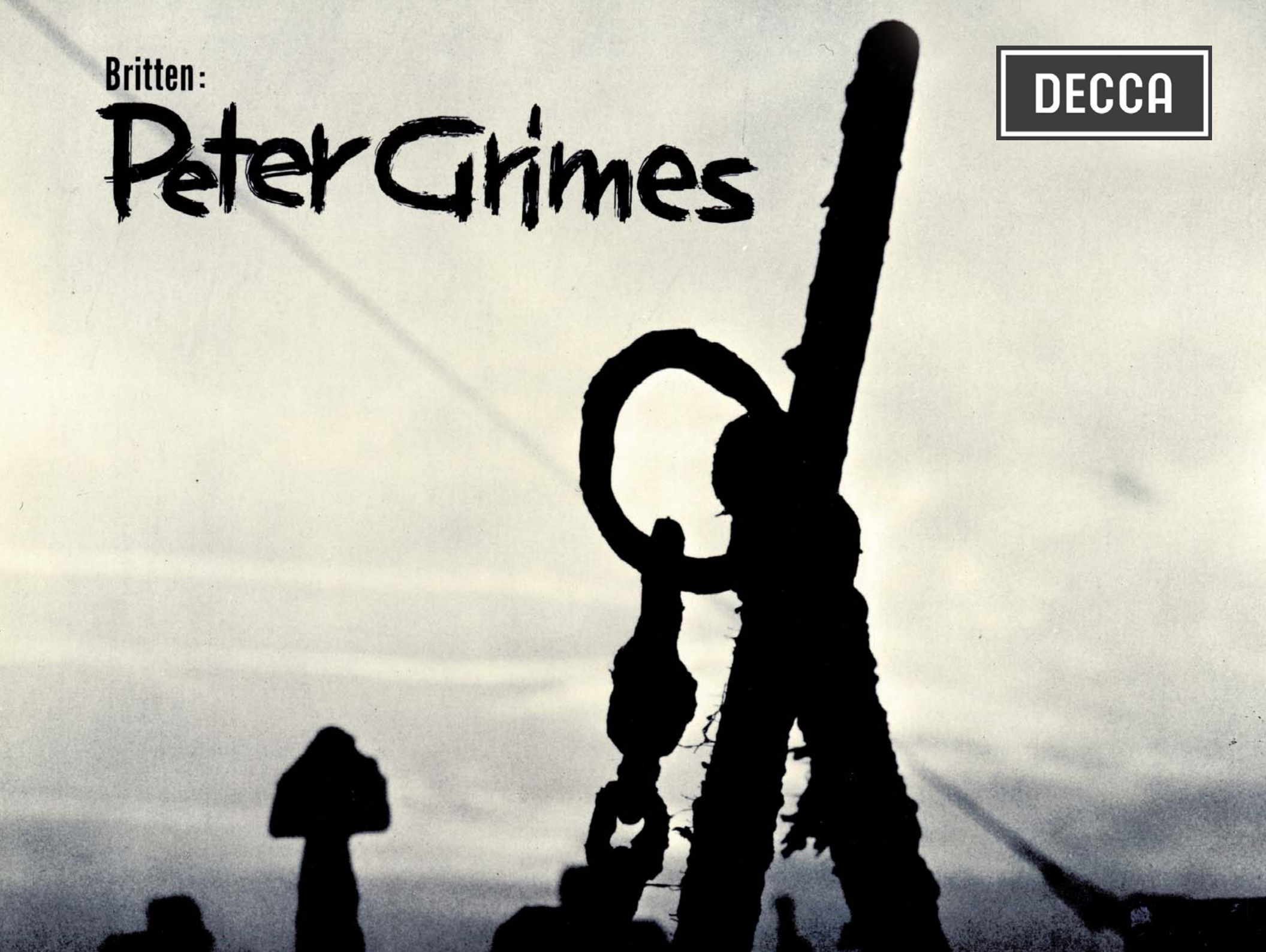


Britten:

Peter Grimes

DECCA





Benjamin Britten
conducting
Peter Grimes
Photo: Decca

Benjamin Britten 1913–1976
PETER GRIMES

Libretto by Montagu Slater, after the poem *The Borough* by George Crabbe

Peter Grimes, a fisherman.....**Peter Pears**
pêcheur · Fischer

Ellen Orford, a widow, schoolmistress of the Borough.....**Claire Watson**
veuve, institutrice du bourg · verwitwete Schulleiterin der Gemeinde

Captain Balstrode, a retired merchant skipper.....**James Pease**
capitaine de marine en retraite · pensionierter Handelsschiffer

Hobson, the carrier, constable of the Borough.....**David Kelly**
voiturier et gendarme du bourg · Fuhrmann und Konstabler

Swallow, a lawyer, Mayor of the Borough.....**Owen Brannigan**
juge, maire du bourg · Rechtsanwalt und Bürgermeister

Mrs Sedley, the widow of an East India Company's factor.....**Lauris Elms**
veuve d'un représentant de la Compagnie orientale des Indes
Witwe eines Vertreters der Ostindischen Handelskompanie

Auntie, the landlady of "The Boar".....**Jean Watson**
gérante du "Sanglier" · Wirtin der Schenke "Zum Eber"

Niece 1 } the main attractions of "The Boar".....**Marion Studholme**

Niece 2 } *principales attractions du "Sanglier" · Hauptattraktionen im "Eber"*...**Iris Kells**

Bob Boles, a Methodist fisherman.....**Raymond Nilsson**
pêcheur méthodiste · Methodist und Fischer

The Rector.....	John Lanigan
<i>Pasteur · Pfarrer</i>	
Ned Keene, the apothecary.....	Geraint Evans
<i>apothicaire · Apotheker</i>	
John, Grimes's new apprentice	Marcus Norman
<i>nouvel apprenti de Grimes · Grimes' neuer Lehrlinge</i>	
Townpeople, fisherfolk	
<i>Villageois et familles de pêcheurs · Bürger und Fischer</i>	
Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden	
BENJAMIN BRITTEN	

	Timing
Prologue	
1 Peter Grimes! <i>Hobson</i>	1.28
2 You sailed your boat round the coast <i>Swallow</i>	3.04
3 Peter Grimes, I here advise you! <i>Swallow</i>	2.09
4 The truth... the pity... and the truth <i>Peter</i>	1.55
5 Interlude I: On the beach (Dawn)	2.58
ACT ONE	
Scene 1	
6 Oh! hang at open doors the net, the cork <i>Women and Fishermen</i>	5.35
7 Hi! Give us a hand! <i>Peter</i>	3.19
8 I have to go from pub to pub <i>Hobson</i>	1.57
9 Let her among you without fault cast the first stone <i>Ellen</i>	3.09
10 Look, the storm cone! <i>Balstrode</i>	2.42
11 And do you prefer the storm <i>Balstrode</i>	4.56
12 What harbour shelters peace <i>Peter</i>	1.12
13 Interlude II: The Storm	4.08

Scene 2	
14	Past time to close! <i>Auntie</i> 4.19
15	We live and let live <i>Balstrode</i> 2.00
16	Have you heard? The cliff is down <i>Keene</i> 1.23
17	Now the Great Bear and Pleiades <i>Peter</i> 3.41
18	Old Joe has gone fishing <i>Keene</i> 2.28
19	The bridge is down, we half swam over <i>Hobson</i> 1.42
ACT TWO	
20	Interlude III: Sunday morning by the beach 2.22
Scene 1	
21	Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight <i>Ellen</i> 5.41
22	Let this be a holiday <i>Ellen</i> 3.00
23	This unrelenting work <i>Ellen</i> 4.41
24	Fool to let it come to this! <i>Auntie</i> 2.18
25	What is it? <i>Chorus</i> 1.03
26	People!... No! I will speak! <i>Boles</i> 2.12
27	We planned that their lives should have a new start <i>Ellen</i> 2.27
28	Swallow! Shall we go and see Grimes in his hut? 0.44

<i>Rector</i>	
29	Now is gossip put on trial 2.13
<i>Mrs Sedley, Boles, Rector, Keene, Swallow and Chorus</i>	
30	From the gutter, why should we trouble at their ribaldries? 4.34
<i>Nieces</i>	
31	Interlude IV (Passacaglia) 5.28
Scene 2	
32	Go there! 7.18
<i>Peter</i>	
33	Now!... Now!... 2.09
<i>Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene and Chorus (off)</i>	
34	Peter Grimes! Nobody here? 3.08
<i>Rector</i>	
ACT THREE	
35	Interlude V: Evening 4.20
Scene 1	
36	Assign your prettiness to me 2.36
<i>Swallow</i>	
37	Pah!... Ahoy! 2.49
<i>Swallow and Keene</i>	
38	Come along, Doctor! 3.19
<i>First Burgess</i>	
39	Embroidery in childhood was a luxury of idleness 5.10
<i>Ellen</i>	
40	Mister Swallow! Mister Swallow! 2.01
<i>Mrs Sedley</i>	
41	Who holds himself apart, lets his pride rise 3.44
<i>Chorus</i>	
42	Interlude VI: Fog 2.37

Scene 2

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 43 | Grimes! Grimes!
<i>Chorus (off)</i> | 4.55 |
| 44 | Peter, we've come to take you home
<i>Ellen</i> | 2.21 |
| 45 | To those who pass the Borough
<i>Chorus</i> | 5.08 |

ADD



Claire Watson during the recording of *Peter Grimes*
Photo: Decca

The Covent Garden Orchestra rise superbly to their task and indeed one is left with an impression of the entire cast, of everybody concerned, being inspired by the presence and direction of the composer. Stereo naturally lends greater spaciousness to the sound but the fine sense of perspective gained by the different positioning of the singers, the feel of entrance and exit, are all present in the monophonic discs and the producer and engineers must be congratulated on their outstanding success which sets a new and very high standard. The balance nearly all through is remarkably good. Gramophone

BRITTEN'S *PETER GRIMES*: THE COMPOSER CONDUCTS

Donald Mitchell

I should like to start with a personal reminiscence. Very occasionally Britten would invite me to attend a performance of one of his works in the concert hall or opera house. (In general, he confined his attendances to performances that he was conducting himself or was involved in as a pianist, in chamber music or accompanying Pears.) One visit to Covent Garden I remember very well. It was for a performance of *Peter Grimes*, and as I sat there and the Prologue and Act One progressed, I became aware of the composer's increasing discomfort, silent but tangible. The act ended and we slipped out, Britten telling me as we walked how painful he found it when he had to listen to his music in the hands of a conductor who failed to bring to it the rhythmic energy and absolutely clear rhythmic articulation that the music demanded. (The height of his unhappiness had been apparent when we embarked on a

peculiarly flabby "Storm" interlude, all noise, I still recall, and no rhythm.)

I think if I were asked to identify one characteristic that distinguishes Britten's own recorded performance of the opera, made in 1958, in which he brings life virtually to every single bar, it would be the phenomenal attention he pays throughout to his obsessive characterising of rhythm, a crucial consideration in an opera where rhythm, mobile or (sometimes) stationary, itself is a principal means of characterising the *dramatis personae*. An important case in point is Britten's rhythmically brilliant concept of the Prologue, in which we first get to know at close hand the major participants in the drama that ensues. But of course there is much, much else that is no less deserving of close scrutiny. It is the accumulation of precise, illuminating detail (though never at the expense of individual forms or overall architecture) that results in

the overpowering impact this historic recording makes. For example, note how Britten in the Prologue's very first minutes succeeds in establishing the already firmly rooted hostility of the Borough's inhabitants to Grimes which they bring with them into the Coroner's court, through meticulously graded dynamics (*p* to *ff*), allowing the combative words to colour the pitches and the carefully placed accents to make their aggressive point — "Fix the guilt! Fix the guilt!" The townspeople's hostility already has a long history. In short, the Prologue, at this level of performance, functions as a graphic exposition of the materials, both musical and dramatic, out of which the opera will evolve.

It is a process of anticipation which we encounter at almost every step, and Britten the conductor never allows us to miss hearing a detail that is to accrue major significance as the work unfolds. It is typical, for instance, that after a first orchestral Interlude of exceptional lucidity and limpidity — its very clarity embodies its vitality — he makes sure, at the first mention of a probable storm at sea from the chorus, that an intimation of the storm, with all its heavy load of symbolism, does not pass unnoticed, even though at this stage it is encapsulated in a *pianissimo* chord for the brass. The bearer of ill tidings here, as so often in Britten, is the tuba (plus a stroke on the gong). As the opera

progresses to its end, the tuba's role takes on a special status. It becomes almost a character in its own right, with a "voice" of its own. It is no accident that it is the tuba which provides one of the principal accompaniments of Grimes's great solo cadenza — the famous "Mad" scene — in which he makes his exit from the opera and from life itself. The tuba, ironically, in its role as off-stage foghorn, is the voice that laments his tragic death. It is the only lament Grimes is to receive.

The care with which Britten exposes and underlines these anticipations has a further dimension to it. It helps service the large structure of the work, which, as the narrative develops, reveals all manner of anticipatory and retrospective references. A lot of this happens as a natural consequence of his vivid characterisations of the Borough's populace. Everyone has his or her defining theme — rhythm here is as significant as melody — which resurfaces throughout but is modified according to the needs of a changing dramatic situation. It is for this reason, I have no doubt, that Britten, in the first scene of Act One, displays in sequence his gallery of characters — in effect, a sequence of portraits — with expository vigour (there is no hanging about) and colour; note in particular his attention to speech rhythms and the exceptional clarity of the words. It is thus that the conductor/composer ensures we carry

forward all the obligatory “information” for the comprehension of later events. This insistent clarity is standard practice throughout the opera, and is again markedly evident in the second scene of this same act, before Grimes’s spectacular visionary appearance, blown as he is by the storm into the midst of the pub’s chattering, quarrelling and gossiping customers. Once again words are given their full value, but Britten skilfully keeps a basic forwards-moving tempo going which prevents the scene from fragmenting into a series of character sketches.

