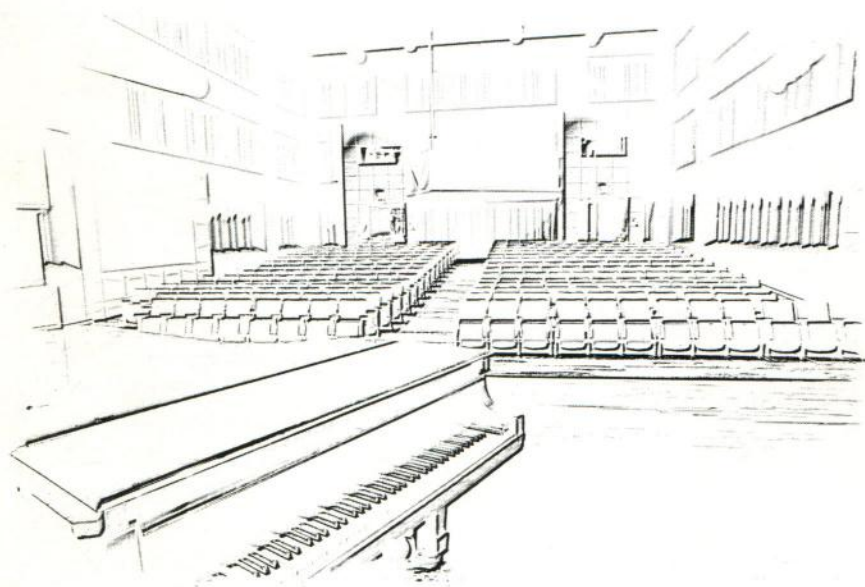


Glenn Gould
Glenn Gould Studio



February 7 -16, 2002

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**Friday, February 8, 2002
8:00 p.m.**

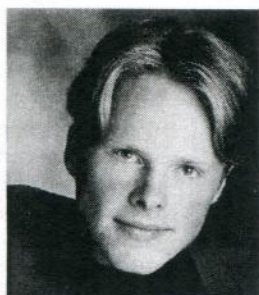
**Catherine Robbin, mezzo-soprano
Colin Ainsworth, tenor
Stephen Ralls, piano**

in

A Britten Recital

presented by

The Aldeburgh Connection



Our sincere thanks to Carol and Kenneth Anderson
for sponsoring our singers
in tonight's recital

and to James and Connie MacDougall
who have provided the
floral arrangements on the stage

All tonight's works are by Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

**Four realizations of songs
by Henry Purcell (1659-95)**
Sound the trumpet (*Nahum Tate*)
Fairest Isle (*John Dryden*)
I'll sail upon the Dog-star
(*Thomas D'Urfey*)
Evening Hymn (*William Fuller*)

**Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo,
Op. 22**

Sonetto XVI - Sì come nella penna e
nell'inchostro
Sonetto XXXI - A che più debb'io mai
l'intensa voglia
Sonetto XXX - Veggio co' bei vostri
occhi
Sonetto LV - Tu sa', ch'io so, signior
mie
Sonetto XXXVIII - Rendete a gli occhi
miei
Sonetto XXXII - S'un casto amor
Sonetto XXIV - Spirto ben nato

A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41

A Cradle Song (*William Blake*)
The Highland Balou (*Robert Burns*)
Sephestia's Lullaby (*Robert Greene*,
from *Menaphon*)
A Charm (*Thomas Randolph*, from
The Jealous Lovers)
The Nurse's Song (*John Philip*, from
The Play of Patient Grissell)

Intermission

**Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac
(*The Chester Miracle Play*), Op. 51**

Three folksong arrangements

Sally in our Alley (*Henry Carey*)
The trees they grow so high
(*Somerset folksong*)
Soldier, won't you marry me?
(*Appalachian folksong*)

The Performers

Catherine Robbin, mezzo-soprano

Catherine Robbin is welcomed on the most renowned concert and recital stages in the world in repertoire ranging from Bach and Handel to the works of Britten, Elgar, Schubert, Mahler and Berlioz. Conductors including Christopher Hogwood, John Eliot Gardiner, Mario Bernardi, Simon Rattle, Nicholas McGegan, Sergiu Comissiona, Bruno Weil, Hans Graf, Bernard Labadie and John Nelson vie for her services both on stage and in the recording studio. A highlight this season is the Canadian premiere of Penderecki's *Credo* at the International Choral Festival in Toronto with the composer himself conducting. She will be heard with the Bach Choir of Bethlehem in Bach's *Magnificat* and *Cantata No. 36*, with Portland Baroque, the Vancouver Bach Choir in the *St. Matthew Passion* and debuts with Chicago's Music of the Baroque in a Vivaldi Festival.

