



Benjamin Britten

# BRITTEN

## SPRING SYMPHONY

---

JENNIFER VYVYAN  
NORMA PROCTER  
PETER PEARS

Emanuel School Boys' Chorus  
Chorus and Orchestra of  
the Royal Opera House,  
Covent Garden

BENJAMIN BRITTEN



Britten's Opus 44 is a symphony only in the broadest understanding of that term; it's really a song cycle for three soloists, chorus, and orchestra on texts concerning the departure of winter and the renewal and rebirth brought by spring. The Koussevitzky Music Foundation commissioned it, but Sergey Koussevitzky and the Boston Symphony Orchestra -- the work's dedicatees -- gave the second performance; the premiere was conducted by Eduard van Beinum at the 1949 Holland Festival.

Britten had initially considered using Medieval Latin texts, but ultimately settled on English lyric verse mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He said that he found inspiration in "a particularly lovely spring day in East Suffolk"; no doubt he also found inspiration, or at least precedent, for the form of his work in Gustav Holst's Choral Symphony.

The first of the four movements begins deep in winter, a slow introduction featuring the icy tones of the vibraphone. It sets "Shine Out, Fair Sun," a prayer in winter for the coming of spring, which may be by George Chapman (Britten's attribution is the safe "Anon."). The orchestra alternates with unaccompanied chorus here, but the forces come together for three concise, quick treatments of lighthearted poems by Edmund Spenser ("The Merry Cuckoo"), Thomas Nashe ("Spring, the

Sweet Spring," with soloists imitating birdcalls), and John Clare ("The Driving Boy"). Part 1 broadens out, but loses none of its humor (*Molto moderato ma giocoso*) in its concluding section, John Milton's "The Morning Star." The second song is for tenor; the fourth features a boys' choir and the soprano singing over choral whistling.

In the composer's words, Part 2, the symphony's slow movement, considers "the darker side of spring -- the fading violets, rain and night." An alto is featured in Robert Herrick's "To Violets" (here renamed "Welcome Maids of Honour"). Next comes a more tranquil treatment for tenor of Henry Vaughan's "The Shower" (retitled "Waters Above"), and finally a setting for alto of portions of "Summer Night" by Britten's contemporary W.H. Auden.

The third movement, the scherzo, is a suite of dance-songs: Richard Barnefield's "When Will My May Come" (with tenor), George Peele's "Fair and Fair" (with tenor and soprano), and William Blake's "Sound the Flute." Part 4 is a Mayday festival, based mostly on a sung version of a joyous speech from Beaumont and Fletcher's comic play *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, raucously set. This provides waltzing counterpoint at the end with an almost shouted version of the anonymous thirteenth century round *Sumer Is Icumen In*, ending the cycle from winter to summer.

# BRITTEN

## SPRING SYMPHONY

JENNIFER VYVYAN  
NORMA PROCTER

PETER PEARS

Emanuel School Boys' Chorus  
Chorus and Orchestra of  
the Royal Opera House,  
Covent Garden

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

**Spring Symphony, Op.44 42:46**

**Part I**

- 1 Introduction: 'Shine Out' 8:53
- 2 The Merry Cuckoo 1:57
- 3 Spring, The Sweet Spring 1:50
- 4 When As The Rye 2:04
- 5 Now The Bright Morning Star 3:09

**Part II**

- 6 Welcome Maids Of Honour 2:40
- 7 Waters Above 2:34
- 8 Out On The Lawn I Lie In Bed 6:08

**Part III**

- 9 When Will My May Come 2:28
- 10 Fair And Fair 2:12
- 11 Sound The Flute 1:18

**Part IV**

- 12 Finale - London, To Thee I Do Present 7:29

Producer: Erik Smith    Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

Recorded by Decca 22,23&26 Nov 1960 at Kingsway Hall



For more info e-mail us:  
[admin@highdeftapetransfers.com](mailto:admin@highdeftapetransfers.com)  
or visit our website:  
[www.highdeftapetransfers.com](http://www.highdeftapetransfers.com)