

Britten in the mid-1960s, by Hans Wild

Edward Benjamin Britten, Baron Britten of Aldeburgh OM CH (22 November 1913 – 4 December 1976) was an English composer, conductor and pianist. He was a central figure of 20th-century British classical music, with a range of works including opera, other vocal music, orchestral and chamber pieces. His best-known works include the opera Peter Grimes (1945), the War Requiem (1962) and the orchestral showpiece The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra (1945).

Born in Suffolk, the son of a dentist, Britten showed talent from an early age. He studied at the Royal College of Music in London and privately with the composer Frank Bridge. Britten first came to public attention with the a cappella choral work A Boy was Born in 1934. With the premiere of Peter Grimes in 1945, he leapt to international fame. Over the next 28 years, he wrote 14 more operas, establishing himself as one of the leading 20th-century composers in the genre. In addition to large-scale operas for Sadler's Wells and Covent Garden, he wrote "chamber operas" for small forces, suitable for performance in venues of modest size. Among the best known of these is The Turn of the Screw (1954). Recurring themes in his operas include the struggle of an outsider against a hostile society and the corruption of innocence.

Britten's other works range from orchestral to choral, solo vocal, chamber and instrumental as well as film music. He took a great interest in writing music for children and amateur performers, including the opera Noye's Fludde, a Missa Brevis, and the song collection Friday Afternoons. He often composed with particular performers in mind. His most frequent and important muse was his personal and professional partner, the tenor Peter Pears; others included Kathleen Ferrier, Jennifer Vyvyan, Janet Baker, Dennis Brain, Julian Bream, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau and Mstislav Rostropovich. Britten was a celebrated pianist and conductor, performing many of his own works in concert and on record. He also performed and recorded works by others, such as Bach's Brandenburg concertos, Mozart symphonies, and song cycles by Schubert and Schumann.

Together with Pears and the librettist and producer Eric Crozier, Britten founded the annual Aldeburgh Festival in 1948, and he was responsible for the creation of Snape Maltings concert hall in 1967. In his last year, he was the first composer to be given a life peerage.

Ottorino Respighi, (born July 9, 1879, Bologna, Italy—died April 18, 1936, Rome), Italian composer who introduced Russian orchestral colour and some of the violence of Richard Strauss's harmonic techniques into Italian music. He studied at the Liceo of Bologna and later with Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov in St. Petersburg, where he was first violist in the Opera Orchestra. From his foreign masters Respighi acquired a command of orchestral colour and an interest in orchestral composition.

As a composer of opera, Respighi had less success outside his own country. His best known works for the theatre were Belfagor, a comic opera produced at Milan in 1923, and La fiamma (Rome, 1934), which effectively transfers the gloomy Norwegian tragedy of H. Wiers Jenssen (known to English-speaking audiences in John Masefield's version as The Witch) to Byzantine Ravenna. In a different, more subdued vein are the "mystery," Maria Egiziaca (1932), and his posthumous Lucrezia (completed by his wife, Elsa; 1937), the latter showing Respighi's interest in the dramatic recitative of Claudio Monteverdi, of whose Orfeo he made a free transcription for La Scala, Milan, in 1935.

Respighi's wife and pupil, Elsa Olivieri-Sangiacommo Respighi (1894-1996), was a singer and a composer of operas, choral and symphonic works, and songs.

# ROBERT ZELLER conducts Vienna State Opera Orch.

**RESPIGHI**  
Rossiniana

**BRITTEN**  
Matinées Musicales  
Soirées Musicales



Soirées Musicales is made up of five movements. The first is a March (allegro brillante) from the soldier's "Ballabilei" third act baller music of Guillaume Tell. Second is a Canzoneua (allegro grazioso) and the third, Tirolese (allegro con brio), a little song originally entitled "La Pastorella degli Alpi." The fourth and fifth movements are a Bolero (andante molto moderato) and a Tarantella (presto vivace).