Recent engagements have included Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in Toronto with Richard Margison, conducted by Mario Bernardi, Vivaldi's *Gloria* with the Indianapolis Symphony, performances of *Messiah* with Tafelmusik, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Calgary Symphony, St. Paul Chamber Orchestra with Nicholas McGegan conducting, and the National Arts Centre Orchestra. She appeared with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra in Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* with Bernard Labadie, the Detroit Symphony in the *B Minor Mass* and CBC's *OnStage* series at Glenn Gould Studio in Brahms's *Liebeslieder Walzer*, and sang at Covent Garden with John Eliot Gardiner, at the Mostly Mozart Festival in New York and at the Salzburg Festival conducted by Sir Simon Rattle. Additional stops on her schedule were at Washington's National Gallery of Art, with the

Boston Baroque, the Baltimore and Milwaukee Symphonies, Philharmonia Baroque of San Francisco and the Baldwin Wallace Bach Festival. European credits include the Schleswig-Holstein and Halle Handel festivals, the Belgian National Orchestra, the Liverpool Philharmonic, and the Châtelet and Champs Elysées Theatres in Paris.

Ms. Robbin sang Ursule in *Béatrice et Bénédict* at the Geneva Opera, Bradamante in Vancouver Opera's *Alcina*, the title role in *Xerxes* for the Carmel Bach Festival, and Eduige in *Rodelinda* with Raglan Baroque. Award-winning recordings include Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* with the English Baroque Soloists for DGG (Gramophone's Record of the Year), and Haydn's *Stabat Mater* with Pinnock, which won the Grand Prix du Disque. A Marquis recital disc with Paul Nicholson, Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* with Gardiner for Philips and a CBC Records Ravel album (MVCD 1128) are recent releases, and her recording of the Duparc Songs with baritone Gerald Finley and pianist Stephen Ralls will be released shortly.

Colin Ainsworth, tenor

Colin Ainsworth first came to national attention through several prestigious competitions, including first place in the 1998 National Kiwanis Music Festival and second place in the Edward Johnson National Music Competition. He is well on his way to an important tenor career.

Audiences have heard this gifted young artist in recent performances of Haydn's *Creation* in Sudbury, Boccherini's *Stabat Mater* with the Talisker Players, an Evening at the Proms with Orchestra London and Ramirez *Masses* with the Orpheus Choir. Operatic roles have included Tamino in *Magic Flute* for Saskatoon Opera, as well as in Germany and the Czech Republic, Lysander in Britten's

A Midsummer Night's Dream and the title role in Britten's *Albert Herring* at the University of Toronto, Jacques Ibert's *Angélique*, Bernstein's *Trouble in Tahiti*, and Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. In upcoming concerts, he will sing Vaughan Williams's *On Wenlock Edge* and Gurney's *Ludlow and Teme* with the Talisker Players, Honegger's *King David* with the Menno Singers and Bach's *St. John Passion* at the Winter Park Bach Festival in Florida, and will make a return engagement with Saskatoon Opera.

Past seasons have included a programme of Gilbert and Sullivan with the Cellar Singers and his debut appearance in New Zealand, where he toured Bach's *Magnificat* with the Aradia Ensemble, a CD of Vanhal *Masses*, Vaughan Williams's *Hodie* with conductor John Barnum, and *The Magic Flute* with Opera Atelier. Other highlights have included Borsa in *Rigoletto* with Orchestra London, Handel's *Messiah* in Kitchener and with the Georgian Concert Choir, Gilbert & Sullivan's *Mikado* in Toronto, Mozart's *Mass in C Minor* with the Bell' Arte Singers, a recital at the Guelph Spring Festival, and the lead role of the disciple John in Handel's *Resurrection* for Opera Atelier.

Stephen Ralls, piano

Stephen Ralls began his musical career in England, following studies at Merton College, Oxford, and at the Royal Academy of Music in London. He was soon involved in frequent recitals throughout England and in regular broadcasts for the BBC. While with the English Opera Group he was selected as chief répétiteur for Britten's last opera, *Death in Venice*, and played the important solo piano part in the first performances and on the Decca recording. This led to recital appearances with Sir Peter Pears at the Aldeburgh Festival and on the BBC, and to Mr. Ralls' appointment to the

staff of the Britten-Pears School in Aldeburgh.

