

BRITTEN

Simple Symphony Temporal Variations Suite on English Folk Tunes

Northern Sinfonia • Stuart Bedford



Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Simple Symphony • Temporal Variations • Suite on English Folk Tunes

The works recorded on this disc cover the entire span of Britten's published output, from the *Simple Symphony* of 1934, itself based on material from the composer's earliest years, to the string orchestral arrangement of *Lachrymae* completed in 1976, the last year of Britten's life.

Britten began composing at a very early age: his juvenilia, most of which he carefully preserved, consists of an enormous number of piano pieces, songs, chamber music and orchestral works. Unlike many composers, Britten always retained a special affection for these childhood efforts and was even persuaded to revive and publish some of them in later life (and many more have appeared posthumously). When, late in 1933, he decided to try his hand at writing a money-spinner for the lucrative schools market, he turned to this early body of work to fashion what became the *Simple Symphony*, *Op. 4*, for string orchestra (or string quartet). In doing so he took the opportunity to rework the material somewhat, making it 'more fit for general consumption', as he put it. In fact comparison of the original pieces with their transformation in the *Simple Symphony* clearly demonstrates Britten's astonishing progression from a musically gifted child to a consummate master of his craft at the age of just 21. The work's four movements are memorably tuneful, technically polished and superbly conceived for the medium, the *Playful Pizzicato* being an especially delightful invention.

One of the more striking of the numerous works to have been published since Britten's death in 1976 is the *Temporal Variations* for oboe and piano, composed in 1936 and first performed at the Wigmore Hall in December of that year by the oboist Natalie Caine, a friend of Britten's from his Royal College of Music days. Although Britten declared himself pleased with the performance and the favourable audience response, the generally negative reviews of several critics may have played a part in his decision to withdraw the work, which was never heard again during his lifetime. Before composing the piece Britten had announced that he was

working on a 'large and elaborate suite for oboe and strings'. Although this did not materialise, in the early 1990s the oboist Nicholas Daniel (the soloist on the present recording) suggested to the composer Colin Matthews that an arrangement of the *Variations* for oboe and strings could well take the place of the aborted suite. Thus the première of the orchestrated version was given at the Aldeburgh Festival in June 1994 with Daniel as soloist and the English Chamber Orchestra conducted by Stuart Bedford. Formally the work is a series of short character-sketches, by turns light-hearted and contemplative, bound together by use of the plangent semi-tone motif with which the oboe opens the work and with which it concludes. In this respect the *Temporal Variations* can be seen as something of a trial run for the more fully accomplished achievement of the *Variations on a theme of Frank Bridge*, composed some six months later.

A Charm of Lullabies, *Op. 41*, was written in December 1947 for the mezzo-soprano Nancy Evans, who had recently taken part in the first productions of *The Rape of Lucretia*, in which she sang the rôle of Lucretia, *Albert Herring*, in which she took the part of Nancy (appropriately enough), and who would appear again as Polly Peachum in Britten's version of *The Beggar's Opera* a year later. The work is one of the most genial and uncomplicated of Britten's song-cycles, though not without some more agitated undercurrents, particularly in the two central songs, settings of Robert Greene's *Sephestia's Lullaby* and Thomas Randolph's *A Charm*. Colin Matthews' orchestral version, made to a commission from the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1990, is scored for a small orchestra of double woodwind, two horns, harp and strings. In a few places the original voice-and-piano version has been altered or expanded, in Matthews' words, 'to give it the extra dimension needed for an orchestral song-cycle' and the first three songs and the last two have been neatly linked, thus effectively weaving the work into an almost continuous whole.

