

BRITTEN

CANTICLES

THE HEART OF THE MATTER



DANIEL NORMAN
CHRISTOPHER GOULD

BENJAMIN MACLEAN
WILLIAM TOWERS
RODERICK WILLIAMS

HARRIET WALTER

RICHARD WATKINS
HUGH WEBB



DANIEL NORMAN

BENJAMIN MACLEAN

WILLIAM TOWERS

RODERICK WILLIAMS

BRITTEN

CANTICLES

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

DANIEL NORMAN
CHRISTOPHER GOULD

BENJAMIN MACLEAN
WILLIAM TOWERS
RODERICK WILLIAMS

HARRIET WALTER

RICHARD WATKINS
HUGH WEBB

Recorded live at the Holywell Music Room

BRITTEN

CANTICLES THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

- | | | |
|----|--|-------|
| 1 | Canticle I: My beloved is mine, Op.40 | 7'34 |
| 2 | Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac, Op.51 | 15'55 |
| | The heart of the matter | |
| 3 | i Prologue: Where are the seeds of the Universal Fire | 2'43 |
| 4 | ii Reading: The earth of my heart was broken and gaped low | 1'56 |
| 5 | iii Song: We are the darkness in the heat of the day | 1'28 |
| 6 | iv Reading: In such a heat of the earth | 3'17 |
| 7 | v Canticle III: Still falls the rain, Op.55 | 11'09 |
| 8 | vi Reading: I see Christ's wounds weep in the Rose on the wall | 2'29 |
| 9 | vii Epilogue: So, out of the dark | 2'52 |
| 10 | Canticle IV: Journey of the Magi, Op.86 | 11'14 |
| 11 | Canticle V: The death of Saint Narcissus, Op.89 | 7'49 |

68'46

DANIEL NORMAN *tenor*
CHRISTOPHER GOULD *piano*
BENJAMIN MACLEAN *treble*
WILLIAM TOWERS *counter-tenor*
RODERICK WILLIAMS *baritone*
HARRIET WALTER *speaker*
RICHARD WATKINS *horn*
HUGH WEBB *harp*

THE FIVE CANTICLES

Britten's five *Canticles* are intricately carved milestones in a brilliant, creative life (1947–74). Not even the three numbered quartets, which cover approximately the same years (1941–76), are as revealing of Britten's stylistic obsessions at any one time. Perhaps it is the thirty-one years separating the second and third of these quartets, or that they are absolute music, without the poetry that had coloured Britten's imagination since childhood. Or perhaps it is that the three quartets represent continuity – an argument about intimate style and gesture continued from one work to the next – whereas each of the *Canticles* displays an individuality so marked, and a mood so distinct, that they can at first seem odd bedfellows.

But there are threads running through the five *Canticles*, even if initially they are not so easy to pick. Primarily, each is the work of an opera composer, who had made his first stumbling steps in 1941 with *Paul Bunyan* and who, four years later, strode purposefully onto the world stage with *Peter Grimes*. Britten had been serving his operatic apprenticeship ever since joining the GPO Film Unit midway through the 1930s, but the success of *Grimes* confirmed dramatic instincts *Bunyan* presented no compelling reason to believe he might possess. So each *Canticle* is a drama in miniature, possessing a compact and powerful narrative that belies its short length. There is the ill-disguised celebration of Britten's love for Peter Pears in the retelling of *The Song of Solomon* by the seventeenth-century English poet Francis Quarles. There is the cruel biblical story of Abraham's intention to slay his son on God's instruction. There is Edith Sitwell's haunting take on the German raids on London in 1940. There is T. S. Eliot's reimagining of the journey of the Magi to Bethlehem to see the Christ child. And finally there is Eliot's depiction of Saint Narcissus, this 'dancer before God', unable to live men's ways.

Perhaps Sitwell intended the protagonist in 'Still falls the rain' to be a woman. Certainly no one present at the Churchill Club late in the war when she recited it, a doodle bug buzzing overhead, the poet merely raising her eyes to the ceiling for a moment before continuing her recitation, would ever hear the poem without thinking of her imperious sing-song voice. Yet its bleak anger, and the sudden quotation from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* ('O Ile leape up to my God: who pulles me doune'), suggest a man, leaving us in each of the *Canticles* with even more names to add to the list of Britten's strong, well-defined male characters. Women barely get a look in.

Except as collaborators. Sitwell was a marvellously eccentric figure, straight out of an E. F. Benson novel, with a wardrobe full of turbans, chunky jewellery and mourning-black clothing. When Britten asked her in 1959 to write a poem celebrating the anniversaries of Purcell and Handel, he spoke of the importance of monuments to the dead. 'The ideal would be a poem, in praise of Purcell and Handel, or in praise of praising great men of art (which I feel these days is getting rarer & rarer).' It was a revealing comment, and Sitwell responded with a poem that Britten would painstakingly work on in the last year of his life, though never finishing it.

Praise we great men
From all the hearths and homes of men, from hives
Of honey-making lives.
Praise with our music those
Who bring the morning light
To the hearts of men, those households of high heaven!