His reputation extended to Canada following his appointment in 1978 to the staff of the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, where he is now Musical Director of the Opera Division. He has accompanied Canada's finest singers in numerous concerts, festivals and broadcasts and has also worked with the Canadian Opera Company, the Banff Centre and the National Arts Centre. His recordings include *Songs of Oskar Morawetz*, *The Lyrical Art of Mark Pedrotti* (CBC Records MVCD 1051), *The Aldeburgh Connection: Schumann, Brahms and Greer and Benjamin Britten: The Canticles* (CBC Records MVCD 1077) and *Songs of Travel* (CBC Records MVCD 1115) with Gerald Finley, the 1998 Juno winner. A recording of the Duparc Songs with Catherine Robbin and Gerald Finley will shortly be released on the CBC Records label.

About The Aldeburgh Connection

Aldeburgh is the small town on the east coast of England where Benjamin Britten, Peter Pears and Eric Crozier founded the Festival of Music which flourishes to this day. Artistic directors Stephen Ralls and Bruce Ubukata have visited and worked there for many summers, as have many of the singers appearing with The Aldeburgh Connection.

The final recital in this Series will take place on Wednesday, May 8, when baritone Brett Polegato and the Elmer Iseler Singers will appear in our annual *Greta Kraus Schubertiad*. For ticket inquiries, please contact the Glenn Gould Studio Box Office at (416) 205-5555.

There are also two concerts remaining in our Sunday Series in Walter Hall: *The Frankfurt Gang*, on March 3, exploring the lives and music of Percy

Grainger, Cyril Scott and several other young British composers who studied in Frankfurt-am-Main in the 1890s, and finally *Music for the Masseys*, on April 28 — a look at the influence of this important family on musical and artistic

life in Canada. Because of the large subscriber audience for this Series, it is advisable to reserve in advance for these concerts by calling (416) 444-3976.

We would also like to thank:

**The Ontario Arts Council
The City of Toronto
through the Toronto Arts Council**

Many individual donors and supporters

Friday, February 8, 2002, 8:00 pm

The Aldeburgh Connection
presents

Catherine Robbin, mezzo **Colin Ainsworth, tenor**
Stephen Ralls, piano

A Britten Recital

In its twentieth anniversary season, it is appropriate that The Aldeburgh Connection should present a complete recital of the music of Benjamin Britten (1913-76). We regret that Andrea Ludwig has had to withdraw from tonight's performance through reasons of ill-health; we are delighted, however, that at short notice Catherine Robbin has agreed to take part.

Please reserve your applause until the end of each group ♦

Four realizations of songs by Henry Purcell (1659-95)

Britten's enthusiasm for the works of Purcell, whom he regarded as the greatest English composer and the most skilled at setting the English language, blossomed during the 250th anniversary events of 1945. He embarked on a series of realizations of Purcell's music, of single songs and of complete works (like *Dido and Aeneas*). Each of these four examples displays a different type of the earlier composer's vocal music.

Sound the trumpet (*Nahum Tate*)

This is a duet from the Birthday Song for Queen Mary, *Come ye sons of art away*, of 1694. It imitates the instruments which appear so prominently in other parts of the work.

Sound the trumpet till around
You make the listening shores rebound.
On the sprightly Oboe play.
All the instruments of joy
That skilful numbers can employ
To celebrate the glories of this day.

Fairest Isle (*John Dryden*)

Venus delivers this song in a vision of Britain which concludes Dryden's "dramatick opera" *King Arthur* (1691).

Fairest Isle, all isles excelling,
Seat of pleasures and of loves;
Venus here will choose her
dwelling,
And forsake her Cyprian groves.
Cupid from his fav'rite nation
Care and envy will remove;
Jealousy that poisons passion,
And despair that dies for love.

Gentle murmurs, sweet
complaining,
Sighs that blow the fire of love;
Soft repulses, kind disdaining
Shall be all the pains you prove.
Ev'ry swain shall pay his duty,
Grateful every nymph shall prove;
And as these excel in beauty,
Those shall be renown'd for love.

I'll sail upon the Dog-star (*Thomas D'Urfey*)

In 1688, Purcell wrote eight vocal numbers for D'Urfey's play *A Fool's Preferment*. This is a mad song for Lyonel, whom the *dramatis personae* calls "a Well Bred Ingenious Gentleman who, being hindered of his mistress by the King, fell distracted."

