hindson, Brian Ferneyhough, Judith Bingham, Judith Weir, Najjii Hakim, Piers Hellawell, Mark-Anthony Turnage, Brian Elias, Ned Rorem, Ulijas Pulkis. He has conducted and collaborated with leading singers such as Elizabeth Llewellyn, Nicky Spence, Andrew Staples, Anna Grevelius, Yeree Suh, Stephen Wallace, Wendy Dawn Thompson, Jonathan McGovern, Marcus Farnsworth and Sara Fulgoni.



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