Strangely, for such a sensitive, thin-skinned man, Britten was not really interested in such praise himself. There was a time when he had been – during the war at the dinner table with the cultured and experienced Erwin Stein, say, whose impressive pedigree included time as a pupil of Schoenberg and a friend of Mahler, and whose approval Britten sought and valued – but by 1959 he was unmoved by the opinions of others. But honouring his heroes was a principle to which he clung. He had long praised Purcell, Mozart, Schubert and Bridge, emulating certain practices, programming them whenever possible, performing them with rare understanding. So too did he build relationships with the small handful of musicians he admired, revolutionising performance practice in England after the war as he went.

And so it was that another thread running through the *Canticles* was stitched into place. Taking his cue from biblical canticles – songs or chants such as the Magnificat ('My soul doth magnify the Lord. / And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour') – Britten dedicated each of his *Canticles*, in either name or spirit, to one of his heroes. *Canticle I 'My beloved is mine and I am his'* was written in 1947 for a memorial service in honour of Canon Dick Sheppard, the charismatic founder of the pre-war Peace Pledge Union,

which Britten sponsored from the end of the war until his death. Sheppard had inverted Victor Hugo's *cri de cœur*, 'Let us dishonour war', by announcing, *Let Us Honour Peace*, a credo Britten lived by. *Canticle II 'Abraham and Isaac'* was written in 1952 for Pears and the contralto Kathleen Ferrier, whose death the following year formed a desperately sad coda to the work's happy ending. *Canticle III 'Still falls the rain'* was written in 1954 for a memorial service honouring the musical, brilliant young Australian pianist Noel Mewton-Wood, whose partner's death precipitated his grief-stricken suicide. *Canticle IV 'Journey of the Magi'* was composed in 1971 and dedicated to its three singers, James Bowman, Pears and John Shirley-Quirk, while *Canticle V 'The death of Saint Narcissus'* was written in 1974 and dedicated to the memory of William Plomer, librettist of *Gloriana* and the three *Church Parables*, whose death the previous year had wholly shaken Britten.

There is one final commonality to the five works. The language is opulent, with imagery shimmering behind every sentence. Even the downcast Sitwell poem – so bitter at the senseless destruction occurring all around them, which she links to the crucifixion of Christ – includes language that deadens the senses through monotonous repetition. In each there was an aspect of Britten being true to the original function of a canticle, choosing texts that pay homage to a biblical figure, though there is occasionally a sting in the tale. Yet even by the time of the first *Canticle* Britten's boyhood faith had been replaced by something closer to a belief in the numinous – a spiritual quality in our daily existence that requires neither hymns nor psalms in its honour. No, the link is because by 1947 Britten was captivated by the flowery yet gritty language of Donne and Crabbe and of the free-fall conceits of the metaphysical poets. Purcell was the inspiration here: Britten had discovered his music at the beginning of the 1940s, setting five of his *Divine Hymns* in the three years leading up to his *Canticle I*, and Purcell's clumping passacaglias, ecstatic vocal lines, and simple accompaniments pushed out of vertical alignment are evident in this first and later *Canticles*. It wasn't just Purcell's music, however. Britten wrote at the time of *Peter Grimes* of what Purcell had taught him about language. 'One of my chief aims is to try and restore to the musical setting of the English language a brilliance, freedom, and vitality that have been curiously rare since the death of Purcell.' Britten despaired at his nineteenth-century forebears, hostages to Victorian harmony at the expense of a poem's natural prosody; the *Canticles* obey no such rules.

Even though the first three *Canticles* span only seven years, each occupies such a distinct musical landscape. There is the sheer joy of *Canticle I*, which gives way to the whispered hymn, 'That I my best-beloved's am; that he is mine'. In *Canticle II*, Britten conjures the voice of God by putting the tenor and alto (or boy's voice) in the same range, and they issue an otherworldly sound, but he is happy enough to counter this with the panicked, short-phrased sentences of poor Isaac when he realizes what his father has in mind. And in *Canticle III* Britten almost creates a deserted battleground punctuated by ghostly bugle calls that are completely disconnected from the narrator's utterances; only in the final moments do they combine in a short hymn, their disagreements put aside. Sitwell, deeply moved by work's premiere in the 1955 Aldeburgh Festival, agreed to return the following year for an expanded version of the *Canticle*, featuring new music and poetry as a frame, lifting its name from Graham Greene's hugely successful novel of 1948, *The heart of the matter*. Rarely performed (or recorded), this version – with its horn fanfares and theatrical declamations – offers a fascinating look into Britten's creative process.

