

BRITTEN: MORE THOUGHTS

Various contributors

We are group of professional musicians and wish to comment on Dr David Wright's article about Benjamin Britten. We also invited comments from other professionals from all over the world. It was no surprise that we were all in general agreement.

Each of us repudiated the claim that Britain was the greatest English composer of the twentieth century. His music is anaemic, loveless and spiritually dead.

By the age of 40, he already had a cult following. That he was called the English Mozart is absurd and laughable, so utterly ridiculous.

When Sadlers Wells Opera opened at the end of World War II there was no Verdi or Puccini but Britten.

Peter Grimes is about a Suffolk fisherman suffering from paranoia and actively involved in pederasty. Grimes is a picture of Britten himself. While it was a successful opera the topics it dealt with are degenerate. This opera of strange themes tells us about the composer himself and so Dr Wright is proved to be correct when he states that the man is in his music.

Britten admitted to a few close friends that he had a terrible skeleton in his cupboard from early days. What that was, we may not know but he was simply dreadful to his father and hated him, and his mother would let him get away with anything. As Dr Wright has said, Britten was a horrid boy at school so full of himself that both he and his arrogance was positively hated. That lasted all his life.

That he was a coward during World War II cannot be argued even on the grounds that he was a pacifist. He did not want to take part in the war because he was narcissistic. He wanted to be the great white hope of British music. When he returned to Britain, he appeared at a Tribunal claiming to be a conscientious objector. As in Professor Wright's article, it is so that he came back after he had libelled the three ladies who rang CEMA, later known as the Arts Council of Great Britain. He told the Tribunal that he and his lover Peter Pears could entertain the troops on leave.

Britten could not take criticism even that of a kind and helpful variety. When Dudley Moore sang Little Miss Britten imitating Pears's awful nasal voice and Britten's affected piano playing he went into a rage and into his bed for weeks.

One of the many facts missing from accounts of Britten and his life is that he was hated in America not only for his sexual orientation but his lack of patriotism and that he accompanied Pears in recitals he would give sexy looks at Pears regularly which was inappropriate. The Americans objected to his left wing politics as well.

It is also interesting to note that Dr Wright refers to Barbirolli being intensely disliked in America. He was also full of himself that he was not dedicated to music and therefore, a poor musician and a lousy conductor.

As we have said about Britten, his politics were extreme left wing. He supported the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War.

He hated the Tories and capitalism but made sure he received as much capital as he could.

Mention has been made of the sexy love letters Britten wrote to boys but he received such letters from adult fellow homosexuals. W H Auden would write to him as Dearest Ben and signed off with all my love.

If you had a son while Britten was alive would you allow your son to be near this evil man? The accounts of his cruel and painful sex on boys has been suppressed.

Britten's friends enabled him to ingratiate with royalty. He would brag that he was a Court composer. His friend Earl Harwood married a distant relative of the Queen. Her Majesty was to decorate Britten with a Companion of Honour award.

There is something wrong with the British system of giving these awards to paederasts who have sex with underage boys and, in those days, homosexuality was a criminal offence.

By the 1950s, Britten said that he was outdated and washed up. He sought comfort and acceptability in the church not from a religious point of view but to write church operas, the first being *Curlew River*. Like all his works in the last 20 years of his life, his music is repetitive, with thin accompaniments and often long held notes making the music static. There is no commitment or relevance in his music. He was composing emotional corpses. He was composing decompositions. There is no independent harmony and a seriously limited technique.

One cringes with the musicologist Michael Kennedy who raves about Britten as a genius. Britten did not have exceptional skill nor did he had a great influence on other composers. He was definitely not a genius.

Michael Kennedy writes a lot of nonsense and turns his opinions into facts which is devious and dishonest

Britten was a troublesome individual. He loved to annoy and upset people. He dedicated his *Sinfonia da Requiem* to his father whom he hated, an act of extreme hypocrisy. With this *Sinfonia*, which was commissioned by the Japanese who specifically requested that the work had no Western or religious references, he offended that nation. Britten ignored Japan's instructions in his rude and offhand way.

Some of his favourite composers were gay... Lully, Tchaikovsky and Ravel for example. His favourite writers were also gay such as W H Auden and Christopher Isherwood. He also said that he admired Wilfred Owen because he was gay.

Of course, everyone has the right to admire music and poetry of their choice. But what Britten did was to say that these composers and writers were great and, indeed, the greatest. He had this attitude that if he liked a composer that composer was great. There are many who adopt this attitude which is dishonest.

Wilfrid Mellers said that the Beatles were as good as the Bach

Britten hated the music of Beethoven and Brahms. He was spiteful about other British composers. He hated Vaughan Williams and Elgar. Vaughan Williams wrote some gorgeous music.

Britten's last two operas are sterile and badly written. These are *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice*. *Death in Venice* is Britten's swan song. Like his first opera, *Peter Grimes*, it is about pederasty and is a portrait of Britten himself.

But his operas have no melody or memorable themes or arias but are full of sexual perversions. *Billy Budd* is sick and again about homosexuals wanting anal sex with a young cabin boy. *The Turn of the Screw* is about Quint a ghost who wants to come back to earth and have sex with the boy Miles. Britten's music is pornography and child pornography as well.

We did not know the story that is in Dr Wright's article when Britten suggested to Walton that if he had

not buggered a boy he had missed one of life's greatest pleasure. However, we have now researched this and found it to be true.

There is the problem of guilty by association which may be an unfair accusation. If you like Britten and his music are you like him?

Peter Pears told us that Britten was constantly losing friends because of his petulance. He sacked conductors and performers if they pointed out errors in his scores which there often were.

He was evil, wicked and caused harm especially to boys. He deliberately caused great harm. He was morally wrong. He was a criminal in the days when homosexuality was illegal. He was also a criminal in his abusing boys. He was a very unpleasant person.

But all these has to be considered in the light that his music is poor, loveless and dead.

This could read as a long list of mere hatred and an outpouring of malice towards Britten and that it is being laid on thick . It will be said to be overkill. People will complain that we should not go into his private life and bring out the sordid details.

What we write is true and rebuts the laud and honour he has received and to dispel the myths about him as a nice man and a great composer. And the myth that he had a love for children that was innocent and pure. We feel that this other side must be told. He was not a saint nor was he a nice man.

Perhaps the article is too long and ramshackle , and we apologise for that, but it does prove that the character of Britten is in his music and do we want to engage in his music which is full of sexual perversions and crime.

We do not have hatred for this composer. We have concern for his victims wherever they are. We wish that he was a decent man and a great composer .

We admire his Sinfonia da Requiem and a few other works and happily acknowledge this.

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