I'll sail upon the Dog-star and then pursue the morning;
I'll chase the moon till it be noon but I'll make her leave her horning.
I'll climb the frosty mountain, and there I'll coin the weather;
I'll tear the rainbow from the sky and tie both ends together.
The stars pluck from their orbs too, and crowd them in my budget;
And whether I'm a roaming boy, let all the Nation judge it.

Evening Hymn (William Fuller)

Remaining one of the best-loved of Purcell's output, this song was published in *Harmonia Sacra: or Divine Hymns and Dialogues* in 1688. It is a supreme example of the composer's favourite musical device, a recurring ground bass.

Now that the sun hath veil'd his light
And bid the world goodnight;
To the soft bed my body I dispose,
But where shall my soul repose?
Dear God, even in Thy arms, and can there be
Any so sweet security?
Then to thy rest, O my soul! and singing, praise
The mercy that prolongs thy days.
Hallelujah!



Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, Op. 22

The *Seven Sonnets* were completed in October 1940 on Long Island, New York. Britten, in self-exile from his homeland, was consciously widening his horizons and setting foreign languages in a deliberate attempt to free himself from his English roots. (A year earlier, he had produced *Les Illuminations* to the poetry of Rimbaud.) The vigour and freshness of the music is well suited to the Italian texts. Each sonnet is devoted to a different aspect of love: its uncertainty, its unrequitedness, its tranquillity are followed by renewed anxiety and a whimsical serenade. Finally, the impetuosity and strength of *S'un casto amor* lead to the nobility of *Spirto ben nato*, a reflection on true love and the immortality of beauty.

1. Sonetto XVI

Sì come nella penna e nell'inchiostro
 È l'alto e 'l basso e 'l mediocre stile,
 E ne' marmi l'immagin ricca e vile,
 Secondo che 'l sa trar l'ingegno
 nostro;
 Così, signor mie car, nel petto vostro,
 Quante l'orgoglio, è forse ogni atto
 umile:
 Ma io sol quel c'a me proprio è e
 simile
 Ne traggo, come fuor nel viso
 mostro.

Chi semina sospir, lacrime e doglie,
 (L'umor dal ciel terrestre, schietto e
 solo,
 A vari semi vario si converte),
 Però pianto e dolor ne miete e coglie;
 Chi mira alta beltà con sì gran duolo,
 Dubbie speranze, e pene acerbe e
 certe.

2. Sonetto XXXI

A che più debb'io mai l'intensa voglia
 Sfogar con pianti o con parole meste,
 Se di tal sorte 'l ciel, che l'alma veste,
 Tard' o per tempo, alcun mai non ne
 spoglia?
 A che 'l cor lass' a più morir m'in-
 voglia,
 S'altri pur dee morir? Dunque per
 queste
 Luci l'ore del fin fian men moleste;
 Ch'ogn' altro ben val men ch'ogni
 mia doglia.
 Però se 'l colpo, ch'io ne rub'
 e 'n volo,
 Schifar non poss'; almen, s'è
 destinato,
 Chi entreran fra la dolcezza e 'l
 duolo?
 Se vint' e pres' i' debb'esser beato,
 Maraviglia non è se nud' e solo,
 Resto prigion d'un Cavalier
 armato.

Just as there is a high, a low, and a
 middle style in pen and ink, and as
 within the marble are images rich
 and poor, according as our fancy
 knows how to draw them forth; so
 within your heart, dear love, there
 are perhaps, as well as pride, some
 humble feelings; but I draw thence
 only what is my desert and like to
 what I show outside on my face.

Whoever sows sighs, tears and
 lamentations (Heaven's moisture
 on earth, simple and pure, adapts
 itself differently to different seeds)
 reaps and gathers grief and sad-
 ness: whoever looks on high beau-
 ty with so great a grief reaps
 doubtful hopes and sure and
 bitter pain.

Why must I go on venting my
 ardent desire in tears and
 melancholy words, if Heaven that
 dresses the soul in grief, never,
 soon or late, allows relief?
 Why should my weary heart
 long for death
 since all must die? So to
 these eyes
 my last hours will be less painful,
 all my grief being greater than
 any joy.