Without doubt to my mind, this emphasis on individual characterisations is one of the leading features of the composer’s interpretation; and, miraculously, it is sustained even when all the individuals involved transform themselves into a collective. For example in that famous round, “Old Joe has gone fishing”, one hears all the parts delivered, not just with exemplary clarity but also “in character”, each of them, and Grimes’s above all. His tormented entry, “When I had gone fishing”, a testing moment for any tenor, is magnificently delivered by Pears, who makes it eloquent of Grimes’s isolation. (The composer helps here by having Grimes pursue his own, separating tonal path.) Or to choose another example, this time from the first scene of Act Two, I commend to every listener’s attention the wholly remarkable

concept that is Ellen’s “aria” (my use of quotes here is deliberate) — the intervention she makes as momentum gathers among the townsfolk to hound Grimes after he has struck Ellen at the climax of their fated duet. What Ellen sings — “We planned that their lives should have a new start” — opens conventionally enough — solo voice and orchestra — but after a mere handful of bars her “accompaniment” consists of comments from all the principals (Grimes excepted), all of them of course “in character”, an accumulation of horizontal vocal lines that builds up — along with the chorus’s own interjections of vengeance — into a unique polyphony, with Ellen, at the very end, struggling to make herself heard: “O hard, hard hearts”. Some “aria”! All of its organisational complexities are finely managed by Britten; we hear the words and marvel at a texture, the counterpoint of which represents a simultaneous combination of the characterising themes associated with the participants in the on-stage drama. A brilliant compositional feat and one that presages what was to become a Britten fingerprint, vocal textures derived from the hubbub of unregulated conversation. (*Albert Herring* specialises in such moments, highly innovative in their time.)

If one were seeking a single adjective to describe Britten’s gallery of characters and

his musical approach to their realisation, “realistic” might serve. These are, we are persuaded to feel, “real” people. On the other hand that is scarcely how one comes to think of the opera’s protagonist, Grimes himself; nor would “realism” fly to one’s lips when considering the unique refinement, nuances, virtuosity, clarity and sheer vocal beauty of Pears’s performance. Grimes is not just an outsider in his relationship to the community in which he finds himself — the opera vouchsafes no real pre-history of Grimes: where does he come from? — but, as the opera progresses, he often reveals *within* himself an “other” that is certainly at odds with the Borough’s assessment of him and for that matter his assessment of himself. This is the famous “visionary” dimension of Grimes, and Pears, it goes without saying, brings off these moments with matchless accomplishment. Everybody of course rightly thinks of “Now the Great Bear and Pleiades”, in the second scene of Act One, but I would choose as my example Grimes’s great *scena* that succeeds the Passacaglia in Act Two, “In dreams I’ve built myself some kindlier home”. This is always a challenge for any Grimes, in range, colour, exposure (everything is focused on the voice), words (and here and there in this recording Pears makes a few adjustments to help himself out) and intimacy; Grimes (for the most part) is singing to himself. There have indeed been other and very different

interpretations of Grimes, some of them very convincing, but I have yet to hear a performance that surpasses Pears’s at this critical moment. It amuses me to remember how he would chide the composer from time to time for making it all so difficult for the soloist, claiming that he had been defeated times without number in live performance in the theatre. Britten smiled but showed no inclination to re-think or revise the *scena*; and the version of it we have on this disc must always provide a model of how the composer wanted it to be heard. The concept of Grimes, reinforced by Pears’s extreme artistry, remains something of a paradox. But then the composer could not have said all he wanted to say about the human condition if the paradox were resolved and his protagonist’s personality simplified.

I have mentioned the Passacaglia, the massive central orchestral interlude which inevitably brings to the fore the independent role that the orchestra plays in *Peter Grimes*, of a scale very rarely encountered in opera from whatever period. (Berg and Shostakovich were major influences but one should not overlook something that is often forgotten, the many precedents we find in Wagner; in his youth Britten was a passionate Wagnerian.) The Passacaglia apart, there are the four “Sea” Interludes — four great seascapes which we know well in both the theatre and concert hall — and a

fifth, preceding the “Mad” scene, an insight into the deranged, destabilised personality Grimes has become as a final consequence of the appalling scenes of his persecution by the Borough.

It is in the Passacaglia in fact that the wretched Apprentice boy is given his own “voice” in the opera. This we hear at the interlude’s very start, a hushed lament that is entrusted to the solo viola, Britten’s own instrument and one for which he reserved his most intimate utterances and compassionate concerns. The boy’s sad “song” provides the material for the ensuing variations, created above an ostinato pizzicato bass which repeats remorselessly, again and again, the desperate cry with which Grimes ends his doomed duet with Ellen, “And God have mercy upon me!” (later picked up by the crowd and hijacked to become *their* abusive cry “Grimes is at his exercise”). Britten gives a masterful account of this huge stretch of orchestral music, in which each variation is characterised (in principle, a similar approach to the composer’s portraits of his *dramatis personae*) by its own orchestral colour. Few I think can fail to be riveted by the swooning, billowing, yawning variation for brass and percussion which rises just once to a *forte* and then dies away *pianissimo*. Masterly sonorities, masterfully controlled and executed. Finally, we note that the Passacaglia does not end but leads into the

ensuing *scena* in the hut. In fact, the Passacaglia does not rediscover its end until the boy has toppled down the cliff to his death. What constitutes his miniature requiem is the “missing” final bars of the Passacaglia where we hear again the sorrowing viola but heard this time in conjunction with the chilly figuration of the celeste, a sonority drained of life, like the Apprentice.

One could find something comparable in each one of the Interludes but what surely has to be mentioned are the bells in the third, which leads into Ellen’s aria, “Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight,” addressed to the ever silent child. But it is by no means all glitter and sunlight. The bells are most powerfully evoked in Britten’s performance but as they ring out they take on an increasingly threatening character (the tuba yet again!) which is no longer celebratory but funerary rather: intimations of death. In this guise the church bells, for that is what they represent, further reinforce Britten’s caustic treatment of the Christian liturgy — a congregation chanting what it does not believe — which is so prominent a feature of the first scene of Act Two.

There could never be an end to the list of comments generated by Britten’s interpretation of his own opera. But there is one further remarkable aspect of this recording that must not be overlooked. It so happened that when conducting the

preparatory rehearsals for it he found himself in considerable pain, the result of putting his shoulder out while shaving! He had to call in help and turned to none other than Reginald Goodall, the very conductor who had given the first performance of the work thirteen years earlier, and was later to become a celebrated Wagnerian. Goodall stepped into the breach and was thanked in a letter from the composer dated 20 December 1958:

I shall never forget your kindness & generosity in coming to help me out on the last days’ recording of *Peter Grimes*. It was typical of you — also typical was the way you conducted the piece, without any preparation at all. I am most grateful to you ...

We can assume that the final version was Britten’s but undoubtedly Goodall too, given his unique relationship to the opera, would also have left his interpretative mark. This fascinating bit of history, still little known,

means that in 1958 the composer’s undoubtedly authoritative performance was recorded in active — if last-minute — collaboration with the conductor who stood on the podium on 7 June 1945 on the occasion of the opera’s legendary premiere at Sadler’s Wells. Thus it is that history is re-lived in more ways than one in this unforgettable recording: for once the description “an historic document” rings entirely true.

Donald Mitchell has written extensively on Britten and Mahler, and has published many books including Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works (with Hans Keller), Benjamin Britten: Pictures from a Life 1913–1976 (with John Evans), Britten and Auden in the Thirties (The T S Eliot Memorial Lectures for 1979), Benjamin Britten: Death in Venice and Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten. He is also a trustee of the Britten–Pears Foundation and chairman of the Britten Estate.

L'Orchestre de Covent Garden se montre largement à la hauteur de sa tâche et en effet, on a l'impression que toute la distribution, tous ceux qui sont impliqués, sont inspirés par la présence et la direction du compositeur. Le son stéréo prête naturellement une plus grande ampleur à l'enregistrement, mais la belle impression de perspective obtenue par le positionnement varié des chanteurs, la sensation d'entrée et de sortie, tout cela est présent dans les disques en mono et le producteur et les ingénieurs doivent être félicités pour ce succès exceptionnel, établissant un nouveau standard particulièrement élevé. La balance, presque tout le long, est remarquable. Gramophone

PETER GRIMES DE BRITTEN SOUS LA DIRECTION DU COMPOSITEUR

Donald Mitchell

J'aimerais commencer par un souvenir personnel. De manière très occasionnelle, Britten m'invitait à assister à l'exécution de l'une de ses œuvres, en concert ou à l'opéra. (En général, il limitait sa présence aux exécutions qu'il dirigeait lui-même ou auxquelles il participait en tant que pianiste, pour jouer en formation de chambre ou accompagner Pears.) Je me souviens très bien de l'une de ces soirées à Covent Garden. C'était pour une représentation de *Peter Grimes*, et, tandis que j'étais assis là et que se déroulaient le Prologue et l'Acte un, je sentais le malaise croissant du compositeur, silencieux mais perceptible. L'acte se termina et nous nous éclipâmes ; en sortant, il me confia combien il lui était pénible de devoir écouter sa musique sous la baguette d'un chef qui ne parvenait pas à lui apporter l'énergie rythmique et l'articulation rythmique parfaitement claire

qu'elle exigeait. (Son malheur fut à son comble quand nous fûmes embarqués dans un interlude de "La Tempête" particulièrement inconsistent, tout en bruit, je m'en souviens encore, et pas de rythme.)

Si l'on me demandait d'identifier une caractéristique unique qui distingue l'interprétation de l'opéra que Britten enregistra lui-même en 1958, où il donne vie à chaque mesure ou presque, ce serait l'attention phénoménale qu'il prête tout du long à la caractérisation obsessionnelle du rythme, considération cruciale dans un opéra où le rythme, mobile ou (parfois) stationnaire, est lui-même un moyen essentiel pour caractériser les personnages. Une illustration importante en est donnée par la conception rythmiquement brillante du Prologue sous la baguette de Britten, Prologue où l'on fait connaissance avec les principaux acteurs du drame qui suit. Mais il

y a bien entendu beaucoup d'autres choses qui mériteraient tout autant d'être scrutées de près. C'est l'accumulation de détails précis, éclairants (sans que ce ne soit jamais aux dépens des formes individuelles ou de l'architecture globale) qui résulte en l'impact irrésistible que produit cet enregistrement historique. On notera ainsi comment Britten, dans les toutes premières minutes du Prologue, réussit à établir l'hostilité déjà solidement enracinée des habitants du bourg envers Grimes, qu'ils apportent avec eux au tribunal, grâce à des dynamiques méticuleusement graduées (*p* à *ff*), permettant aux mots combatifs de colorer les hauteurs et aux accents soigneusement placés d'exprimer leur agressivité — "Qui oserait le déclarer coupable !" L'hostilité des habitants a déjà une longue histoire. Bref, le Prologue, à ce niveau d'interprétation, fonctionne comme une éloquente exposition des matériaux, tant musicaux que dramatiques, dont l'opéra sera issu.

C'est un processus d'anticipation qu'on rencontre à chaque pas ou presque, et Britten chef ne nous laisse jamais manquer d'entendre un détail qui doit prendre une importance capitale à mesure que l'œuvre se déroule. Il est ainsi caractéristique que, après un premier Interlude orchestral d'une luminosité et d'une limpidité exceptionnelles — sa clarté même incarne sa vitalité —, il s'assure que, à la première évocation d'une probable tempête en mer venue du chœur,

le pressentiment de la tempête, avec sa lourde charge symbolique, ne passe pas inaperçu, bien qu'à ce stade il s'exprime dans un accord *pianissimo* des cuivres. Le prophète de malheur ici, comme souvent chez Britten, est le tuba (avec un coup de gong). Lorsque l'opéra progresse vers sa fin, le tuba assume un statut spécial. Il devient presque un personnage à part entière, avec sa propre "voix". Ce n'est pas un hasard si c'est le tuba qui fournit l'un des principaux accompagnements de la grande cadence soliste de Grimes — la célèbre scène de la "folie" —, dans laquelle il quitte l'opéra et la vie elle-même. Le tuba, curieusement, dans son rôle en coulisses de corne de brume, est la voix qui déplore sa mort tragique. C'est la seule déploration que reçoit Grimes.

Le soin avec lequel Britten expose et souligne ces anticipations a une autre dimension. Il contribue à asseoir la structure globale de l'œuvre, qui, à mesure que le récit se développe, révèle toute sorte de références prémonitoires et rétrospectives. Beaucoup d'entre elles sont une conséquence naturelle de ses vives caractérisations de la population du bourg. Chacun a son thème qui le définit — le rythme est ici aussi significatif que la mélodie — et qui resurgit tout du long, mais modifié suivant les besoins d'une situation dramatique changeante. C'est pour cette raison, j'en suis convaincu, que Britten, dans la première scène de l'Acte un, présente

dans l'ordre sa galerie de personnages — une succession de portraits, en fait — avec vigueur (sans que cela ne traîne) et couleur ; on notera en particulier l'attention portée aux rythmes parlés et l'exceptionnelle clarté des mots. C'est ainsi que le compositeur-chef s'assure que nous emportons toute l'"information" nécessaire à la compréhension des événements ultérieurs. Cette clarté insistante, qui est la norme pendant tout l'opéra, est de nouveau nettement en évidence dans la deuxième scène de ce même acte, avant la spectaculaire apparition visionnaire de Grimes, poussé par la tempête au beau milieu du bavardage, des disputes et des ragots des clients du pub. Une fois encore, les mots reçoivent leur pleine valeur, mais Britten garde habilement un tempo de base qui avance et qui évite à la scène de se fragmenter en une série d'esquisses de caractère.

Il ne fait aucun doute pour moi que cette emphase sur les caractérisations individuelles est l'un des traits marquants de l'interprétation du compositeur ; et, miraculeusement, elle est maintenue même lorsque tous les individus concernés se transforment en une collectivité. Par exemple, dans la célèbre ronde, "*Old Joe has gone fishing*", on entend toutes les parties rendues non seulement avec une clarté exemplaire, mais également chacune "dans son caractère", surtout celle de

Grimes. Son entrée tourmentée, "*When I had gone fishing*", moment éprouvant pour tout ténor, est magnifiquement interprétée par Pears, qui en fait l'expression éloquente de l'isolement de Grimes. (Le compositeur l'aide ici en faisant suivre à Grimes son propre cheminement tonal séparé.) Ou, pour choisir un autre exemple, cette fois dans la première scène de l'Acte deux, je recommande à l'attention de tout auditeur le concept tout à fait remarquable qu'est l'"aria" d'Ellen — c'est à dessein que j'emploie ici des guillemets —, l'intervention qu'elle fait au moment où la fièvre monte parmi les habitants qui décident de traquer Grimes après qu'il a frappé Ellen au point culminant de leur fatal duo. Ce que chante Ellen — "Nous voulions que leur vie prenne un nouveau départ" — débute de manière relativement conventionnelle : voix soliste et orchestre ; mais, après quelques mesures seulement, son "accompagnement" consiste en commentaires de tous les principaux personnages (à l'exception de Grimes), tous bien entendus conformes à leur caractère, une accumulation de lignes vocales horizontales qui devient — avec les propres interjections vengeresses du chœur — une polyphonie unique, où Ellen, tout à la fin, lutte pour se faire entendre : "Ô cœurs durs, durs." Quelle "aria" ! Toutes ses complexités d'organisation sont finement gérées par Britten ; on entend les mots et on est émerveillé par une texture dont le

contrepoint représente une combinaison simultanée des thèmes caractéristiques associés aux acteurs du drame sur scène. Brillante prouesse d'écriture, qui préfigure ce qui allait devenir une signature de Britten : des textures vocales issues du brouhaha d'une conversation dérégulée. (*Albert Herring* se fait une spécialité de tels moments, extrêmement novateurs en leur temps.)