Britten's original version of *Lachrymae* for viola and piano was written in May 1950 as brief respite from labours on *Billy Budd*. Originally written for and dedicated to the violist William Primrose, Britten revised the work in 1970 for a performance at Aldeburgh with Cecil Aronowitz and made this arrangement for viola and string orchestra for the same player in February 1976. Subtitled *Reflections on a song of John Dowland*, the work does not so much grow out of the Dowland song 'If my complaints could passions move' on which it is based, as into it; thus the work proceeds by way of a sequence of contrasted variations (the sixth, marked *Appassionato*, quotes a second Dowland song, 'Flow my tears') towards the magical conclusion when the Dowland original, together with its own harmonization, appears to emerge from out of a mist, a moment made particularly telling in the orchestral version, when we seem to be hearing it across the distance of time, as if played by a consort of violas. Britten was to turn to Dowland once more in 1963 for his *Nocturnal, Op. 70*, written for the guitarist Julian Bream.

In December 1966, Britten composed a short 'folk dance for wind and drums' entitled *Hankin Booby* for the opening of the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London in March 1967. He had often expressed his intention to find a larger context for this solitary miniature and seven years later, incorporated it into the *Suite on English Folk Tunes, Op. 90*, his last purely orchestral work, begun in October 1974 whilst on a visit to Wolfsgarten in Germany and completed at Horham, Suffolk, the following month. Dedicated to the memory of Percy Grainger, himself an avid folk-song arranger, the work was composed for the forces of the English Chamber Orchestra (at that time the Aldeburgh Festival's 'house band') and was first performed by them on 13th June 1975, with Steuart Bedford conducting. The work's subtitle 'A time there was...' refers to the Thomas Hardy poem 'Before life and after' which Britten had set as the

concluding song in his 1952 cycle *Winter Words*, a song which yearns for a return to a time 'before the birth of consciousness, when all went well'. Each of the Suite's five movements is based around a pair of tunes found either in Playford's *The Dancing Master*, a collection of folk melodies published during the mid-seventeenth century, or collected orally from authentic rural sources. Britten's earthy treatment of his folk-song material is at the furthest remove from the sentimentality often associated with the English pastoral tradition: the first movement, *Cakes and Ale*, is a vigorous scherzo marked 'Fast and rough' with prominent rôles for timpani and percussion, contrasted with a more warmly harmonized middle section. *The Bitter Withy*, derived from a Sussex song noted down by Vaughan Williams, is dominated by the solo harp (given the very Graingeresque marking 'ringingly'), which is then exchanged for a more sombre texture with quiet unison strings and the dark sonority of two low horns and tubular bell. *Hankin Booby* is a somewhat caustic alla-Coranto that gains its pungent, quasi-medieval sound from its acid two-part contrapuntal writing and incisive scoring for woodwind and muted trumpets over a rhythmic tattoo played on a tamburo. *Hunt the Squirrel* engages the two violin sections in a lively Scottish-sounding reel, much of its rustic brilliance achieved by the effective use of open strings. The final movement is the only one to quote a folk song *in toto*: after an introduction based on snatches of a dance tune, *Epping Forest*, Britten faithfully reproduces the long melody *Lord Melbourne* as transcribed by Grainger himself, played 'freely' on the cor anglais over a harmonically static yet rhythmically fluid string accompaniment. This is followed by a development of the opening material, prompting a short-lived climax before fading away on a hushed C major chord, over which fragmentary reminiscences of the melody float by like echoes on the breeze.

Lloyd Moore

Nicholas Daniel

Educated at Salisbury Cathedral School, the Purcell School and at the Royal Academy of Music, Nicholas Daniel studied with Janet Craxton, Celia Nicklin and George Caird. At the age of eighteen he was the winner of the BBC's prestigious Young Musician of the Year Competition, and went on to win numerous other competitions, including the International Double Reed Society competition in Graz, and the Munich International Oboe Competition, where he was the first British prize-winner. He made his debut at the BBC Promenade Concerts in London 1992 when still only in his twenties, returning to appear as a soloist in subsequent years. Today, one of the Britain's most distinguished and charismatic soloists, he is also noted for his championing of new repertoire for the instrument. An Artistic Associate of the Britten Sinfonia, Nicholas Daniel is also Artistic Director of the Osnabruck Festival, Germany, the Leicester International Music Festival and the Barbirolli Isle of Wight Oboe Competition, as well as serving as a member of the Arts Council in the East of England. Nicholas Daniel has been heard in recital on almost every continent, and has been a concerto soloist with major European orchestras in collaboration with distinguished conductors. An active chamber musician, he is a founding member of the Haffner Wind Ensemble, one of the leading wind ensembles in Britain, and has enjoyed a long collaboration with the pianist Julius Drake, with whom he has given premières of a number of important new works. He was Professor of Oboe and Conducting at the Indiana University School of Music from 1997 to 1999 and Prince Consort Lecturer of Oboe at the Royal College of Music for a three-year tenure from 1999-2002, and his outstanding musical achievements have been recognised by the major London conservatories, all of which have conferred honorary awards. Recently, he has been appointed Professor of Oboe at the Trossingen Musikhochschule in South West Germany. Nicholas Daniel can be heard on more than thirty recordings for major record companies.