If, therefore, I cannot avoid these
 blows, nay, even seek them,
 since it is my fate, who is
 the one
 that stands always between joy
 and grief? If to be happy I must be
 conquered and held captive, no
 wonder then that I, unarmed and
 alone, remain the prisoner of a
 Cavalier in arms.

3. Sonetto XXX

Veggio co' bei vostri occhi un dolce
lume,
Che co' miei ciechi già veder non
posso;
Porto co' vostri piedi un pondo
addosso,
Che de' mie zoppi non è già costume;
Volo con le vostr'ale senza piume;
Col vostr'ingegno al ciel sempre son
mosso;
Dal vostr'arbitrio son pallido e rosso,
Freddo al sol, caldo alle più fredde
brume.

Nel voler vostro è sol la voglia mia,
I mie' pensier nel vostro cor si fanno,
Nel vostro fiato son le mie parole.
Come luna da sè sol par ch'io sia;
Chè gli occhi nostri in ciel veder non
sanno
Se non quel tanto che n'accende il
sole.

4. Sonetto LV

Tu sa', ch'io so, signor mie,
che tu sai
Ch'i veni per goderti più da
presso;
E sai ch'i' so, che tu sa' ch'i' son
desso.
A che più indugio a salutarci o mai?
Se vera è la speranza che mi dai,
Se vero è 'l buon desio che m'è
concesso,
Rompasi il mur fra l'uno e l'altro messo;
Chè doppia forza hann' i celati guai.

S'i' amo sol di te, signor mie caro,
Quel che di te più ami, non ti sdegni;
Che l'un dell'altro spirito
s'innamora,
Quel che nel tuo bel volto bramo
e m'paro,
E mal compres' è degli umani
ingegni,
Chi 'l vuol veder, convien che prima
mora.

With your lovely eyes I see a sweet
light
that yet with my blind ones I
cannot see;
with your feet I carry a weight on
my back
which with my lame ones I cannot;
with your wings I, wingless, fly;
with your spirit I move forever
heavenward;
at your wish I blush or turn pale,
cold in the sunshine, or hot in the
coldest midwinter.

My will is in your will alone,
my thoughts are born in your heart,
my words are on your breath.
Alone, I am like the moon in the
sky which our eyes cannot
see
save that part which the sun
illuminates.

Thou know'st, beloved, that
I know thou know'st
that I am come nearer to enjoy
thee more:
and thou know'st that I know thou
know'st that I am still the same.
Why, then, do I hesitate to greet thee?
If the hope thou gives me is true,
if true the strong desire that
is granted me,
the wall between us crumbles,
for secret griefs have double force.
If I love in thee, beloved, only what
thou lovest most, do not be angry;
for so one spirit is enamoured
of another.
That which in thy lovely face
I yearn for and seek to grasp,
is but ill understood by
human kind,
and he that would see it, first
must die.

5. Sonetto XXXVIII

Rendete agli occhi miei, o fonte o fiume,
 L'onde della non vostra e salda vena.
 Che più v'innalza, e cresce, e con più lena
 Che non è 'l vostro natural costume.
 E tu, folt'air, che 'l celeste lume
 Tempri a' tristi occhi, de' sospir miei piena,
 Rendigli al cor mio lasso e rasserena
 Tua scura faccia al mio visivo acume.
 Renda la terra i passi alle mie piante,
 Ch'ancor l'erba germogli che gli è tolta;
 E 'l suono Ecco, già sorda a' miei lamenti;
 Gli sguardi agli occhi mie, tue luci sante;
 Ch'io possa altra bellezza un'altra volta
 Amar, po' che di me non ti contenti.

Give back to my eyes, you fountains and rivers,
 the waves of those strong currents that are not yours, which make you swell and grow
 with greater power than is your natural way.
 And thou, heavy air, that dims the heavenly light to my sad eyes, so full of sighs art thou,
 give them back to my weary heart, and lighten
 thy dark face to my eye's keen sight.
 Earth, give me back my footsteps that the grass may sprout again where it was trod;
 and Echo, yet deaf to my laments, give back thy sound;
 and you blest pupils give back to my eyes their glances;
 that I another time may love another beauty,
 since with me you are not satisfied.

