

Ellen Orford, the schoolteacher he hopes to marry) and the early morning of Act I. Britten divides his orchestra into three choirs: flutes and violins play a high, largely static melody, against which the harp, violas, and clarinets interject shimmering arpeggios. The rest of the orchestra interrupts periodically with ominously surging chords.

In “Sunday Morning,” which begins Act II, large church bells are suggested by clanging thirds from opposing pairs of horns, and later by actual bells. Woodwinds, strings, and trumpets represent smaller bells, while a flute evokes waking birds. A sweeping violin melody at the end is, in the opera, Ellen’s song greeting the morning.

“Moonlight,” which again bridges night and the following day, is the prologue to Act III, after the death of Grimes’ second apprentice. It is an unsettling blend of motion and stasis, built around the “second inversion” chord (a major chord with the fifth at the bottom), which in traditional harmony is a consonance that functions like a dissonance because it doesn’t feel at rest. In classical concertos, it’s the chord on which everything pauses for the cadenza before the end, and it retains a feeling of penultimate-ness. Stringing many such chords together creates a feeling of instability.

“Storm,” from Act I, begins with Grimes outdoors as a storm approaches and ends in a pub where townspeople wait out the same storm. The consoling theme heard when the storm music subsides is the melody to which Grimes has just sung “What harbor shelters peace, away from tidal waves, away from storms?” It will be also the last thing Peter sings before he goes down with his sinking boat.

# BRITTEN NOCTURNE

Peter Pears

London Symphony Orchestra

Benjamin Britten

Four Sea Interludes • Passacaglia (Peter Grimes)

Nocturne was the first piece Britten completed in its entirety at his and Pears' new home of the Red House. It continues a trend for night-themed works in Britten's output around this time.

As with the Serenade for tenor, horn and strings, Britten chose an anthology of poetry with night as its central theme. Paul Kildea identifies the sources as Carol Stewart's Poems of Sleep and Dream, and Cecil Day Lewis's edition of Palgrave's Golden Treasury., noting also how they were 'the compilation of a real poetry lover, someone who had read anthologies since boyhood.'

Once again Pears was the vehicle for Britten's thinking as a vocalist, but rather than use a horn in tandem with the tenor voice as before, the composer chose six obligato soloists – bassoon, harp, horn, timpani, cor anglais, and flute and clarinet together. With the strings alone in the first setting, the instruments then unite with them for the seventh and final poem, Shakespeare's Sonnet 43, which Kildea describes as one of Britten's 'slow reveals', like the Sonnet at the end of the Serenade, or Before Life and After at the close of Winter Words.

The cor anglais is used in the setting of Wilfred Owen's The kind ghosts, and draws parallel with Mahler's use of the instrument in Das Lied von der Erde. Mahler is linked to the work far more definitively, however, through its dedication to his surviving wife

Alma. Britten had met her while in New York – she attended the first performance of the Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo – and the two remained in correspondence. She was deeply honoured by the dedication.

Interestingly the Serenade began with a working title of Nocturnes, and the proportions and construction of each work ensures they are closely linked. Kildea, however, identifies the later work as 'subtler and more integrated...and far more ambitious.' He sees it as 'a stunning dress rehearsal for A Midsummer Night's Dream.' In its exploration of the power and possibility of night, and the compelling marriage between danger and beauty, it prefigures not just that opera but a host of 'night works' in the early 1960s.

These orchestral pieces from Benjamin Britten's first successful opera, Peter Grimes, are scene changes by a master of the scene change. They not only take the listener from one physical location to another (at times seeming to go out to sea and back), but also explore the turmoil in the characters' minds as coastal villagers hound the misanthropic loner fisherman Grimes to self-destruction after the mysterious, but accidental, deaths of two of his apprentices. Because each Interlude in the opera leads into the following scene without pause, Britten rewrote their endings to make them self-contained concert pieces.

"Dawn" bridges the Prologue (following a duet between Peter and

# BRITTEN NOCTURNE

Peter Pears      London Symphony Orchestra      Benjamin Britten  
Four Sea Interludes • Passacaglia (Peter Grimes)

Nocturne for tenor, 7 obligato instruments & strings, Op. 60

1 "On A Poet's Lips I Slept" 3:26

2 "Below The Thunders Of The Upper Deep" 3:18

3 "Encintured With A Twine Of Leaves" 2:12

4 "Midnight's Bell Goes Ting, Ting, Ting" 2:30

5 "But That Night When On My Bed I Lay" 3:02

6 "She Sleeps On Soft, Last Breaths" 4:30

7 "What Is More Gentle Than A Wind In Summer?" 3:27

8 "When Most I Wink, Then Do Mine Eyes Best See" 4:01

Four Sea Interludes And Passacaglia From Peter Grimes, Op. 33

9 Dawn (Act I) 3:39

10 Sunday Morning (Act II) 3:55

11 Moonlight (Act III) 4:27

12 Storm (Act I) 4:20

13 Passacaglia (Act III) 7:14

Producer: James Walker

Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

Recorded by Decca 21-22 Sep 1959 Walthamstow Assembly Hall, London



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