Si l'on cherchait un adjectif unique pour décrire la galerie de portraits de Britten et sa démarche musicale pour les réaliser, ce pourrait être le mot "réaliste." On est amené à sentir qu'il s'agit de gens "réels." D'un autre côté, ce n'est guère l'idée qu'on se fait du protagoniste de l'opéra, Grimes lui-même ; ce n'est pas non plus le mot "réalisme" qui viendrait à l'esprit lorsqu'on songe au raffinement, aux nuances, à la virtuosité, à la clarté et à la simple beauté vocale de l'interprétation de Pears. Grimes n'est pas seulement un marginal dans sa relation avec la communauté au sein de laquelle il se trouve — l'opéra ne nous offre aucune pré-histoire véritable de Grimes : d'où vient-il ? Mais, à mesure que l'opéra progresse, il révèle souvent en lui un "autre" qui est certainement en contradiction avec le jugement que porte sur lui le bourg ou du reste avec le jugement qu'il porte sur lui-même. C'est la célèbre dimension "visionnaire" de Grimes, et Pears, cela va sans dire, rend ces moments avec une

perfection incomparable. Tout le monde pense bien entendu, et à juste titre, à "*Now the Great Bear and Pleiades*", dans la deuxième scène de l'Acte un ; mais je choisirais plutôt comme exemple la grande *scena* de Grimes qui succède à la Passacaille de l'Acte deux, "*In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home*". C'est toujours un défi pour tout Grimes, du fait de l'étendue, de la couleur, du risque (tout est focalisé sur la voix), du texte (ici et là, dans cet enregistrement, Pears fait quelques ajustements pour mieux s'en sortir) et de l'intimité ; Grimes (pour l'essentiel) chante pour lui-même. Il y a certes eu d'autres interprétations très différentes de Grimes, dont certaines très convaincantes, mais je n'en ai jamais entendu qui surpasse celle de Pears à ce moment critique. Cela m'amuse de me rappeler qu'il reprochait de temps à autre au compositeur d'avoir rendu les choses si difficiles pour le soliste, prétendant qu'il avait été vaincu d'innombrables fois en interprétant le rôle sur le vif au théâtre. Britten souriait, mais ne se montrait nullement enclin à repenser ni à réviser la *scena* ; et la version que nous en avons sur ce disque devra toujours servir de modèle pour la manière dont le compositeur voulait qu'elle soit entendue. Le concept de Grimes, renforcé par le suprême talent de Pears, demeure un peu un paradoxe. Mais le compositeur n'aurait pas eu dit tout ce qu'il voulait dire sur la condition humaine si le

paradoxe était résolu et la personnalité de son protagoniste simplifiée.

J'ai cité la Passacaille, le massif interlude orchestral qui amène inévitablement au premier plan le rôle indépendant que joue l'orchestre dans *Grimes*, à une échelle qu'on rencontre très rarement dans l'opéra de quelque période que ce soit. (Berg et Chostakovitch exercèrent une influence majeure, mais il ne faut pas négliger un élément qu'on oublie souvent : les nombreux précédents qu'on trouve chez Wagner ; dans sa jeunesse, Britten était un fervent wagnérien.) Mis à part la Passacaille, il y a les quatre Interludes sur le thème de la "mer" — quatre grandes marines qu'on connaît bien pour les avoir entendues tant au théâtre qu'en concert — et un cinquième, précédent la scène de la "folie", un aperçu de la personnalité dérangée et déstabilisée de Grimes en tant que conséquence ultime des scènes épouvantables où il est persécuté par le bourg.

C'est au sein de la Passacaille que le malheureux Apprenti se voit donner sa propre "voix" dans l'opéra. On l'entend dès le début de l'interlude, une lamentation murmurée confiée à l'alto solo, l'instrument de Britten lui-même, auquel il réserva ses expressions les plus intimes et ses préoccupations les plus personnelles. La triste "chanson" du garçon sert de matériau aux variations qui suivent, créées au-dessus d'une basse ostinato pizzicato qui répète implacablement, encore et encore, le cri

désespéré par lequel Grimes termine son funeste duo avec Ellen, "Et que Dieu ait pitié de moi !" (ensuite repris par la foule et détourné pour devenir leur cri injurieux, "Grimes a recommencé"). Britten donne une version magistrale de cette immense plage de musique orchestrale, dans laquelle chaque variation est caractérisée par sa propre couleur orchestrale (dans le principe, la démarche est analogue aux portraits des personnages que peint le compositeur). Rares sont ceux qui manqueront, me semble-t-il, d'être captivés par la variation défaillante, béante, ondulante pour cuivres, qui s'élève une seule fois jusqu'à un *forte* puis meurt *pianissimo*. Sonorités magistrales, magistralement contrôlées et exécutées. Pour finir, on notera que la Passacaille ne se termine pas, mais conduit à la *scena* qui suit dans la cabane. En fait, la Passacaille ne dévoile sa fin que lorsque le garçon fait sa chute mortelle de la falaise. Les dernières mesures "manquantes" de la Passacaille sont un Requiem miniature, où l'on entend de nouveau l'alto accablé de chagrin, mais en conjonction cette fois avec la figuration glaciale du célesta, une sonorité vidée de vie, comme l'Apprenti.

On pourrait trouver quelque chose de comparable dans chacun des Interludes, mais il faut incontestablement citer les cloches dans le troisième, qui conduit à l'aria d'Ellen, "*Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight*", adressée à l'enfant silencieux à jamais. Mais tout n'y est nullement scintillement et soleil. Les cloches sont très

éloquemment évoquées dans l'interprétation de Britten, mais lorsqu'elles retentissent elles prennent un caractère de plus en plus menaçant (encore le tuba !), qui n'est plus festif mais funèbre plutôt : annonce de mort. Sous cette forme, les cloches d'église, puisque c'est ce qu'elles représentent, renforcent le traitement caustique de la liturgie chrétienne — une assemblée de fidèles qui chante ce à quoi elle ne croit pas — aspect si marquant de la première scène de l'Acte deux.

On pourrait commenter sans fin l'interprétation de son propre opéra que nous a laissée Britten. Mais il reste un aspect remarquable de cet enregistrement qu'il ne faut pas passer sous silence. Il se trouve qu'en dirigeant les répétitions préparatoires il souffrait de vives douleurs, car il s'était démis l'épaule en se rasant ! Contraint de demander de l'aide, il se tourna vers nul autre que Reginald Goodall, le même chef qui avait dirigé la création de l'œuvre treize ans auparavant, et qui allait par la suite devenir un wagnérien célèbre. Goodall le remplaça au pied levé, et le compositeur le remercia dans une lettre datée du 20 décembre 1958 :

"Je n'oublierai jamais la gentillesse et la générosité que vous avez témoignées en venant m'aider pour les derniers jours de l'enregistrement de *Peter Grimes*. C'était typique de vous — ce qui était également typique était la manière dont vous avez dirigé l'œuvre, sans aucune préparation.

Je vous suis extrêmement reconnaissant."

On peut supposer que la version définitive est celle de Britten, mais il est certain que Goodall, compte tenu de sa relation unique avec l'opéra, y a laissé aussi sa marque d'interprète. Ce petit détail historique, encore méconnu, signifie qu'en 1958 l'interprétation du compositeur, qui fit incontestablement référence, fut enregistrée avec la collaboration active — quoique tardive — du chef qui était au pupitre le 7 juin 1945 lors de la création légendaire de l'opéra à Sadler's Wells. L'histoire est donc ressuscitée de plusieurs manières dans cet enregistrement inoubliable : pour une fois, la description "enregistrement historique" sonne parfaitement juste.

Traduction DECCA 2001 Dennis Collins

Donald Mitchell a beaucoup écrit sur Britten et Mahler, et a publié de nombreux livres, dont Benjamin Britten : A Commentary on his Works (avec Hans Keller), Benjamin Britten : Pictures from a Life 1913–1976 (avec John Evans), Britten and Auden in the Thirties (The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures for 1979), Benjamin Britten : Death in Venice et Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten. Il fait également partie du conseil d'administration de la Britten-Pears Foundation et est président du Britten Estate.

Das Covent Garden Orchestra steigert sich erheblich mit dieser Aufgabe, und man erhält wirklich den Eindruck, dass die ganze Besetzung, jeder einzelne Beteiligte, durch die Gegenwart des Komponisten inspiriert wurde. Die Stereotechnik gibt dem Klang natürlich eine größere Räumlichkeit, aber das feine Gespür für Perspektive, das durch die unterschiedliche Aufstellung der Sänger erreicht wird, sowie das Gefühl für Auftritt und Abgang — all dies ist bereits in der Monoaufnahme vorhanden; man muss den Produzenten und die Toningenieure zu ihrem außergewöhnlichen Erfolg beglückwünschen, der einen neuen und sehr hohen Standard setzt. Die Klangbalance ist fast durchweg bemerkenswert gut. Gramophone

BRITTENS PETER GRIMES: DER KOMPONIST DIRIGIERT

Donald Mitchell

Ich möchte mit einer persönlichen Erinnerung beginnen. Nur hin und wieder lud Britten mich zu der Aufführung eines seiner Werke im Konzertsaal oder im Opernhaus ein. (Im allgemeinen beschränkte er seine Anwesenheit auf Aufführungen, die er selbst dirigierte oder an denen er als Pianist beteiligt war — bei Kammermusikwerken oder um Pears zu begleiten.) An einen Besuch in Covent Garden erinnere ich mich besonders gut. Es war eine Aufführung von *Peter Grimes*, und während ich da saß und Prolog und erster Akt abliefen, wurde mir das zunehmende und wortlose, aber greifbare Unbehagen des Komponisten bewusst. Der Akt endete, und beim Hinausgehen sagte mir Britten, wie quälend er es fände, seiner Musik unter der Leitung eines Dirigenten zu hören zu müssen, dem es nicht gelingt, ihr die erforderliche rhythmische Energie und absolut klare rhythmische Artikulation zu geben. (Der Gipfel seines Unbehagens zeigte sich, als ein besonders "schwammig" ge-

brachtes "Sturm"-Zwischenspiel einsetzte, nur lärmend und ohne Rhythmus, wie ich mich immer noch erinnere.)

Ich glaube, wenn man mich darum bäte, einen charakteristischen Zug zu nennen, der Britten eigene Einspielung der Oper von 1958 auszeichnet, in der er praktisch jeden einzelnen Takt mit Leben erfüllt hat, dann wäre es die phänomenale Aufmerksamkeit, die er durchwegs seiner obsessiven rhythmischen Charakterisierung zollt — ein entscheidender Faktor in einer Oper, in der Rhythmus, sei er beweglich oder (gelegentlich) unbeweglich, selbst ein zentrales Charakterisierungsmittel für die Personen des Dramas ist. Ein typisches Beispiel ist Britten's rhythmisch brillante Konzeption des Prologes, in dem wir die Hauptbeteiligten des folgenden Dramas kennenlernen. Aber natürlich gibt es erheblich mehr, was ebenso einer eingehenden Untersuchung wert ist. Da ist die Häufung genauer, erhellender Details (jedoch nie auf Kosten einzelner For-

men oder der Gesamtarchitektur), die zu der überwältigenden Wirkung dieser historischen Aufnahme führt. Man beachte z. B., wie es Britten schon in den ersten Minuten des Prologes gelingt, die bereits fest eingewurzelte Feindseligkeit der Bürger Grimes gegenüber zu verdeutlichen, die sie in den Gerichtssaal mitbringen: nämlich mittels genau abgestufter Dynamik (*p* bis *ff*), dank derer die kämpferischen Worte die Tonhöhe einfärben und die sorgfältig gesetzten Akzente ihre aggressive Betonung anbringen können — "Fix the guilt! Fix the guilt" (Wer wagt es noch, die Schuld festzustellen?). Die Feindseligkeit der Bürger hat bereits eine lange Geschichte. Kurz, der Prolog funktioniert bei diesem Aufführungsniveau als anschauliche Exposition des musikalischen wie des dramatischen Materials, aus dem die Oper sich entwickeln wird.

Es ist ein vorausgreifender Prozess, auf den wir bei fast jedem Schritt stoßen, und der Dirigent Britten erlaubt uns nie, ein Detail zu überhören, das im weiteren Verlauf des Werkes größere Bedeutung gewinnt. Es ist z. B. typisch, dass er — nach einem ersten Orchesterzwischenpiel von außergewöhnlicher Luzidität und Klarheit (gerade diese Klarheit verkörpert seine Vitalität) — bei der ersten Erwähnung eines möglichen Sturmes auf See durch den Chor sicherstellt, dass eine Andeutung des Sturmes mit all seiner symbolischen Überfrachtung nicht unbemerkt vorübergeht, obwohl sie in diesem Stadium in einem pianissimo-Akkord für die Blechbläser enthalten ist. Als Botin schlech-

ter Nachrichten fungiert hier, wie so oft bei Britten, die Tuba (zusammen mit einem Gongschlag). Gegen Ende der Oper erhält sie einen besonderen Status. Sie wird fast zu einer selbständigen Figur mit einer eigenen "Stimme". Nicht zufällig bietet gerade die Tuba eine der vorrangigen Begleitungen zur großen Solokadenz von Grimes — der berühmten "Wahnsinnsszene", in der er sich aus der Oper und dem Leben verabschiedet. Die Tuba ist in ihrer Rolle als Nebelhorn hinter der Bühne ironischerweise die Stimme, die seinen tragischen Tod beklagt. Dies ist die einzige Klage, die auf Grimes angestimmt wird.