6. Sonetto XXXII

S'un casto amor, s'una pietà superna,
 S'una fortuna infra dua amanti equale,
 S'un'aspra sorte all'un dell'altro cale,
 S'un spirto, s'un voler duo cor governa;
 S'un'anima in duo corpi è fatta eterna,
 Ambo levando al cielo e con pari ale;
 S'amor c'un colpo e d'un dorato strale
 Le viscer di duo petti arda e discerna;
 S'amar l'un l'altro, e nessun se medesimo,
 D'un gusto e d'un diletto, a tal mercede,

If love be chaste, if pity heavenly,
 if fortune equal between two lovers;
 if a bitter fate is shared by both, and if one spirit, one will rules two hearts;
 if in two bodies one soul is made eternal,
 raising both to heaven on the same wings;
 if at one stroke and with a gilded arrow love burns and pierces two hearts to the core;
 if in loving one another, forgetting one's self,
 with one pleasure and one delight there is such reward

C'a un fin voglia l'uno e l'altro
 porre;
 Se mille e mille non sarien
 centesimo
 A tal nodo d'amore, a tanta
 fede;
 E sol l'isdegno il può rompere e
 sciorre?

that both wills strive for the same
 end;
 if thousands and thousands do not
 make one hundredth part
 to such a bond of love, to such
 constancy,
 can, then, mere anger break and
 dissolve it?

7. Sonetto XXIV

Spirto ben nato, in cui si specchia e vede	Noble soul, in whose chaste and dear limbs
Nelle tue belle membra oneste e care	are reflected all that nature
Quante natura e 'l ciel tra no' puo' fare,	and heaven can achieve with us,
Quand'a null'altra suo bell'opra cede:	the paragon of their works:
Spirto leggiadro, in cui si spera e crede	Graceful soul, within whom one hopes and believes
Dentro, come di fuor nel viso appare,	Love, Pity and Mercy are dwelling, as they appear in your face;
Amor, pietà, mercè, cose sì rare	things so rare, and never found
Che mà' furn'in beltà con tanta fede:	in beauty so truly:
L'amor mi prende, e la beltà mi lega;	Love takes me captive, and beauty
La pietà, la mercè con dolci sguardi	binds me; Pity and Mercy with sweet
Ferma speranz'al cor par che ne doni.	glances fill my heart with a strong hope.
Qual uso o qual governo al mondo niega,	What law or earthly government,
Qual crudeltà per tempo, o qual più tardi,	what cruelty now or to come,
C'a sì bel viso morte non perdoni?	could forbid Death to spare such a lovely face?

Translations by Elizabeth Mayer and Peter Pears



A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41

After some early adolescent efforts, all of Britten's songs were written with specific singers in mind. The tenor, Peter Pears, inspired the greatest number, from the *Michelangelo Sonnets* onward; but a few important cycles were composed for other, lower voices (male or female). The mezzo-soprano, Nancy Evans, was a founder-member of Britten's English Opera Group — she shared the role of Lucretia with Kathleen Ferrier and she created the role of Nancy in *Albert Herring*. Until her death in 2000, she taught at the Britten-Pears School and was an Honorary Patron of The Aldeburgh Connection. *A Charm of Lullabies* was premiered by her in 1948. The cycle is one of several in which Britten ingeniously gathers together a diverse selection of poems on the themes of night and sleep.

A Cradle Song (William Blake)

Sleep! sleep! beauty bright,
Dreaming o'er the joys of night,
Sleep! sleep! in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

Sweet Babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles.

O! the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep.
When thy little heart does wake
Then the dreadful lightnings break,
From thy cheek and from thy eye,
O'er the youthful harvests nigh.
Infant wiles and infant smiles
Heaven and Earth of peace

The Highland Balou (Robert Burns)

Hee balou¹, my sweet wee Donald,
Picture o' the great Clanronald!
Brawlie kens our wanton Chief
What gat my young Highland thief.

Leeze me on² thy bonie craigie³!
An thou live, thou'll steal a naigie⁴,
Travel the country thro' and thro',
And bring hame a Carlisle cow!

Thro' the Lawlands, o'er the Border,
Weel, my babie, may thou furdur⁵!
Herry the louns⁶ o' the laigh⁷ Countrie,
Syne⁸ to the Highlands hame to me!

1. lullaby
2. blessings on
3. pretty throat
4. nag
5. succeed
6. harry the rogues
7. low
8. then

Sephestia's Lullaby (*Robert Greene, from Menaphon*)

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

Mother's wag, pretty boy,
Father's sorrow, father's joy;
When thy father first did see
Such a boy by him and me,
He was glad, I was woe;
Fortune changed made him so,
When he left his pretty boy,
Last his sorrow, first his joy.