Catherine Wyn-Rogers

The mezzo-soprano Catherine Wyn-Rogers was a Foundation Scholar at the Royal College of Music, studying with Meriel St Clair and gaining several prizes including the Dame Clara Butt award. She continued her studies with Ellis Keeler and now works with Diane Forlano. She appears extensively in recital and oratorio, collaborating with the major orchestras and choral societies, and at the Three Choirs, Edinburgh and Aldeburgh Festivals. She is renowned for her performances with period instrument orchestras, including the Sixteen, the English Concert, and the Academy of Ancient Music, and with symphony orchestras, including the Philharmonia, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Netherlands Radio Orchestra, the European Union Youth Orchestra and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, all under the most distinguished conductors. She appears regularly on the opera stage and has worked with Scottish Opera, Welsh National Opera, Opera North, English National Opera, the Semper Opera in Dresden, the Teatro Real Madrid, the Netherlands Opera, the Salzburg Festival, the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and with the Bavarian State Opera, Munich. Catherine Wyn-Rogers' numerous recordings include Handel's *Samson* with The Sixteen under Harry Christophers, Mozart's *Vespers* with Trevor Pinnock, Vaughan Williams's *Serenade to Music* with Roger Norrington, and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*. She has joined Graham Johnson's Complete Schubert Edition for Hyperion, recorded Mozart's *Requiem* with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Sir Charles Mackerras and Mrs Sedley in *Peter Grimes* with the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Colin Davis.

Philip Dukes

Philip Dukes' acclaimed recital début at London's South Bank in 1991 marked the beginning of a career in which he has established himself as one of the leading viola-players of his generation. His principal teachers in London and New York have included Mark Knight, Yfrah Neaman and Michael Tree. Having completed his studies, he won a succession of awards, scholarships, prizes and competitions, and in June 1992 was selected for representation by Young Concert Artists Trust. In 1995 he won the coveted European Rising Stars Award which led to recitals throughout Europe. Philip Dukes has performed at major music festivals at home and abroad. As a concerto soloist, he has appeared with leading orchestras throughout Great Britain, as well as with the Warsaw Sinfonia and the Swedish Chamber Orchestra. In 1995 he made his BBC Promenade Concert début, giving the world première of the *Viola Concerto* by Sally Beamish and at the 1997 Aldeburgh Festival he gave the world première of the previously unpublished *Concerto for Violin, Viola and Orchestra* by Benjamin Britten. At the 1999 BBC Promenade Concerts, he returned to give, together with Clio Gould, the world première of *Inside Story*, for violin, viola and orchestra, by Piers Hellawell. In addition to his solo engagements Philip Dukes is Professor of Viola at the Royal Academy of Music and Trinity College of Music in London, Artist in Residence at Queens University Belfast, and Head of Strings at Wells Cathedral School. He is also a jury member for both the Munich and Vienna International Viola Competitions.