Die Sorgfalt, mit der Britten diese Vorwahnahmen exponiert und betont, hat noch eine weitere Dimension. Sie unterstützt die ausgedehnte Werkstruktur, die mit fortschreitender Geschichte alle Arten vorausgreifender und rückblickender Bezüge aufweist. Ein Großteil davon ergibt sich als natürliche Folge seiner lebendigen Charakterisierung der Bewohner des Ortes. Jeder hat sein eigenes Thema — dabei ist der Rhythmus ebenso bezeichnend wie die Melodie —, das immer wieder erscheint, sich dabei jedoch den Notwendigkeiten wechselnder dramatischer Situationen anpasst. Zweifellos aus diesem Grund hat Britten in der ersten Szene des 1. Aktes der Reihe nach seine Figurengalerie — tatsächlich eine Folge von Porträts — aussagekräftig (Schlag auf Schlag) und farbig vorführt; besonders beachtlich sind seine Aufmerksamkeit gegenüber Sprachrhythmen und die außergewöhnliche Klarheit der Wor-

te. Dadurch stellt der Dirigent/Komponist sicher, dass wir über alle notwendigen "Informationen" für das Verständnis des späteren Geschehens verfügen. Diese nachdrückliche Klarheit wird die ganze Oper hindurch gleichbleibend beibehalten und tritt in der zweiten Szene desselben Aktes noch einmal sehr deutlich zutage: vor der spektakulären, visionären Erscheinung von Grimes, den der Sturm mitten unter die schwatzenden, streitenden und klatschenden Pubbesucher hereinweht. Wieder kommen die Worte voll zur Geltung, doch Britten hält ein vorwärtstreibendes Grundtempo aufrecht, das ein Aufsplittern der Szene in eine Aneinanderreihung von Charakterskizzen verhindert.

Für mich ist ohne Zweifel diese Betonung von Einzelcharakterisierungen einer der wichtigsten Züge in der Interpretation des Komponisten; und wunderbarerweise wird sie auch dann noch aufrechterhalten, wenn sich alle beteiligten Individuen in ein Kollektiv verwandeln. Zum Beispiel hört man in jenem berühmten Kanon "Old Joe has gone fishing" (Old Joe, der ging fischen), dass alle Partien nicht nur mit beispielhafter Klarheit vorgetragen werden, sondern jede auch entsprechend ihrem Charakter, besonders die von Grimes. Sein gequälter Einsatz "When I had gone fishing" (Als ich fischen ging), ein Prüfstein für jeden Tenor, wird von Pears großartig vorgetragen, der die Isolation von Grimes daraus sprechen lässt. (Der Komponist hilft hier dadurch, dass er Grimes einen separaten tonalen Weg einschlagen lässt.)

Oder um ein anderes Beispiel, diesmal aus der ersten Szene des 2. Aktes, zu wählen, empfehle ich der Aufmerksamkeit jeden Hörers die insgesamt bemerkenswerte Konzeption von Ellens "Arie" (ich verwende hier bewusst Anführungszeichen): ihre Intervention, als die Stadtbewohner sich aufmachen, Grimes zu jagen, nachdem er Ellen auf dem Höhepunkt ihres unseligen Duets geschlagen hatte. Was Ellen singt — "We planned that their lives should have a new start" (Wir planten, dass ihr Leben einen neuen Anfang bekommen sollte) — beginnt konventionell genug — mit Solostimme und Orchester —, doch nach nur wenigen Takten besteht ihre "Begleitung" aus Kommentaren aller Hauptpersonen (Grimes ausgenommen), jede natürlich jeweils ihrem Charakter entsprechend: eine Häufung horizontaler Linien, die sich — neben den Rache-einwürfen des Chores — zu einer einzigartigen Polyphonie aufbauen, wobei Ellen ganz am Ende Mühe hat, Gehör zu finden: "O hard, hard hearts" (O Gott, wie hartherzig!). Was für eine "Arie"! Ihre vielschichtige Anlage wird von Britten sehr schön gehandhabt; wir hören die Worte und bewundern eine Struktur, deren Kontrapunkt jene Themen simultan kombiniert, welche die am Bühnengeschehen beteiligten Personen charakterisieren. Dies ist eine glänzende Leistung der Komposition, die auch auf ein künftiges Kennzeichen Britzens vorausweist: Vokalstrukturen, die sich aus dem Gewirr unregelter Gespräche herleiten. (*Albert Herring* zeichnet sich

besonders durch derartige Momente aus, die zu ihrer Zeit höchst innovativ waren.)

Wenn man nach einem einzigen Adjektiv suchen wollte, um die Figurengalerie von Britten und die Art ihrer musikalischen Realisierung zu beschreiben, könnte "realistisch" hilfreich sein. Hier handelt es sich, wie wir zu spüren meinen, um "echte" Menschen. Andererseits denkt man kaum ebenso über den Protagonisten der Oper, Grimes selbst; ebensowenig würde einem das Wort "Realismus" in den Sinn kommen, wenn man die einzigartige Verfeinerung, die Nuancen, Virtuosität, Klarheit und bloße vokale Schönheit der Interpretation von Pears bedenkt. Grimes ist nicht nur ein Außenseiter in seiner Beziehung zu der Gemeinschaft, in der er sich befindet — die Oper bietet keine eigentliche Vorgeschichte von Grimes: wo kommt er her? Doch im Fortgang der Oper lässt er oft in seinem Inneren einen "anderen" erkennen, der sicher nicht mit dem Bild übereinstimmt, das man im Ort von ihm hat, und eigentlich auch nicht mit seiner Selbsteinschätzung. Dies ist die berühmte "visionäre" Dimension von Grimes, und Pears bewältigt diese Momente, das versteht sich von selbst, mit unvergleichlicher Vollendung. Jeder denkt natürlich zu Recht an "Now the Great Bear and Pleiades" (Nun ziehen der Große Bär und die Pleiaden) in der zweiten Szene des 1. Aktes; doch ich möchte als mein Beispiel Grimes' große *scena* auswählen, die auf die Passacaglia im 2. Akt folgt: "In dreams I've built myself some kindlier

home" (In Träumen habe ich mir ein freundlicheres Heim gebaut). Diese Szene ist stets eine Herausforderung für den Darsteller des Grimes hinsichtlich Umfang, Klangfarbe, Exponiertheit (alles ist auf die Stimme konzentriert), Text (hier und da hilft Pears sich in dieser Aufnahme mit ein paar Änderungen) und Intimität: Grimes singt (überwiegend) zu sich selbst. Es hat tatsächlich andere und sehr unterschiedliche Interpretationen von Grimes gegeben, darunter einige sehr überzeugende; doch ich müsste erst noch eine Darbietung hören, die jene von Pears in dieser entscheidenden Szene übertrifft. Mich amüsiert die Erinnerung daran, wie er den Komponisten gelegentlich dafür tadelte, dem Solisten alles so schwierig gemacht zu haben, und meinte, er habe bei zahllosen Bühnenaufführungen versagt. Britten lächelte dazu, zeigte aber keine Neigung, die *scena* zu überdenken oder zu überarbeiten; und die Version auf dieser CD sollte immer ein Modell für den Klangeindruck bieten, den der Komponist gewünscht hat. Die Konzeption von Grimes, verstärkt durch die außerordentliche Kunst von Pears, bleibt etwas paradox. Aber der Komponist hätte nicht alles sagen können, was er über die menschliche Verfassung sagen wollte, wenn das Paradox aufgelöst und die Persönlichkeit des Protagonisten vereinfacht worden wäre.

Ich habe die Passacaglia erwähnt, das gewaltige zentrale Orchesterzweischenspiel, das zwangsläufig die selbständige Rolle des Orchesters in *Peter Grimes* deutlich macht und

dessen Ausmaß nur sehr selten in Opern — welcher Epoche auch immer — vorkommt. (Berg und Schostakowitsch waren von großem Einfluss, aber man sollte etwas nicht übersehen, das oft vergessen wird: die vielen Vorbilder, die sich bei Wagner finden; in seiner Jugend war Britten ein leidenschaftlicher Wagnerianer). Abgesehen von der Passacaglia gibt es noch die vier "Sea Interludes" — vier großartige Seebilder, die man sowohl aus dem Theater wie aus dem Konzertsaal gut kennt — sowie ein fünftes Zwischenspiel, das der Wahnsinnsszene vorausgeht, ein Einblick in die verstörte, instabile Persönlichkeit, zu der Grimes als letzte Konsequenz seiner schrecklichen Verfolgung durch die Bürger geworden ist.

Tatsächlich erhält der unglückliche Lehrjunge in der Passacaglia seine eigene "Stimme" in der Oper. Sie erklingt ganz zu Beginn des Zwischenspiels, eine gedämpfte Klage, die der Bratsche anvertraut ist, Britten eigenem Instrument, dem er seine intimsten Äußerungen und mitfühlendsten Anliegen vorbehält. Das traurige "Lied" des Jungen bietet das Material für die anschließenden Variationen über einem pizzicato gespielten Ostinatobass, der unbarmherzig immer wieder den verzweiferten Schrei wiederholt, mit dem Grimes sein verhängnisvolles Duett mit Ellen beendet: "And God have mercy upon me!" (Und Gott sei mir gnädig!); er wird später von der Menge übernommen und zu *ihrer* beleidigenden Ausruf: "Grimes is at his exercise" (Grimes ist in

seiner Stimmung) gemacht. Britten gibt eine meisterhafte Interpretation dieses gewaltigen Orchesterstückes, in dem jede Variation durch ihre eigene Orchesterfarbe charakterisiert ist (im Prinzip vergleichbar mit seinen Porträts der Hauptfiguren). Ich glaube, nur Wenige werden nicht von der verhallenden, wogenden, ausgedehnten Variation für Blechbläser und Schlagzeug gefesselt sein, die sich nur einmal zu einem Forte erhebt und danach im Pianissimo verklingt. Meisterhafte Klänge, meisterhaft kontrolliert und ausgeführt. Schließlich sei angemerkt, dass die Passacaglia nicht endet, sondern in die folgende *scena* in der Hütte überleitet — tatsächlich findet die Passacaglia ihr Ende erst dann, wenn der Junge von der Klippe zu Tode gestürzt ist. Sein Miniaturrequiem bilden die "fehlenden" Schlusstakte der Passacaglia, in denen wieder die klagende Bratsche erklingt, doch diesmal in Verbindung mit der kalten Verzierung der Celesta, ein Klang ohne Leben, tot wie auch der Lehrjungsunge.

Man kann in jedem der Zwischenspiele etwas Vergleichbares finden; auf jeden Fall müssen aber die Glocken im dritten erwähnt werden, das zu Ellens Arie "Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight" (Glitzernde Wellen und gleißendes Sonnenlicht) überleitet, gerichtet an den für immer schweigenden Jungen. Aber hier gibt es durchaus nicht nur Glitzern und Sonnenlicht. Die Glocken werden in Britten Darbietung sehr machtvoll evokiert; aber während sie erklingen, wer-

den sie zunehmend bedrohlicher (noch einmal die Tuba!), nicht mehr feierlich, sondern eher an ein Begräbnis gemahnend: Andeutungen an den Tod. In diesem Gewand verstärken die Kirchenglocken (denn um diese handelt es sich) Britten's sarkastische Behandlung der christlichen Liturgie (eine Gemeinde singt etwas, an das sie nicht glaubt), die ein so auffallender Zug der ersten Szene des 2. Aktes ist.

Man könnte endlos weiter Bemerkungen zu Britten's Interpretation seiner Oper anbringen. Aber es gibt einen weiteren bemerkenswerten Aspekt dieser Aufnahme, der nicht übergangen werden sollte. Beim Dirigieren der vorbereitenden Proben hatte er beträchtliche Schmerzen infolge einer Schulterverrenkung beim Rasieren! Er musste um Hilfe bitten und wandte sich an niemand anderen als Reginald Goodall, eben jenen Dirigenten, der die Uraufführung des Werkes dreizehn Jahre zuvor geleitet hatte und später ein berühmter Wagnerianer werden sollte. Goodall sprang ein, und der Komponist dankte ihm in einem Brief vom 20. Dezember 1958:

Ich werde Ihre Freundlichkeit und Großzügigkeit nie vergessen, als Sie kamen, um mir bei der Aufnahme von *Peter Grimes* in den letzten Tagen zu helfen. Das war typisch für Sie — und ebenfalls typisch war die Art, wie Sie das Stück dirigiert haben — ohne jede Vorbereitung. Ich bin Ihnen äußerst dankbar.

Man kann davon ausgehen, dass die endgültige Version von Britten stammte; aber zweifellos hat auch Goodall mit seiner einmaligen Beziehung zu der Oper ihr seinen Stempel aufgedrückt. Dieses immer noch wenig bekannte und faszinierende historische Detail besagt, dass 1958 die zweifellos maßgebliche Interpretation des Komponisten in Tätigkeit (wenn auch in letzter Minute erfolgter) Zusammenarbeit mit dem Dirigenten stattfand, der am 7. Juni 1945 anlässlich der legendären Uraufführung der Oper in Sadler's Wells auf dem Podium stand. So wird Geschichte in mehr als einer Weise mit dieser unvergesslichen Aufnahme wiederbelebt: endlich einmal ist das Etikett "ein historisches Dokument" völlig zutreffend.

Übersetzung DECCA 2001
Christiane Frobenius

Donald Mitchell hat viel über Britten und Mahler geschrieben und veröffentlichte zahlreiche Bücher, wie Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on his Works (mit Hans Keller), Benjamin Britten: Pictures from a Life 1913–1976 (mit John Evans), Britten and Auden in the Thirties (die T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures von 1979), Benjamin Britten: Death in Venice und Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten. Er ist Kurator der Britten-Pears Foundation und Präsident des Britten Estate.

PROLOGUE

Interior of the Moot Hall, arranged as for a coroner's inquest. Coroner, Mr. Swallow, at table on dais, clerk at table below. A crowd of townspeople in the body of the hall is kept back by Hobson acting as constable. Mr. Swallow is the leading lawyer of the Borough and at the same time its Mayor and its Coroner. A man of unexceptionable career and talents, he nevertheless disturbs the burgesses by his air of a man with an arrière pensée.

Hobson (*shouts*)

1 Peter Grimes!

(Peter Grimes steps forward from among the crowd.)

Swallow (*reading*)

Peter Grimes, we are here to investigate the cause of death of your apprentice William Spode, whose body you brought ashore from your boat, "The Boy Billy," on the 26th ultimo. Do you wish to give evidence?

(Peter nods.)

Will you step into the box. Peter Grimes!
Take the oath! After me!
I swear by Almighty God.

Peter

"I swear by Almighty God."

Swallow

That the evidence I shall give.

Peter

"That the evidence I shall give."

Swallow

Shall be the truth.

Peter

"Shall be the truth."

Swallow

The whole truth and nothing but the truth.