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

The wanton smiled, father wept,
Mother cried, baby leapt;
More he crowed, more we cried,
Nature could not sorrow hide:
He must go, he must kiss
Child and mother, baby bliss,
For he left his pretty boy,
Father's sorrow, father's joy.

Weep not, my wanton, smile upon my knee;
When thou art old there's grief enough for thee.

A Charm (*Thomas Randolph, from The Jealous Lovers*)

Quiet, sleep! or I will make
Erinnys whip thee with a snake,
And cruel Rhadamanthus take
Thy body to the boiling lake,
Where fire and brimstone never slake;
Thy heart shall burn, thy head shall ache,
And every joint about thee quake;
And therefore dare not yet to wake!

Quiet, sleep! or thou shalt see
The horrid hags of Tartary,
Whose tresses ugly serpents be,
And Cerberus shall bark at thee,
And all the Furies that are three —
The worst is call'd Tisiphone, —
Shall lash thee to eternity;
And therefore sleep thou peacefully.

The Nurse's Song (*John Philip, from The Play of Patient Grissell*)

Lullaby baby, lullaby baby,

Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be.

Be still, my sweet sweeting, no longer do cry;

Sing lullaby baby, lullaby baby.

Let dolours be fleeting, I fancy thee, I,

To rock and to lull thee I will not delay me.

Lullaby baby, lullaby baby,

Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be.

The gods be thy shield and comfort in need!

Sing lullaby, lullaby, lullaby baby.

They give thee good fortune and well for to speed,

And this to desire I will not delay me.

Lullaby baby, lullaby baby,

Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be.



INTERMISSION

Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac (*Chester Miracle Play*), Op. 51

Britten's five *Canticles*, whose composition spanned more than a quarter of a century, provide a compendium of his vocal writing. (Significantly, the first *Canticle* was described by the composer as "a new invention in a sense, although modelled on the Purcell *Divine Hymns*.") *Canticle II*, a setting of a scene from one of the medieval Chester Miracle Plays, was written early in 1952 for the touring concerts of the English Opera Group. Its premiere was given in Nottingham by Kathleen Ferrier, Peter Pears and the composer. Again, specific singers were in mind for a vocal work. The *Canticle* was subsequently recorded by the composer with a boy as Isaac and, more recently, counter-tenors have taken the work into their repertoire. But there are strong reasons for preferring Britten's original vocal casting, not least those of balance.

The work is a masterly fusion of play, cantata and operatic *scena*. At the opening, the voice of God is depicted by the two voices not quite in unison. (Sir Michael Tippett called this "one of the wonderful things in Ben's music.") God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son. As father and son set out on their journey, they sing a duet which Britten later used in the *War Requiem* (in the setting of Wilfred Owen's bitter rewriting of the biblical story). Abraham is forced to admit what the boy must undergo; after Isaac's tranquil acceptance of his fate, dramatic tension rises almost unbearably over a slow funeral march until God intervenes with a tremendous crash of thunder. Because of Abraham's piety, Isaac is reprieved; the two voices sing a joyful *Envoi* — 'Such obedience grant us, O Lord!'



Three folksong arrangements

Britten was always well-known for his folksong arrangements — but, too often, attention has centred solely on the familiar ones in the first two volumes of English settings, to the detriment of the many other fine examples. Tonight, *The trees they grow so high* is from the oft-performed first volume — all the arrangements there date from the American sojourn in the early 1940s. *Sally in our Alley* is a comparative rarity; it was first performed in 1959 and is not, strictly speaking, a folksong, since words and melody are by the eighteenth century Henry Carey. *Soldier, won't you marry me* was published only last year but it, too, dates from the 1950s, when Peter Pears and the mezzo, Norma Procter, gave joint recitals.

This body of folksong arrangements was often criticized for over-sophistication and 'tricksiness'. In this context, it is worth remembering what Ralph Vaughan Williams, much beloved by the old school, wrote in 1943:

"Are we old fogeys of the folksong movement getting into a rut? If so, it is very good for us to be pulled out of it by such fiery young steeds as Benjamin Britten. We see one side of a folksong, they see the other. They probably think our point of view hopelessly dull and stodgy, but that is no excuse for us to label them self-conscious or deliberately freakish."

Sally in our Alley (*Henry Carey*)

The trees they grow so high (*Somerset folksong*)

Soldier, won't you marry me? (*Appalachian folksong*)





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