Northern Sinfonia

Northern Sinfonia is one of Europe's foremost chamber orchestras. With its Music Director Thomas Zehetmair Northern Sinfonia ranges across the Western Classical Music repertoire from early baroque through the classical and romantic periods, to commissioned new work. The orchestra was founded in 1958 and as it approaches its fiftieth anniversary year is embarking on a brand new era in its development, making The Sage Gateshead its new home in December 2004. This new £70 Million pound Norman Foster building will become central to the orchestra's extensive classical music programme. The flexibility of this world-class orchestra extends to self-directed performances and chamber music as well as concerts at different times of day and in different venues from tiny Northumberland churches to the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. With The Sage Gateshead as its home Northern Sinfonia will continue to travel, serving the whole of the North of England and further afield throughout the United Kingdom as well as internationally. Apart from its Music Director, Thomas Zehetmair, Northern Sinfonia works with distinguished visiting musicians including Franz Bruggen, Imogen Cooper, Thierry Fischer, Lesley Garrett, Evelyn Glennie, Richard Hickox, Heinz Holliger, Kiri Te Kanawa, Sir Roger Norrington and Heinrich Schiff. Recordings and broadcasts form an integral part of the orchestra's work. Northern Sinfonia has won Classic CD awards for Best Concerto Recording and Living Composer. The orchestra's wide-ranging Learning and Participation programme features participatory projects for people of all ages and abilities, and community performances. Northern Sinfonia also has an associated award-winning youth orchestra, Young Sinfonia and is joined for both performance and recording by the Northern Sinfonia Chorus.

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Steuart Bedford

Steuart Bedford is recognised as one of today's leading experts on the works of Benjamin Britten. As a result of his former collaboration with the composer, he has conducted Britten's operas throughout the world, including the world première of *Death in Venice* in 1973, which was followed by the first recording of the work. From 1974 to 1998 he was one of the Artistic Directors of the Aldeburgh Festival eventually becoming Joint Artistic Director with Oliver Knussen. Steuart Bedford has an extensive operatic repertoire and has worked with many of the world's greatest opera companies including English National Opera, the Royal Opera Covent Garden, Metropolitan Opera, Opera North, Scottish Opera, Opéra de Paris, Brussels Opera, Monte Carlo Opera, Lausanne Opera, San Diego Opera, Santa Fe Opera Festival, Canadian Opera Company, Vancouver Opera, and the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires. He is also highly regarded for his interpretations of the works of Mozart, with acclaimed performances at the Garsington Opera and elsewhere. Although opera commitments take up much of his time, Steuart Bedford conducts concert engagements, both in Britain and abroad, and has toured Australia, New Zealand, South America and Scandinavia. He has worked with the English Chamber Orchestra (with whom he has toured all over the world), the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Northern Sinfonia, City of London Sinfonia, Teatro Colón, Gurzenich Orchestra, Orchestre National de Bordeaux Aquitaine, Orchestre Philharmonique de Montpellier, Dortmund Philharmonic and the BBC Orchestras.

A Charm of Lullabies (1947)

14 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 beguiles.

15 The Highland Balou

Robert Burns

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

Leeze me on thy bonnie craigie!
And thou live, thou'll steal a naigie,
Travel the country thro' and thro' ,
and bring hame a Carlisle cow!

Thro' the Lawlands, o'er the Border,
Weel, my babie, may thou furder!
Herry the louns o' the laigh Countrie,
Syne to the Highlands hame to me!
Hee balou, my sweet wee Donald,

16 Sephestia's lullaby

Robert Greene

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 crow'ed, 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.

17 A Charm
Thomas Randolph

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 brimstones never slake;
Thy heart shall burn, thy head shall ache,

And ev'ry joint about thee quake;
And therefore dare not yet to wake!
Quiet, sleep!
Quiet, sleep! Quiet!

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 called Tisiphone,
Shall lash thee to eternity;
And therefore sleep thou peacefully
Quiet, sleep!
Quiet, sleep! Quiet!

18 The Nurse's Song
John Philip

Lullaby baby, lullaby baby,
Thy nurse will tend thee as duly as may be.
Lullaby baby!

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.
Lullaby baby!

The gods be thy shield and comfort in need!
The gods be thy shield and comfort in need!
Sing Lullaby baby, 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.
Lullaby baby!