Peter

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Swallow

Tell the court the story in your own words.
(Peter is silent.)

2 You sailed your boat round the coast with the intention of putting in to London. Why did you do this?

Peter

We'd caught a huge catch, too big to sell here.

Swallow

And the boy died on the way?

Peter

The wind turn'd against us, blew us off our course.
We ran out of drinking water.

Swallow

How long were you at sea?

Peter

Three days.

Swallow

What happen'd next?

Peter

He died lying there among the fish.

Swallow

What did you do?

Peter

Threw them all overboard, set sail for home.

Swallow

You mean you threw the fish overboard?
When you landed, did you call for help?

Peter

I called Ned Keene.

Swallow

The apothecary here?
(indicating Ned)
Was there anybody else called?

Peter

Somebody brought the parson.

Swallow

You mean the Rector, Mr. Horace Adams?

(The Rector steps forward. Swallow waves him back.)

All right, Mr. Adams.

(He turns back to Peter.)

Was there a certain amount of excitement?

Peter

Bob Boles started shouting.

Swallow

There was a scene in the village street, from which you were rescued by our landlady?

Peter

Yes. By Auntie.

Swallow

We don't call her that here!...
You then took to abusing a respectable lady?

(Peter glares.)

Answer me!...You shouted abuse at a certain person?

(Mrs. Sedley pushes forward. Mrs. Sedley is the widow of a retired factor of the East India Company and is known locally as "Mrs. Nabob." She is 65, self-assertive, inquisitive, unpopular.)

Mrs. Sedley

Say who! Say who! Say who!

Swallow

Mrs. Sedley here.

Peter *(fiercely)*

I don't like interferers!

(A slight hubbub among the spectators resolves itself into a chorus which is more like the confused muttering of a crowd than something fully articulate.)

Chorus of Townspeople

When women gossip the result is someone doesn't sleep at night!

Hobson *(shouting)*

Silence!

Swallow

Now tell me this.
Who help'd you carry the boy home?
The schoolmistress, the widow,
Mrs. Ellen Orford?

Women of the town

O when you pray you shut your eyes
and then can't tell the truth from lies!

Hobson *(shouting)*

Silence!

Swallow

Mrs. Orford, as the schoolmistress, the widow,
how did you come into this?

Ellen

I did what I could to help.

Swallow

Why should you help this kind of fellow,
callous, brutal, and coarse?

(to Grimes)

There's something here perhaps in your favour.
I am told you rescued the boy from drowning
in the March storms.

(Peter is silent.)

Have you something else to say?

No? Then I have.

- 3 Peter Grimes, I here advise you!
Do not get another boy apprentice.
Get a fisherman to help you, big enough
to stand up for himself. Our verdict is that
William Spode, your apprentice, died in
accidental circumstances. But that's the kind
of thing people are apt to remember.

Chorus of Townspeople

But when the crowner sits upon it,
who can dare to fix the guilt?

Hobson *(shouting)*

Silence! Silence!

*(Peter has stepped forward and is trying
to speak.)*

Peter

Your honour! Like ev'ry other fisherman
I have to hire an apprentice. I must have help!

Swallow

Then get a woman help you look after him.

Peter

That's what I want, but not yet!

Swallow

Why not?

Peter

Not till I've stopp'd people's mouths.

(The hubbub begins again.)

Swallow *(making a gesture of dismissal)*

Stand down! Clear the court! Stand down!

Peter

Stand down you say, you wash your hands.
The case goes on in people's minds.
The charges that no court has made
will be shouted at my head.

Then let me speak, let me stand trial,
bring the accusers into the hall.
Let me thrust into their mouths,
the truth itself, the simple truth.

Chorus of Townspeople

When women gossip, the result
is someone doesn't sleep at night!
But when the crowner sits upon it,
who can dare to fix the guilt?

Hobson

Clear the court!

*(Swallow rises with slow dignity. Everybody
stands up while he makes his ceremonial exit.
The crowd then begins to go out. Peter and
Ellen are left alone.)*

Peter

- 4 The truth... the pity... and the truth.

Ellen

Peter, come away!

Peter

Where the walls themselves
gossip of inquest!

Ellen

But we'll gossip, too,
and talk and rest...

Peter

While Peeping Toms
nod as you go.
You'll share the name
of outlaw, too!

Ellen

Peter, we shall restore your name,
warned by the new esteem
that you will find...

Peter

Until the Borough hate
poisons your mind.

Ellen

There'll be new shoals to catch,
life will be kind.

Peter

Ay! only of drowning ghosts!
Time will not forget,

the dead are witness
and fate is blind.

Ellen

Unclouded,
the hot sun
will spread his rays around.

Both

Your (my) voice out of the pain,
is like a hand
that I (you) can feel and know:
here is a friend.
(They walk off slowly as the curtain falls.)

5 Interlude I

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Street by the sea: Moot Hall exterior with its outside staircase, next door to which is "The Boar": Ned Keene's apothecary's shop is at the street corner. On the other side breakwaters run down to the sea. It is morning, before high tide, several days later. Two fishermen are turning the capstan, hauling in their boat. Prolonged cries as the boat is hauled ashore. Women come from mending nets to take the fish from other fishermen who now disembark. Captain Balstrode sits on the breakwater looking out to sea through his glass. Balstrode is a retired merchant sea-captain, shrewd as a travelled man should be, but with a general sympathy that makes him the favourite rentier of the whole Borough. He chews a plug of tobacco while he watches.

Chorus

Women and Fishermen

- 6** Oh, hang at open doors the net, the cork,
while squalid sea-dames at their mending work
welcome the hour when fishing through
the tide
the weary husband throws this freight aside.

Fishermen

O cold and wet and driven by the tide,
beat your tired arms against your tarry side.
Find rest in public bars where fiery gin
will aid the warmth that languishes within.

(Several fishermen cross to "The Boar" where Auntie stands in the doorway.)

Fisherman

Auntie!

Auntie

Come in, gentlemen, come in!

Boles

Her vats flow with poison'd gin.
(Boles the Methodist fisherman stands aside from all this dram drinking.)

Fisherman

Boles has gone Methody!

Auntie

A man should have hobbies to cheer his
private life!
(Fishermen go into "The Boar." Others remain with their wives at the nets and boats.)

Women's Chorus

Dabbling on shore half-naked sea-boys crowd,
swim round a ship, or swing upon a shroud.
Or in a boat purloin'd with paddles play
and grow familiar with the wat'ry way.

(While the second boat is being hauled in, boys are scrambling over the first.)

Balstrode

Shoo, you little barnacles!
Up your anchors! Hoist your sails! Shoo! Shoo!

(Balstrode chases them from the boat. A more respectable figure now begins, with much hat-raising, his morning progress down the High Street. He makes straight for "The Boar.")

Fisherman *(touching his cap)*

Dr. Crabbe.

Boles *(pointing as the swing door closes)*

He drinks! "Good Health" to all diseases!

Another Fisherman

Storm?

A few Fishermen

Storm?

(They shade their eyes looking out to sea.)

Balstrode *(glass to his eye)*

A long way out, sea-horses.
The wind is holding back the tide...
if it veers round, watch for your lives.

Chorus of Fishers

And if the spring-tide eats the land again
till e'en the cottages and cobbled walls
of fishermen
are billets for the thievish waves which take
as if in sleep, thieving for thieving's sake.

(The Rector comes down the High Street. He is followed as always by the Borough's second most famous rentier, the widow, Mrs. [Nabob] Sedley. From "The Boar" come the two "nieces" who give Auntie her nickname. They stand in front of the pub taking the morning sun. Ned Keene, seeing Mrs. Sedley, pops out of his shop door.)

Rector *(right and left)*

Good morning, good morning!

Nieces

Good morning!

Mrs. Sedley

Good morning, dear Rector!

Keene

Had Auntie no nieces we'd never respect her!

Swallow

Good morning, good morning!

Nieces

Good morning!

Mrs. Sedley

Good morning, your worship, Mr. Swallow!

Auntie *(to Keene)*

You jeer, but if they wink you're eager to follow!

(The Rector and Mrs. Sedley continue towards the church.)

Chorus of Women and Fishermen

For us sea-dwellers, this sea-birth can be death to our gardens of fertility.

Yet only such contemptuous spring-tide can tickle the virile impotence of man.

Keene *(shouts across to Auntie)*

I'm coming tonight to see your nieces!

Auntie *(dignified)*

The Boar is at its patron's service.

Boles

God's storm will drown your hot desires!

Balstrode

God stay the tide, or I shall share your fears.

Peter *(calling offstage)*

[7] Hi! Give us a hand!

Haul the boat!

Boles *(shouting back)*

Haul it yourself, Grimes!

Peter *(off)*

Hi! Somebody bring the rope!

(Nobody does. Presently he appears and takes the capstan rope himself and pulls it after him [off] to the boat. Then he returns. The fishermen and women turn their backs on him and slouch away awkwardly.)

Balstrode *(going to capstan)*

I'll give a hand, the tide is near the turn.

Keene

We'll drown the gossips in a tidal storm.

(Balstrode and Keene turn the capstan.)

Auntie *(at the door of "The Boar")*

Parsons may moralise and fools decide, but a good publican takes neither side.

Balstrode

O haul away, the tide is near the turn!

Keene

Man invented morals but tides have none.

Boles *(with arms akimbo, watching their labour)*

This lost soul of a fisherman must be

shunned by respectable society!

O let the captains hear, let the scholars learn:

shielding the sin, they share the people's scorn.

Auntie

I have my business. Let the preachers learn.

Hell may be fiery, but the pub won't burn!

Balstrode and Keene

The tide that floods will ebb,

the tide, the tide will turn.

(The boat is hauled up. Grimes appears.)

Keene

Grimes, you won't need help from now.

I've got a prentice for you.

Balstrode

A workhouse brat?

Keene

I called at the workhouse yesterday.

All you do now is fetch the boy.

We'll send the carter with a note.

He'll bring your bargain on his cart!

(He calls Hobson.)

Jim Hobson, we've a job for you!

Hobson *(entering)*

Cart's full, sir, more than I can do.

Keene

Listen, Jim, you'll go to the workhouse

and ask for Mr. Keene his purchase.

Bring him back to Grimes!

Hobson

Cart's full, sir. I have no room.

Keene

Hobson, you'll do what there is to be done!

(It is near enough to an argument to attract a crowd. Fishermen and women gather round. Boles takes his chance.)

Boles

Is this a Christian country?

Are pauper children so enslaved

that their bodies go for cash?

Keene

Hobson, will you do your job?

(Ellen Orford has come in. She is a widow of about 40. Her children have died, or grown up and gone away, and in her loneliness she has become the Borough schoolmistress. A hard life has not hardened her. It has made her the more charitable.)

Hobson

[8] I have to go from pub to pub, picking up parcels, standing about. My journey back is late at night, Mister, find some other way to bring your boy back.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

He's right! Dirty jobs!

Ellen

Carter! I'll mind your passenger.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

What! And be Grimes's messenger?

Ellen

Whatever you say, I'm not ashamed.

Somebody must do the job.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

You'll be Grimes's messenger! You!

Ellen

The carter goes from pub to pub,
picking up parcels, standing about.
The boy needs comfort late at night.
He needs a welcome on the road.
Coming here strange he'll be afraid.
I'll mind your passenger!

Keene

Mrs. Orford is talking sense.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

Ellen — you're leading us a dance,
fetching boys for Peter Grimes,
because the Borough is afraid,
you who help will share the blame!

Ellen

Whatever you say...

- 9 Let her among you without fault
cast the first stone.
And let the Pharisees and Sadducees
give way to none.
But whosoever feels his pride
humbled so deep,
there is no corner he can hide,
even in sleep!
Will have no trouble to find out
how a poor teacher
widow'd and lonely finds delight
in should'ring care.
(as she moves up the street)
Mr. Hobson, where's your cart?
I'm ready.

Hobson

Up here, ma'am. I can wait.

(The crowd stands round and watches. Some follow Ellen and Hobson. On the edge of the crowd are other activities.)

Mrs. Sedley *(whispers to Ned)*

Have you my pills?

Keene

I'm sorry, ma'am.

Mrs. Sedley

My sleeping draught?

Keene

The laudanum
is out of stock, and being brought
by Mr. Carrier Hobson's cart.
He's back tonight.

Mrs. Sedley

Good Lord! Good Lord!

Keene

Meet us both in the pub, "The Boar,"
Auntie's, we call it. It's quite safe.

Mrs. Sedley

I've never been in a pub in my life.

Keene

You'll come?

Mrs. Sedley

All right.

Keene

Tonight?

Mrs. Sedley

All right!

(She moves off up the street.)

Keene

If the old dear takes much more laudanum
she'll land herself one day in Bedlam!

Balstrode *(looks seaward through his glass)*

- 10 Look, the storm cone!
The wind veers
in from sea
at gale force.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

Look out for squalls.
It's veering
in from sea!
Look, the storm cone!
The wind veers in
at gale force.
Make your boat fast!
Shutter your windows!
And bring in all the nets!
Flooding, flooding
our seasonal fears.
Fasten your boats!
The spring-tide's here
with a gale behind.
Soloists *(variously)*
Now the flood tide
and the sea-horses
will gallop over

the eroded coast.

The wind veers
in from sea
at gale force.
Look, the storm cone!
A high tide coming
will eat the land.
A tide no breakwaters can withstand.

All

Look! The Storm come!
The wind veers
in from sea
at gale force.

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

Is there much to fear?

Keene

Only for the goods you're rich in!
It won't drown your conscience, it might flood
your kitchen.

Boles *(passionately)*

God has His ways which are not ours.
His high tide swallows up the shores.
Repent! Repent!

Chorus of Fishermen and Women

Look out for squalls, etc.

Keene

And keep your wife upstairs!

All

O tide that waits for no man,
spare our coasts!

(There is a general exeunt, mostly through the swing doors of "The Boar." Dr. Crabbe's hat blows away, is rescued for him by Ned Keene, who bows him into the pub. Finally only Peter and Balstrode are left, Peter gazing seaward, Balstrode hesitating at the pub door.)

Balstrode

11 And do you prefer the storm
to Auntie's parlour and the rum?

Peter

I live alone. The habit grows.

Balstrode

Grimes, since you're a lonely soul,
born to blocks and spars and ropes,
why not try the wider sea
with merchantman or privateer?

Peter

I am native, rooted here.

Balstrode

Rooted by what?

Peter

By familiar fields,
marsh and sand,
ordinary streets,
prevailing wind.

Balstrode

You'd slip these moorings if you had the mind.