Matinées Musicales, Op. 24 was written during Britten's stay in the United States in 1941, on a commission from Lincoln Kirstein for a new ballet which would use both the Soirées and the Matinées Musicales. I, was choreographed by George Balanchine and was first performed under the title Divertimento by the American Ballet Company during a South American tour. The few years separating the making of the two suites had no major effect on Britten's overall handling of Rossini's musical material. The orchestration is light and deft, with some good-natured and humorous touches and with splashes of modern harmonies. It indicates Britten's healthy but not overawed respect for Rossini as composer of miniature works. It is perhaps no accident that the first movement of the Matinées Musicales, as with the first movement of Soirées Musicales, is a condensed version of a section of ballet music from Rossini's Guillaume Tell.

The March of the first movement (largamente) is a condensed version of the "Passo a sei" from Rossini's opera. The second and third are called Nocturne (andante tranquillo) and Waltz (allegro brillante). The fourth, Pantomime (allegro quasi menuetto) is followed by Moto perpetuo (prestissimo), taken from "Solfeggi e Gorgheggi."

The Matinées Musicales and Soirées Musicales were recorded as orchestrated for double woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, percussion, harp, celesta and strings

Rossiniana (1925) is rich with the same orchestral color for which Respighi is famous. It is

based on four pieces derived from the many miniature compositions composed by Rossini during the voluntary retirement of the last twenty years of his life. Respighi chose the four movements which comprise Rossiniana from the group which Rossini had entitled "Quelques Riens pour Album," a part of hundreds of little piano pieces and songs. Many are still in manuscript, and some were described by Rossini as "sins of my old age."

The suite is divided into four parts. The first movement (allegretto) is subtitled Capri e Taormina. The music, with or without the help of the ride, should evoke a nostalgia reminiscent of Southern Italy. The second movement, Lamento (andantino maestro) is introduced by three pianissimo strokes of the tam-tam followed by a short motive played by the bassoon over triplet figures in the upper strings. An expressive, sad melody is introduced by the cellos and violas. Then a punctuated, dramatic triplet-figure is heard, and a harp cadenza leads us into the transition passage which ends with a clarinet cadenza and a return to the development of the main melodic theme. A cadenza with short fragments of the beginning motive and the pianissimo tam-tam end this Lamento. An Intermezzo (allegretto moderato) makes up the third movement. More delicately scored (for strings without contrabass, flute, two clarinets, glockenspiel, triangle, timpani, celesta and harp) it is intimate in feeling. This movement is rather gracious and even reminiscent of Respighi's settings for his "Anriche Danze." The fourth movement is entitled Tarantella "puro sangue" (allegro vivacissimo). It is most brilliantly scored with difficult virtuoso passages for the woodwinds and especially the horns. This movement characterizes the tarantella often danced at fiestas. After the first section the dancing at festivities are interrupted by a passing religious procession (andante religioso, in half tempo), and against this only snatches of the subdued dancing is heard. After that the full tarantella resumes again with extractions of the phrases which preceded. The suite finishes in a blaze of rhythm and color.

# Britten Matinées Musicales - Soirées Musicales

## Respighi Rossiniana

### Robert Zeller - Vienna State Opera Orchestra

#### Matinées Musicales

- 1. I. March 2:57
- 2 II. Nocturnes 4:24
- 3 III. Waltz 1:47
- 4 IV. Pantomime 3:33
- 5 V. Moto Perpetuo 2:55

#### Soirées Musicales

- 6 I. March 1:21
- 7 II. Canzonetta 3:08
- 8 III. Tirolese 2:08
- 9 IV. Bolero 2:16
- 10 V. Tarantella 2:05

#### Rossiniana

- 11 I. Capri E Taormina 6:56
- 12 II. Lamento 8:17
- 13 III. Intermezzo 2:25
- 14 IV. Tarantella 6:22
- Total Time: 50:34

Produced by James Grayson Engineering by H. Zeithammer / P. Curiel  
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