Simple Symphony, Op. 4 (1934)

15:56

1	Boisterous Bourrée	3:21	3	Sentimental Sarabande	6:34
2	Playful Pizzicato	2:59	4	Frolicsome Finale	3:03

Temporal Variations (1936)

Orchestrated by Colin Matthews (1993)

13:50

5	Theme	1:54	10	Chorale	2:19
6	Oration	1:38	11	Waltz	1:34
7	March	1:13	12	Polka	1:09
8	Exercises	0:59	13	Resolution	1:43
9	Communion	1:21			

A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41 (1947)

Arranged by Colin Matthews (1990)

13:45

14	A Cradle Song	2:59	17	A Charm	2:02
15	The Highland Balou	2:03	18	The Nurse's Song	4:44
16	Sephestia's Lullaby	1:57			

Lachrymae, Op. 48a (1976)

14:30

19	Theme	1:53	25	Variation 6: Appassionato	0:53
20	Variation 1: Allegretto, andante molto	0:54	26	Variation 7: Alla valse moderato	0:58
21	Variation 2: Animato	1:29	27	Variation 8: Allegro marcia	0:45
22	Variation 3: Tranquillo	1:53	28	Variation 9: Lento	0:50
23	Variation 4: Allegro con moto	0:45	29	Variation 10: L'istesso tempo	3:31
24	Variation 5: Largamente	0:39			

Suite on English Folk Tunes, Op. 90 (1974) 'A time there was ...'

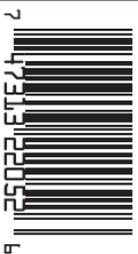
13:45

30	Cakes and Ale	2:30	33	Hunt the Squirrel	1:20
31	The Bitter Withy	2:32	34	Lord Melbourne	5:17
32	Hankin' Booby	2:06			



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Playing Time
71:46

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 Booklet notes in English
 Sung texts included
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The works on this recording cover the entire span of Britten's published output – from the *Simple Symphony* of 1934, to the string orchestral arrangement of *Lachrymae* completed in the last year of his life. Britten always retained a special affection for his childhood efforts and in the *Simple Symphony* reworked his earliest compositions making them 'more fit for general consumption'. In contrast there is a special poignancy about the works of his final three years, composed after Britten's unsuccessful heart operation. In its earthy treatment of the folk-song material, the *Suite on English Folk Tunes*, his last purely orchestral work, is at the furthest remove from the sentimentality often associated with the English pastoral tradition.

Benjamin
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 (1913-1976)

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|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| 1-4 | Simple Symphony for Strings, Op. 4 (1934) | 15:56 |
| 5-13 | Temporal Variations (1936) ¹
Orchestrated by Colin Matthews (1993) | 13:50 |
| 14-18 | A Charm of Lullabies, Op. 41 (1947) ²
Arranged by Colin Matthews (1990) | 13:45 |
| 19-29 | Lachrymae, Op. 48a (1976) ³ | 14:30 |
| 30-34 | Suite on English Folk Tunes, Op. 90 (1974)
'A time there was ...' | 13:45 |

Nicholas Daniel, Oboe ¹ • Catherine Wyn-Rogers, Mezzo-Soprano ²
 Philip Dukes, Viola ³ • Northern Sinfonia • Stuart Bedford

Recorded at All Saints Church, Gosforth, Newcastle, UK on 16th and 17th July 1998
 Producer: John H. West • Engineer: Mike Hatch (Floating Earth) • Booklet Notes: Lloyd Moore
Originally released by Collins Classics in 1998 • Please see booklet for a complete track list
 Publishers: Oxford University Press (Tracks 1-4), Faber Music Ltd. (Tracks 5-13 and 30-34)
 and Boosey & Hawkes Ltd. (Tracks 14-29) • Tracks 5-13 and 14-18 are **World Première Recordings**
 Cover Picture: *In the Fields* by Henry John Yeend King (Bourne Gallery, Surrey / Bridgeman Art Library)

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