Peter

By the shut faces
of the Borough clans,
and by the kindness
of a casual glance.

Balstrode

You'll find no comfort there!
When an urchin's quarrelsome
brawling at his little games,
mother stops him with a threat,
"You'll be sold to Peter Grimes!"

Peter

Selling me new apprentices,
children taught to be ashamed
of the legend on their faces:
"You've been sold to Peter Grimes!"

Balstrode

Then the Crowner sits to hint,
but not to mention crimes,
and publishes an open verdict
whispered about this "Peter Grimes."
Your boy was workhouse starved,
maybe you're not to blame he died.

Peter

Picture what that day was like
that evil day!
We strained into the wind,
heavily laden.
We plunged into the wave's
shuddering challenge.
Then the sea rose to a storm
over the gunwales,

and the boy's silent reproach
turned to illness.
Then home
among fishing nets
alone, alone, alone
with a childish death.

Balstrode

This storm is useful. You can speak your mind
and never mind the Borough comment'ry.
There is more grandeur in a gale of wind
to free confession, set a conscience free.

Peter

They listen to money
these Borough gossips.
I have my visions,
fiery visions.
They call me dreamer,
they scoff at my dreams
and my ambition.
But I know a way
to answer the Borough.
I'll win them over.

Balstrode

With the new prentice?

Peter

We'll sail together.
These Borough gossips
listen to money,
only to money.
I'll fish the sea dry,
sell the good catches.
That wealthy merchant

Grimes, will set up
household and shop,
you will all see it!
I'll marry Ellen!

Balstrode

Man, go and ask her,
without your booty.
She'll have you now.

Peter

No, not for pity!

Balstrode

Then the old tragedy
is in store.
New start with new prentice
just as before.

Peter

What Peter Grimes decides
is his affair.

Are you my conscience?

Balstrode

You fool, man, you fool!
New start with new prentice just as before!

*(The wind has risen. Balstrode is shouting
above it. Peter faces him angrily.)*

Balstrode

! Might as well
! try shout the storm down,
! as to tell the obvious truth!
!

Peter
Take your advice,
put it where your money is.

Balstrode
The storm is here, o come away!

Peter
The storm is here and I shall stay!

(The storm is rising. Auntie comes out of "The Boar" to fasten the shutters, in front of the windows. Balstrode goes to help her. He looks back towards Peter, then goes into the pub.)

Peter
12 What harbour shelters peace,
away from tidal waves, away from storms?
What harbour can embrace
terrors and tragedies?
With her there'll be no quarrels,
with her the mood will stay,
a harbour ever more
where night is turned to day.

(The wind rises. He stands a moment as if leaning against the wind.)

(Curtain.)

13 Interlude II

Scene 2
Interior of "The Boar," typical main room of a country pub. No bar. Upright settles, tables, log fire. When the curtain rises Auntie is admitting Mrs. Sedley. The gale has risen to hurricane

force and Auntie holds the door with difficulty against the wind which rattles the windows and howls in the chimney. They both push the door closed.

Auntie
14 Past time to close!

Mrs. Sedley
He said half-past ten.

Auntie
Who?

Mrs. Sedley
Mr. Keene.

Auntie
Him and his women!

Mrs. Sedley
You referring to me?

Auntie
Not at all, not at all!
What do you want?

Mrs. Sedley
Room from the storm.

Auntie
That is the sort of weak politeness
makes a publican lose her clients.
Keep in the corner out of sight.

(Balstrode and a Fisherman enter. They struggle with the door.)

Balstrode
Phew, that's a bitch of a gale all right!

Auntie *(nods her head towards Mrs. Sedley)*
Sh-h-h.

Balstrode
Sorry. I didn't see you, Missis.
You'll give the regulars a surprise.

Auntie
She's meeting Ned.

Balstrode
Which Ned?

Auntie
The quack! He's looking after her heart attack.

Balstrode
Bring us a pint.

Auntie
It's closing time.

Balstrode
You fearful old female, why should you mind?

Auntie
The storm!

(Bob Boles and other fishermen enter. The wind howls through the door and again there is difficulty in closing it.)

Boles
Did you hear the tide
has broken over the Northern Road?
(He leaves the door open too long with disastrous consequences. A sudden gust howls through the door, the shutters of the window fly open, a pane blows in.)

Balstrode *(shouts)*
Get those shutters!

Auntie *(screams)*
O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode
You fearful old female, why do you
leave your windows naked?

Auntie
O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode
Better strip a niece or two
and clamp your shutters!

(The two "nieces" run in. They are young, pretty enough though a little worn, conscious that they are the chief attractions of "The Boar." At the moment they are in mild hysterics, having run downstairs in their night clothes, though with their unusual instinct for precaution they have found time to don each a wrap. It is not clear whether they are sisters, friends, or simply colleagues: but they behave like twins, as though each has only half a personality, and they cling together always to sustain their self-esteem.)

Nieces

Oo! Oo!
It's blown our bedroom windows in.
Oo! we'll all be drowned.

Balstrode

Perhaps in gin!

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if it didn't howl.
It gets on my nerves!

Balstrode

D'you think we should stop our storm for such
as you?
Coming all over palpitations! Oo! Oo!
Auntie, get some new relations!

Auntie (*taking it ill*)

Loud man, I never did have time
for the kind of creature who spits in his wine!
A joke's a joke and fun is fun!
But say your grace and be polite
for all that we have done.

Nieces

[For his peace of mind.

Mrs. Sedley

[This is no place for me!

Auntie

Loud man, you're glad enough to be
playing your cards in our company.
A joke's a joke and fun is fun!
But say your grace and be polite
for all that we have done.

Nieces

[For his peace of mind.

Mrs. Sedley

[This is no place for me!

Auntie

Loud man!

*(Two fishermen enter. Usual struggle with
the door.)*

Fisherman

There's been a landslide up the coast!

Boles (*rising unsteadily*)

I'm drunk. Drunk!

Balstrode

You're a Methody wastrel!

Boles (*staggers to one of the nieces*)

Is this a niece of yours?

Auntie

That's so.

Boles

Who's her father?

Auntie

Who wants to know?

Boles

I want to pay my best respects
to the beauty and misery of her sex.

Balstrode

Old Methody, you'd better tune
your piety to another hymn!

Boles

I want her!

Balstrode

Sh-h-h!

Boles

I want her!

Auntie (*cold*)

Turn that man out.

Balstrode

He's the local preacher.
He's lost the way of carrying liquor.
He means no harm.

Boles

No, I mean love!

Balstrode

Come on, boy!

*(Boles hits him. Mrs. Sedley screams.
Balstrode quietly overpowers Boles and sits
him in a chair.)*

Balstrode

^[15] We live and let live, and look
we keep our hands to ourselves.

*(Boles struggles to his feet. Balstrode sits him
down again, laying the law down.)*

Pub conversation should depend
on this eternal moral;
So long as satire don't descend
to fisticuff or quarrel.
We live and let live, and look
we keep our hands to ourselves.

Chorus of Townspeople and Fishermen

We live and let live, and look
we keep our hands to ourselves.

Balstrode

We sit and drink the evening through
not deigning to devote a thought
to the daily cud we chew
but buying drinks by rota!

All

We live and let live, and look!...

*(The door opens. The struggle with the
wind is worse than before as Ned Keene
gets through.)*

Keene

^[16] Have you heard? The cliff is down
up by Grimes's hut?

Auntie

Where is he?

Mrs. Sedley

Thank God you've come!

Keene

You won't blow away.

Mrs. Sedley

The carter's over half an hour late!

Balstrode

He'll be later still: the road's under flood.

Mrs. Sedley

I can't stay longer. I refuse!

Keene

You'll have to stay if you want your pills.

Mrs. Sedley

With drunken females and in brawls!

Keene

They're Auntie's nieces, that's what they are,
and better than you for kissing, ma!
Mind that door!

**Balstrode then Chorus of Townspeople
and Fishermen**

Mind that door!

(The door opens again. Peter Grimes has come in. Unlike the rest he wears no oilskins. His hair looks wild. He advances into the room, shaking off the raindrops from his hair. Mrs. Sedley faints. Ned Keene catches her as she falls.)

Keene

Get the brandy, Aunt!

Auntie

Who'll pay?

Keene

Her! I'll charge her for it.

**Nieces and Chorus of Townspeople and
Fishermen**

Talk of the devil and there he is.
And a devil he is, a devil he is!
Grimes is waiting his apprentice.

(Peter sits down. The others move away from that side of the table)

Keene

This widow's as strong as
any two fishermen I have met.
Everybody's very quiet!

(No-one answers. Silence is broken by Peter, as if thinking aloud.)

Peter

¹⁷ Now the Great Bear and Pleiades
where earth moves
are drawing up the clouds
of human grief
breathing solemnity in the deep night.
Who can decipher
in storm or starlight
the written character
of a friendly fate —
as the sky turns, the world for us to change?
But if the horoscope's
bewildering like a flashing turmoil
of a shoal of herring
who can turn skies back and begin again?

(Silence again. Then muttering in undertones.)

Chorus of Townspeople and Fishermen

He's mad or drunk!
Why's that man here?

Nieces

His song alone would sour the beer.

Chorus of Townspeople and Fishermen

His temper's up.
O chuck him out!

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if he didn't howl!

Chorus of Townspeople and Fishermen

He looks as if he's nearly drowned.

Boles *(staggering up to Grimes)*

You've sold your soul, Grimes!

Balstrode

Come away!

Boles

Satan's got no hold on me.

Balstrode

Leave him alone, you drunkard!
(Goes to get hold of Boles.)

Boles

I'll hold the Gospel light before
the cataract that blinds his eyes.

Peter *(as the drunk stumbles up to him)*

Get out!

(Grimes thrusts Boles aside roughly and turns away.)

Boles

His exercise is not with men but killing boys!

(Boles picks up a bottle and is about to bring it down on Grimes's head when Balstrode knocks it out of his hand and it crashes in fragments on the floor.)

Auntie

For God's sake, help me keep the peace.
D'you want me up at the next assize?

Balstrode

For peace sake, someone start a song.

Keene

¹⁸ Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and
You Know has gone fishing and
found them a shoal.

Auntie

That's right, Ned!

Keene and Auntie then Others

Old Joe has gone, *etc.*

Pull them in han'fuls,
and in canfuls,
and in panfuls.
Bring them in sweetly,
gut them completely,
pack them up neatly,
sell them discreetly,
oh, haul a-way!

(Peter comes into the round, upsetting its course.)

Peter

When I had gone fishing
when He had gone fishing
when You Know'd gone fishing
we found us Davy Jones.
Bring him in with horror!
Bring him in with terror!
And bring him in with sorrow!
Oh, haul a-way.

(The others recover.)

All

Old Joe has gone fishing, etc.

(At the climax of the round the door opens to admit Ellen Orford, the boy, and the carrier. All three are soaking, muddy, and bedraggled.)

Hobson

19 The bridge is down, we half swam over.

Keene

And your cart? Is it seaworthy?

(The women go to Ellen and the boy. Auntie fusses over them.)

Ellen

We're chilled to the bone.

Boles *(to Ellen)*

Serves you right, woman.

Auntie

My dear, there's brandy and hot water to spare.

Nieces

Let's look at the boy.

Ellen *(rising)*

Let him be.

Nieces *(admiring)*

Nice sweet thing!

Ellen *(protecting him)*

Not for such as you.

Peter

Let's go. You ready?

Auntie

Let them warm up, they've been half drowned.

Peter

Time to get off.

Auntie

Your hut's washed away.

Peter

Only the cliff. Young prentice, come!

(The boy hesitates, Ellen leads him to Peter.)

Ellen

Goodbye, my dear, God bless you.
Peter will take you home.

All

Home! Do you call that home!

(Peter takes the boy out the door into the howling storm.)

(Curtain.)

ACT TWO

20 Interlude III

Scene 1

Scene as in Act One. The street, some weeks later. A fine sunny morning with church bells ringing. Ellen and the boy, John, enter. Ellen is carrying a work-basket. She sits down between a boat and a breakwater and takes her knitting from the basket. One or two late-comers cross and hurry into the church.

Ellen

21 Glitter of waves
and glitter of sunlight
bid us rejoice
and lift our hearts on high.
Man alone
has a soul to save,
and goes to church
to worship on a Sunday.
Shall we not go to church this Sunday
but do our knitting by the sea?
I'll do the work, you talk.

(In church the hymn starts.)

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*

'Now that the daylight fills the sky
'we lift our hearts to God on high
'that he in all we do or say
'would keep us free from harm to-day.
'
'

Ellen

'Nothing to tell me,

;nothing to say? Then shall I
 ;tell you what your life was like?
 ;See if I'm right. I think
 ;you liked your workhouse with its grave,
 ;empty look. Perhaps you weren't
 ;so unhappy in your loneliness?
 ;When first I started teaching
 ;the life at school to me
 ;seem'd bleak and empty...
 ;But soon I found a way of knowing children,
 ;found the woes of little people
 ;hurt more, but are more simple.
 ;
 ;*(She goes on with her work. John says*
 ;*nothing.)*

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 ;May he restrain our tongues from strife
 ;shield from anger's din our life
 ;and guard with watchful care our eyes
 ;from earth's absorbing vanities.
 ;So we, when this day's work is done
 ;and shades of night return once more. Amen!
 ;

Ellen
 ;John, you may have heard the stories
 ;of the prentice Peter had before.
 ;But when you came,
 ;I said: Now this is where we
 ;make a new start.
 ;Ev'ry day I pray it may be so.

Rector *(off)*
 Wherefore, I pray and beseech you, as many
 as are here present, to accompany me with
 a pure heart and humble voice, saying
 after me...

Rector and Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 Almighty and most merciful Father, we have
 erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost
 sheep. And we have done these things which
 we ought not to have done. And grant, o most
 merciful Father...

Ellen
 There's a tear in your coat. Was that done
 before you came? Badly torn.
 That was done recently.
 Take your hand away.
 Your neck, is it?
 John, what are you trying to hide?

Rector *(off)*
 O Lord, open Thou our lips.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 And our mouth shall show forth Thy praise.

Rector *(off)*
 O God, make speed to save us.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 O Lord, make haste to help us.

(Ellen undoes the neck of his shirt.)

Ellen
 A bruise... Well, it's begun!

Rector *(off)*
 Glory be to the Father and to the Son.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 And to the Holy Ghost.

Rector *(off)*
 As it was in the beginning, is now...

Ellen
 Child, you're not too young to know
 where roots of sorrow are.
 Innocent you've learn'd how near
 life is to torture!

Rector *(off)*
 Praise ye the Lord!

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 The Lord's name be praised.

Ellen
 22 Let this be a holiday,
 full of peace and quietness
 while the treason of the waves
 glitters like love.

Storm and all its terrors are
 nothing to the heart's despair.
 After the storm will come a sleep
 like oceans deep.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.
 O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord.
 O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord.
 Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

(Peter Grimes enters.)

;O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord.
 ;O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord.

;O ye Lightnings and Clouds, bless ye the Lord.
 ;Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Peter
 Come boy!

Ellen
 Peter, what for?

Peter
 I've seen a shoal. I need his help.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 O ye Wells, bless ye the Lord.
 O ye Seas and Floods, bless the Lord.
 O ye Whales and all that move in the waters.
 Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Ellen
 But if there were then all the boats
 would fast be launching.

Peter
 I can see the shoals
 to which the rest are blind.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 O all ye Fowls of the air, bless ye the Lord.
 O all ye Beasts and Cattle, bless ye the Lord.
 O ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord.
 Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.

Ellen
 This is a Sunday, his day of rest!

Peter
 'This is whatever day I say it is!
 'Come boy!

Ellen
 'You and John have fished all week,
 'night and day without a break,
 'painting boat, mending nets, cleaning fish.
 'Now let him rest.

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 'O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.
 'O ye holy and humble, bless ye the Lord.
 'Ananias, Azarias, Misael,
 'bless ye the Lord.
 'Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.
 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son,
 'and to the Holy Ghost.
 'As it was in the beginning, is now, and
 'ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Peter
 'Come boy!

Ellen
 'But your bargain...

Peter
 'My bargain?

Ellen
 'His weekly rest.

Peter
 'He works for me, leave him alone, he's mine!

Ellen
 'Hush, Peter!

23 This unrelenting work,
 this grey, unresting industry,
 what aim, what future,
 what peace will your hard profits buy?

Peter
 Buy us a home, buy us respect
 and buy us freedom from pain
 of grinning at gossip's tales.
 Believe in me, we shall be free!

Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
 I believe in God the Father Almighty,
 Maker of heaven and earth,
 and in Jesus Christ His only Son,
 our Lord, who was conceived...

Ellen
 Peter, tell me one thing,
 where the youngster got that ugly bruise?

Peter
 Out of the hurly burly!

Ellen
 O your ways are hard
 and rough beyond his days!
 Peter, were we right in what we planned
 to do? Were we right, were we right?

Peter
 Take away your hand!
 My only hope depends on you.
 If you take it away, what's left?

Ellen
 Were we mistaken when we schemed
 to solve your life by lonely toil?

Peter
 Wrong to plan!
 Wrong to try!
 Wrong to live!
 Right to die!

Ellen
 Were we mistaken when we dreamed
 'that we'd come through and all be well?

Peter
 'Wrong to struggle!
 'Wrong to hope!
 'Then the Borough's
 'right again!

Ellen
 Peter! You cannot buy your peace.
 You'll never stop the gossips' talk
 with all the fish from out the sea.
 We were mistaken to have dreamed...
 Peter! We've failed, we've failed!

*(Peter cries out as if in agony. Then strikes her.
 The basket falls.)*

Chorus of Townspeople
 Amen!

Peter
 So be it! And God have mercy upon me!

*(The boy runs from him. Peter follows. Ellen
 goes out the other way, weeping. Behind
 closed doors and half-open windows
 neighbours have been watching. Three
 now emerge. First Auntie, then Ned Keene,
 finally Boles.)*

Auntie
24 Fool to let it come to this!
 Wasting pity, squand'ring tears.

Keene
 See the glitter in his eyes!
 Grimes is at his exercise!

Boles
 What he fears is that the Lord
 follows with a flaming sword!

Auntie
 You see all thro' crazy eyes...

All
 ... Grimes is at his exercise!

Boles
 Where's the pastor of this flock?
 Where's the guardian shepherd's hook?

All three
 Parson, lawyer, all at prayers!

*(After the Benediction in church, the
 congregation emerges.)*

Now the church parade begins.
 Fresh beginning for fresh sins.
 Ogling with a pious gaze,
 each one's at his exercise.

(Doctor Crabbe comes first.)

Auntie
 Doctor!

Keene

Leave him out of it!

Mrs. Sedley

What is it?

Keene

Private business!

Mrs. Sedley

I heard two voices during psalms.
One was Grimes, and one more calm.

Boles

While you worshipped idols there,
the Devil had his Sabbath here.

Mrs. Sedley

Maltreating that poor boy again!

Balstrode

Grimes is weatherwise and skilled
in the practice of his trade.
Let him be. Let us forget
what slander can invent.

Chorus of Townspeople

What is it?

Auntie, Boles and Keene

What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

*(As people come out two by two, they
circulate the village green singing their
couplets as they reach the centre. First come
Swallow and a fellow lawyer.)*

Chorus of Townspeople

[25] What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

A Lawyer

Dullards build their self-esteem
by inventing cruelties.

Swallow

Even so, the law restrains
too impetuous enterprise.

Fisherwoman

Fishing is a lonely trade,
single men have much to bear.

Nieces

If a man's work cannot be made decent,
let him stay ashore.

Rector

My flock — ah, what a weight is this,
my burden pastoral.

Mrs. Sedley

But what a dang'rous faith is this
that gives souls equality!

*(Balstrode pauses by Keene as he walks
round.)*

Balstrode

When the Borough gossip starts
somebody will suffer.

Chorus of Townspeople

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.
Grimes! Grimes!

*(During the hubbub Boles climbs a little way up
the steps of the Moot Hall. Keene tries to stop
him.)*

Boles

[26] People!... No! I will speak!...
This thing concerns you all.

Chorus of Townspeople

(crowding round Boles)
Whoever's guilty gets the rap.

Balstrode

Tub-thumping.

Boles

This prentice system's
uncivilised and unchristian.

Balstrode

Something of the sort befits
brats conceived outside the sheets.

Chorus of Townspeople

The Borough keeps its standards up.

Boles

Where's the parson in his black?
Is he here or is he not
to guide a sinful, straying flock?

Chorus of Townspeople

Where? Where's the parson?

Rector

Is it my business?

Boles

Your business? To ignore
growing at your door
evils, like your fancy flowers?

Chorus of Townspeople

Evils!

Rector

Calm now! Tell me what it is.

*(Ellen comes in. She is met by Auntie who has
picked up Ellen's abandoned basket and its
contents.)*

Auntie

Ellen dear, see I've gather'd
all your things. Come rest inside!

Boles and Chorus of Townspeople

She can tell you, Ellen Orford.

Chorus of Townspeople

Ellen Orford!

Boles

She help'd him in his cruel games.

Chorus of Townspeople

She help'd him!

Rector *(holding his hand up for silence)*

Ellen, please!

Ellen

What am I to do?

Boles and Chorus of Townspeople

Speak out in the name of the Lord!

Ellen

[27] We plann'd that their lives
should have a new start,
that I, as a friend could
make the plan work
by bringing comfort where
their lives were stark.

Rector

You plann'd to be worldly-wise
but your souls were dark.

Ellen

We plann'd this time to
care for the boy...

Mrs. Sedley

O little care you for the prentice
or his welfare!

Ellen

... To save him from danger
and hardship sore...

Boles

Call it danger, call it harship
or plain murder!

Ellen

...And mending his clothes and giving him
regular meals.

Keene

But thanks to flinty hearts
e'en quacks can make a profit!

Swallow

'You planned to heal sick souls
'with bodily care!

Nieces

'Perhaps his clothes you mended
'but you work his bones bare!

Auntie

'You meant just to be kind
'and avert fear!

Balstrode

'You interfering gossips,
'this is not your business!

Ellen

'O pity those who try to bring
'a shadow'd life into the sun.

Hobson

'Pity the boy!

Ellen, Auntie and Balstrode

'O hard hearts!

Chorus

Who lets us down must take the rap!
The Borough keeps its standards up.

All (except Ellen, Auntie and Balstrode)

Ha-ha! Tried to be kind!
Murder!

Ha-ha! Tried to be kind and to help!
Murder!

Rector

[28] Swallow! Shall we go and see Grimes
in his hut?

Swallow

Popular feeling's rising.

Rector

Balstrode, I'd like you to come.

Balstrode

I warn you, we shall waste our time.

Rector

I'd like your presence just the same.

Mrs. Sedley

Little do the suspects know,
I've the evidence. I've a clue.

Nieces, Keene, Hobson and Chorus of Townspeople

Now we will find out the worst!

Swallow (to the Nieces)

No ragtail, no bobtail if you please!

Boles (pushes the Nieces away)

Back to the gutter — you keep out of this.

Rector

Only the men, the women stay!

Swallow

Carter Hobson, fetch the drum.
Summon the Borough to Grimes's hut.

Mrs. Sedley, Boles, Rector, Keene, Chorus of Townspeople

To Grimes's hut!
To Grimes's hut!

*(Swallow and the Rector lead the way.
Balstrode stays hesitating.)*

Mrs Sedley, Boles, Rector, Keene, Swallow, Chorus of Townspeople

[29] Now is gossip put on trial,
now the rumours either fail
or are shouted in the wind,
sweeping furious thro' the land.
Now the liars shiver, for
now if they've cheated we shall know!
We shall strike and strike to kill
at the slander or the sin!

*(Ellen motions to Balstrode to follow the
procession.)*

Now the whisperers stand out
now confronted by the fact,
Bring the branding iron and knife:
what's done now is done for life.
Now...

(Auntie, the Nieces and Ellen remain.)

Nieces

[30] From the gutter, why should we
trouble at their ribaldries?

Auntie

And shall we be ashamed because
we comfort men from ugliness?

All

Do we smile or do we weep
or wait quietly till they sleep?

Auntie

When in storm they shelter here
and we smoothe their fears away.

Nieces

We know they'll whistle their good-byes
next fine day and put to sea.

Ellen

On the manly calendar
we only mark heroic days.

All

Do we smile or do we weep
or wait quietly till they sleep?

Ellen

They are children when they weep,
we are mothers when they strive.
Schooling our own hearts to keep
the bitter treasure of their love.

All

Do we smile or do we weep
or wait quietly till they sleep?

(Curtain.)

31 Interlude IV *(Passacaglia)*

Scene 2

Grimes's hut is an upturned boat. It is on the whole shipshape, though bare and forbidding. Ropes coiled, nets, kegs, and casks furnish the place. It is lighted by a skylight. There are two doors, one (back center) opens on the cliff, the other, downstage, opens on the road. The boy staggers into the room as if thrust from behind. Peter follows, in a towering rage. He pulls down the boy's fishing clothes which were neatly stacked on a shelf.

Peter

32 Go there! Here's your sea boots.
Take those bright and fancy buckles off your feet.
There's your oilskin and sou'wester.
Stir your pins, we must get ready!
There's the jersey that she knitted,
with the anchor that she patterned.
(He throws the clothes to the boy. They fall on the floor around him.)
I'll tear the collar off your neck.

(The boy is crying silently. Peter shakes his shoulder.)

Steady! Don't take fright, boy! Stop!
(Peter opens the cliff-side door and looks out.)
Look. Now is our chance!
The whole sea's boiling! Get the nets!
Come, boy!
They listen to money

these Boro' gossips,
listen to money,
only to money.
I'll fish the sea dry,
flood the market.
Now is our chance to get a good catch,
get money to choke
down rumour's throat!
I will set up
with house and home and shop.
I'll marry Ellen.
I'll...
(He turns to see the boy still sitting on the rope coil, weeping. He tears off his coat and throws the jersey at him.)
Coat off! Jersey on!
My boy, we're going to sea!
(He gives the boy a shove, which knocks him over; he lies sobbing miserably.)
In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home
warm in my heart and in a golden calm,
where there'll be no more fear and no
more storm.

And she will soon forget her schoolhouse ways
forget the labour of those weary days,
wrapp'd round in kindness like September haze.

The learned at their books have no more store
of wisdom than we'd close behind our door.
Compar'd with us the rich man would be poor.

I've seen in stars the life that we might share:
fruit in the garden, children by the shore,
a whiten'd doorstep, and a woman's care.

But dreaming builds what dreaming can disown.
Dead fingers stretch themselves to tear it down.
I hear those voices that will not be drowned.

Calling, there is no stone
in earth's thickness to make a home,
that you can build with and remain alone.

(Hobson's drum can be heard in the distance. Peter doesn't notice.)

Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut.
His eyes are on me as they were that evil day,
in harbour still and deep.

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*

33 Now!... Now!...

(Peter goes to the street door and looks out.)

Peter

There's an odd procession here.
Parson and Swallow coming near.
Wait! You've been talking!
You and that bitch were gossiping.
What lies have you been telling?
The Borough's climbing up the hill
to get me. Me! Oh, I'm not scared.
I'll send them off with a flea in their ear.
I'll show them. Grimes ahoy!

Grimes ahoy!
Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*
...Or are shouted in the wind,
weeping furious thro' the land.
Now!

Peter

You sit there watching me
and you're the cause of everything.
Your eyes, like his, are watching me
with an idiot's drooling gaze!

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*

... Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife,
what's done now is done for life!

Peter

Will you move
or must I make you dance!
Step boldly! For here's the way we go to sea,
down the cliff to find that shoal
that's boiling in the sea!

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*

Now the liars shiver, for
now if they've cheated we shall know.
We shall strike and strike to kill
at the slander or the sin.

(The boy climbs through the cliff door.)

Peter

Careful, or you'll break your neck!
Down the cliff-side to the deck!
I'll pitch the stuff down. Come on!...
Now, shut your eyes and down you go!

Boles, Rector, Swallow, Keene, Chorus of Townspeople *(off)*

Now!

(There is a knocking at the other door. Peter turns towards it, then retreats. Meanwhile the boy climbs out. While Peter is between the two doors the boy screams and falls. Peter runs to the cliff door, feels for his grip, and then swings after him. The cliff-side door is open. The street door still resounds with the Rector's knock. Then it opens and the Rector puts his head round the door.)

Rector

34 Peter Grimes! Nobody here?

Swallow

What about the other door?

(They go and look out.)

Rector

Was this a recent landslide?

Swallow

Yes.

Rector

It makes almost a precipice.
How deep?

Swallow

Say forty feet.

Rector

Dangerous to leave the door open!

Keene

He used to keep his boat down there.
Maybe they've both gone fishing.

Rector

Yet his hut is reasonably kept.
Here's order, here's skill.

Swallow

The whole affair gives Boro' talk its,
shall I say, quietus? Here we come pell-mell,
expecting to find out we know not what.
But all we find is a neat and empty hut.
Gentlemen, take this to your wives:
less interference in our private lives.

Rector

There's no point certainly in staying here,
and will the last to go please close the door.

(They all leave except Balstrode, who hesitates, looks round the hut, sees the boy's Sunday clothes lying around, examines them, then goes to the path door to shut it. He goes up to the cliff-side door, looks out, and hurriedly climbs down the way Peter and the boy went. Curtain.)

ACT THREE

35 Interlude V

Scene 1

Scene as in Act One, a few days later. It is a summer evening. One of the season's subscription dances is taking place in the Moot Hall, which is brightly lit and from which we can hear the band playing. "The Boar" too is brightly lit and, there is a regular passage — of the males, at any rate — between the Moot Hall and the inn. There is a squeal and the First Niece scampers down the exterior staircase of the Moot Hall closely followed by Swallow. A Barn Dance is being played in the Moot Hall.

Swallow *(to the First Niece)*

36 Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll seal the deed and take no fee;
my signature, your graceful mark
are witness'd by the abetting dark.

(The Second Niece joins the First arm in arm.)

Both Nieces

Together we are safe
as any wedded wife
for safety in number lies.
A man is always lighter,
his conversation brighter,
provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll call it real property.

Your sister shan't insist upon
her stay of execution.

Nieces

Save us from lonely men,
they're like a broody hen
with habits but with no ideas.
But in their choice of pleasures
they show their coloured feathers,
provided that the tête-à-tête's in threes.

Swallow

I shall take steps to change her mind;
she has first option on my love.
If my appeal should be ignored
I'll take it to the House of Lords!

Nieces

O pairing's all to blame
for awkwardness and shame,
and all these manly sighs and tears,
which wouldn't be expended
if people condescended
always to have their tête-à-tête's in threes!

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
we'll make an absolute decree
of quiet enjoyment which you'll bless
by sending sister somewhere else!

Second Niece

Ned Keene is chasing me, gives me no peace!

Swallow

He went to The Boar to have a glass.
Sister and I will join him there.

If you don't want Ned you'd better stay here.
(He opens the inn door.)

First Niece *(aside to Swallow)*

They're all watching. I must wait
till Auntie's turned her back.
*(She runs away to join her sister and leaves
Swallow holding the door open.)*

Swallow

[37] Pah!

*(He goes into "The Boar" alone. The sisters are
halfway upstairs when Ned Keene comes out
of the Moot Hall at the top of the stairs. They
fly, giggling, and hide behind one of the boats
on the shore.)*

Keene *(calling after them)*

Ahoy!

*(He is halfway to their hiding-place when
Mrs. Sedley stops him. A slow Waltz starts
from the Moot Hall.)*

Mrs. Sedley

Mr. Keene! Can you spare a moment?
I've something to say that's more than urgent!
About Peter Grimes and that boy!
Neither of them was seen yesterday.
It's more than suspicion now, it's fact!
The boy's disappeared.

Keene

Do you expect me to act
like a Bow Street runner or a constable?

Mrs. Sedley

At least you can trouble to hear
what I've got to say!
For two days I've kept my eyes open;
for two days I've said nothing.
Only watch'd and taken notes,
piec'd clue to clue, and bit by bit
reconstructed all the crime.
Everything points to Peter Grimes:
he is the murderer!

Keene

Old woman, you're far too ready
to yell "Blue murder"!
If people poke their noses into others'
business —
No! They won't get me to help them.
They'll find there's merry hell to pay!
You just tell me where's the body?

Mrs. Sedley

In the sea the prentice lies
whom nobody has seen for days!
Murder most foul it is,
eerie I find it.
My skin's a prickly heat,
blood cold behind it!
In midnight's loneliness
and thrilling quiet
the history I trace,
the stifling secret.
Murder most foul it is,
and I'll declare it!

Keene

Are you mad old woman,
or is it too much laudanum?

Mrs. Sedley

Has Peter Grimes been seen?

Keene

He's away.

Mrs. Sedley

And the boy?

Keene

They're fishing, likely.

Mrs. Sedley

Has his boat been seen?

Keene

Why should it?

Mrs. Sedley

His hut's abandoned.

Keene

I'm dry. Good night.

*(The Waltz ends. He breaks away from her
grasp, goes into "The Boar," and bangs the
door after him. Dr. Crabbe, the Rector, and
other burgesses emerge from "The Boar." Mrs.
Sedley retires into the shadow of the boats. A
hornpipe starts from the Moot Hall.)*

First Burgess

[38] Come along, Doctor!
(indicating "The Boar")
We're not wanted here, we oldsters.

Burgesses (*variously*)

Good night! It's time for bed.
Good night! Good sirs, good night!
Good night! Good people, good night!

Rector

I look'd in a moment, the company's gay,
with pretty young women and youths on
the spree,
so parched like my roses, but now the sun's
down
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine!

Burgesses

Good night! Good night!
Good night, good people, good night!

Rector

Good night, Dr. Crabbe, all good friends good
night.
Don't let the ladies keep company too late!
My love to the maidens, wish luck to the men!
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine!

(They go out waving.)

Burgesses

Good night! Good night!
Good night, good people, good night!

*(The hornpipe fades out. Mrs. Sedley, still in
the boat shadow, goes on with her brooding.)*

Mrs. Sedley

Crime, which my hobby is
sweetens my thinking;
men who can breach the peace
and kill convention —

so many guilty ghosts,
with stealthy body,
trouble my midnight thoughts...

*(Ellen and Balstrode come up slowly from the
beach. It is clear they have been in earnest
talk. As they approach, Balstrode shines his
lantern on the name of the nearest boat:
"The Boy Billy." Mrs. Sedley doesn't show
herself.)*

Ellen

Is the boat in?

Balstrode

Yes! For more than an hour.
Peter seems to have disappeared.
Not in his boat, not in his hut.

Ellen (*holding out the boy's jersey*)

This I found,
down by the tide-mark.

*(It is getting dark. To see the garment properly
Balstrode holds it to his lantern.)*

Balstrode

The boy's!...

Ellen

My broider'd anchor on the chest!
[39] Embroidery in childhood was
a luxury of idleness.
A coil of silken thread giving
dreams of a silk and satin life.
Now my broidery affords
the clue whose meaning we avoid!
My hand remembered its old skill —

these stitches tell a curious tale.
I remember I was brooding
on the fantasies of children...
and dreamt that only by wishing
I could bring some silk into their lives.
Now my broidery affords
the clue whose meaning we avoid!

*(The jersey is wet. Balstrode wrings the
water out.)*

Balstrode

We'll find him, maybe give a hand.

Ellen

We have no power to help him now.
We have no power...

Balstrode

We have the power. We have the power.
In the black moment
when your friend suffers
unearthly torment,
we cannot turn our backs.
When horror breaks one heart
all hearts are broken.

Ellen and Balstrode

We shall be there with him, we shall be there.

Balstrode

Nothing to do but wait
since the solution
is beyond life,
beyond dissolution...

*(They go out together. Mrs. Sedley goes
quickly to the inn door.)*

Mrs. Sedley (*calling through the door*)

[40] Mr. Swallow, Mr. Swallow!
I want the lawyer Swallow!

Auntie (*coming to the door*)

What do you want?

Mrs. Sedley

I want the lawyer Swallow!

Auntie

He's busy.

Mrs. Sedley

Fetch him please, this is official.
Bus'ness about the Borough criminal.
Please do as I tell you!

Auntie

My customers come here for peace,
for quiet, away from you
and all such nuisances!

Mrs. Sedley

[This is an insult!

Auntie

You'll find as long as I am here,
you'll find that I always speak my mind!

Mrs. Sedley

[I'll have you know your place,
you baggage!

Auntie

My customers come here for peace,
they take their drink, they take their ease!
As long as I am here,
you'll find that I will speak my mind.

Swallow *(coming out)*

Hi! What's the matter?
Tell me what's the matter.
What is it? What's all this noise about? Hi!

Auntie *(going in and banging door)*
Good night!

Mrs. Sedley *(points dramatically)*
Look!

Swallow
I'm short-sighted, you know.

Mrs. Sedley
Look! It's Grimes's boat, back at last!

Swallow
That's different! Hey!
(shouting into "The Boar")
Is Hobson there?

Hobson *(appearing)*
Ay, ay, sir!

Mrs. Sedley
Good, now things are moving, and about time too!

Swallow
You're constable of the Borough,
Carter Hobson.

Hobson
Ay, ay, sir!

Swallow
As the mayor,
I ask you to find Peter Grimes!
Take whatever help you need.

Hobson
Now what I claims
is he's out at sea.

Swallow *(points)*
But here's his boat.

Hobson
Oh! We'll send a posse to his hut.

Swallow
If he's not there, you'll search the shore,
the marsh, the fields, the streets, the Borough.

Hobson
Ay, ay, sir!
(He goes into "The Boar" hailing.)
Hey there! Come out and help!
Grimes is around! Hey there!

Mrs. Sedley
Crime, that's my hobby,
is by cities hoarded.
Rarely are country minds
lifted to murder,
the noblest of the crimes
which are my study.
And now the crime is here
and I am ready!

(Hobson comes out with Boles and other fishermen. When the news reaches the Moot Hall and the pub, the people crowd on to the beach.)

Chorus of Fishermen and Townspeople
[41] Who holds himself apart,
lets his pride rise.
Him who despises us
we'll destroy!

And cruelty becomes
his enterprise.
Him who despises us
we'll destroy!

(The Nieces, Mrs. Sedley, Boles, Keene, and Swallow join in.)

Our curse shall fall on his evil day.
We shall tame his arrogance!
Who holds himself apart, etc.
Our curses shall fall on him!
Him who despises us,
we'll destroy!
Ha, ha, ha!

Swallow, Hobson, Chorus of Fishermen and Townspeople
We'll make the murd'rer pay,
we'll make him pay
for his crime!

All
Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

(The people scatter in all directions. Curtain.)

[42] Interlude VI

Scene 2
Scene as in Scene 1. Some hours later. The dance is over. Peter is alone by his boat in the changeful light of a cloud-swept moon. There is a distant fog-horn.

Chorus *(off)*
[43] Grimes! Grimes!

Peter
Steady! There you are! Nearly home!
What is home? Calm as deep water.
Where's my home? Deep in calm water.
Water will drink my sorrows dry
and the tide will turn.

Chorus *(off)*
Grimes!

Peter
Steady! There you are! Nearly home!
The first one died, just died...
The other slipped, and died...
and the third will...
"Accidental circumstances."
Water will drink his sorrows, my sorrows dry,
and the tide will turn.

Chorus *(off)*
Grimes! Peter Grimes!
Peter
Peter Grimes! Here you are! Here I am!
Hurry, hurry!
Now is gossip put on trial.
Bring the branding iron and knife
for what's done now is done for life!
Come on! Land me!
"Turn the skies back and begin again!"

Chorus *(off)*
Peter Grimes!

Peter
"Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and
you'll know who's gone fishing when
you land the next shoal!"

Chorus *(off)*

Peter Grimes! Grimes!

Peter

Ellen! Give me your hand.
There now, my hope is held by you.
If you leave me alone, if you...
Take away your hand!
The argument's finished,
friendship lost,
gossip is shouting,
everything's said.

Chorus *(off)*

Peter Grimes!

Peter

To hell with all your mercy!
To hell with your revenge.
And God have mercy upon you!

Chorus *(off)*

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

Peter

Do you hear them all shouting my name?
D'you hear them?

[Old Davy Jones shall answer:
Come home, come home!

Chorus *(close at hand)*

[Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!

Peter *(roaring back at them)*

Peter Grimes! Grimes! Peter Grimes!

(Ellen and Balstrode have come in and stand watching. Then Ellen goes up to Peter.)

Ellen

44 Peter, we've come to take you home.
Oh, come home out of this dreadful night.
See, here's Balstrode. Peter, don't you
hear me?

(Peter does not notice her. The voices are now distant.)

Chorus

[Peter Grimes! Grimes!
Peter! Peter!

Peter

What harbour shelters peace,
away from tidal waves,
away from storms?
What harbour can embrace
terrors and tragedies?
Her breast is harbour too,
where night is turned to day.

Balstrode *(going up to Peter)*

Come on, I'll help you with the boat.
Sail out till you lose sight of the Moot Hall.
Then sink the boat.

Ellen

No!

Balstrode

D'you hear? Sink her. Goodbye, Peter.

(Together they push the boat down the slope of the shore. Balstrode comes back and leads Ellen away. Dawn comes to the Borough by a gentle sequence of sights and sounds. A candle is lighted and shines through a bare

window. A shutter is drawn back. Hobson and his posse meet severally on the green. Some turn home, others go to the boats. Nets are brought down from the houses by fisherwives. Cleaners open the front door of the inn and begin to scrub the step. Dr. Crabbe comes from a confinement case with his black bag. He yawns and stretches. Nods to the cleaners. The Rector comes to early morning prayer. Mrs. Sedley follows. Ned Keene draws the shutters of his shop.)

Chorus

45 To those who pass the Borough sounds
betray
the cold beginning of another day.
And houses sleeping by the waterside
wake to the measured ripple of the tide.

(Mr. Swallow comes out and speaks to the fishermen.)

Swallow

There's a boat sinking out at sea,
coastguard reports.

Fisherman

Within reach?

Swallow

No.

Fisherman

Let's have a look thro' the glasses.

Chorus

Or measured cadence of the lads who tow
some entered hoy to fix her in their row.
Or hollow sound that from the passing bell
to some departed spirit bids farewell.

(Auntie comes out of the pub door.)

Auntie

What is it?

Boles

Nothing I can see.

Auntie

One of those rumours!

(The Nieces emerge and begin to polish the brasses outside "The Boar.")

All

In ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide
flowing it fills the channel broad and wide.
Then back to sea with strong majestic sweep
it rolls in ebb yet terrible and deep.

(During the chorus the curtain slowly falls.)

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Technical specification

Mixing desk: Decca built mixer

Microphones: Neumann M50, KM 56

Recording (tape) machines: 2 x EMI TR 90

Decca built mixer

A 6 channel unit built by Roy Wallace after experiments with a 3 channel unit; additional channels were added as requirements changed (3 channels + 3 channels, *i.e.* 18 channels in all).

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Recording Location: Walthamstow Assembly Hall, London, December 1958

Producer: Erik Smith

Recording Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

Remastering: Andrew Wedman

Publishers: Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd

Cover photo: Adam Woolfitt

Art direction: Jeremy Tilston



Peter Pears recording the role of Peter Grimes

Photo: Decca

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