By the time of *Canticle IV*, Britten's musical language had changed markedly. But there is something in the works of his final years that looks back to the more literal or illustrative works of the 1940s. So it is easy enough in *Canticle IV* to pick out the lumbering camel train and to sympathise with the three Kings in old age as they attempt to remember and describe what they encountered all those years ago, speaking over each other, contradicting bold assertions, until they are held bewitched – as are we – by the plainsong *Magi videntes stellam* (The Magi, having seen the star), which is spelled out in the piano, but wafts high above the texture as though echoing round a boomy cathedral. Even *Canticle V* contains a youthful muscularity so at odds with the circumstances of its creation, composed, as it was, when Britten was desperately ill, scribbling urgently the notes on his mind, aware that time was short. But by then the sense of drama that had governed his output for over thirty years – and would do so chillingly one last time in *Phaedra* (1975) – was second nature. Narcissus emerges fully drawn, another great dramatic figure from Britten's febrile imagination.



1 **Canticle I: My beloved is mine, Op.40**
Francis Quarles (1592-1644)

Ev'n like two little bank-divided brooks,
That wash the pebbles with their
wanton streams,
And having ranged and searched a
thousand nooks,
Meet both at length at silver-breasted
Thames,
Where in a greater current they conjoin:
So I my best beloved's am, so he is mine.

Ev'n so we met; and after long pursuit,
Ev'n so we joined, we both became entire;
No need for either to renew a suit,
For I was flax and he was flames of fire.
Our firm-united souls did more than twine;
So I my best beloved's am; so he is mine.

If all those glittering monarchs, that
command
The servile quarters of this earthly ball,
Should tender, in exchange, their shares
of land,
I would not change my fortunes for
them all:
Their wealth is but a counter to my coin:
The world's but theirs; but my
beloved's mine.

Nor time, nor place, nor chance, nor death
can bow
My least desires unto the least remove;
He's firmly mine by oath; I his by vow;
He's mine by faith; and I am his by love;
He's mine by water; I am his by wine;
Thus I my best-beloved's am; thus he
is mine.

He is my altar; I his holy place;
I am his guest; and he my living food;
I'm his by penitence; he mine by grace;
I'm his by purchase; he is mine, by blood;
He's my supporting elm; and I his vine;
Thus I my best beloved's am; thus he
is mine.

He gives me wealth; I give him all
my vows:
I give him songs; he gives me length
of days;
With wreaths of grace he crowns my
longing brows:
And I his temples with a crown of praise,
Which he accepts; an everlasting sign,
That I my best-beloved's am; that he
is mine.

2 **Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac, Op.51**

Anonymous

GOD

Abraham! My servant, Abraham,
Take Isaac, thy son by name,
That thou lovest the best of all,
And in sacrifice offer him to me
Upon that hill there besides thee.
Abraham, I will that so it be,
For aught that may befall.

ABRAHAM

My Lord, to Thee is mine intent
Ever to be obedient.
That son that Thou to me hast sent
Offer I will to Thee.
Thy bidding done shall be.
Make thee ready, my dear darling,
For we must do a little thing.
This woodē do on thy back it bring,
We may no longer abide.
A sword and fire that I will take,
For sacrifice behoves me to make;
God's bidding will I not forsake,
But ever obedient be.

ISAAC

Father, I am all ready
To do your bidding most meekely,
And to bear this wood full bayn am I,
As you commanded me.

ABRAHAM

Now, Isaac son, go we our way
To yonder mount if that we may.

ISAAC

My dear father, I will essay
To follow you full fain.

ABRAHAM

O! My heart will break in three,
To hear thy words I have pitey;
As Thou wilt, Lord, so must it be,
To Thee I will be bayn.
Lay down thy faggot, my own son dear.

ISAAC

All ready, father, lo, it is here.
But why make you such heavy cheer?
Are you anything adread?

ABRAHAM

Ah! Dear God! That me is woe!

ISAAC

Father, if it be your will,
Where is the beast that we shall kill?

ABRAHAM

Thereof, son, is none upon this hill.

ISAAC

Father, I am full sore affeared
To see you bear that drawne sword.

ABRAHAM

Isaac, son, peace, I pray thee,
Thou breakest my heart even in three.

ISAAC

I pray you, father, layn nothing from me,
But tell me what you think.

ABRAHAM

Ah! Isaac, Isaac, I must thee kill!

ISAAC

Alas! Father, is that your will,
Your owne child for to spill
Upon this hillës brink?

If I have trespassed in any degree,
With a yard you may beat me;
Put up your sword, if your will be,
For I am but a child.

Would God my mother were here
with me!

She would kneel down upon her knee,
Praying you, father, if it may be,
For to save my life.

ABRAHAM

O Isaac, son, to thee I say
God hath commanded me today
Sacrifice, this is no nay,
To make of thy bodye.

ISAAC

Is it God's will I shall be slain?

ABRAHAM

Yea, son, it is not for to layn.

ISAAC

Father, seeing you mustë needs do so,
Let it pass lightly and over go;
Kneeling on my kneës two,
Your blessing on me spread.

ABRAHAM

My blessing, dear son, give I thee
And thy mother's with heart free;

The blessing of the Trinity,
My dear Son, on thee light.
Come hither, my child, thou art
so sweet,
Thou must be bound both hands
and feet.

ISAAC

Father, do with me as you will,
I must obey, and that is skill,
Godes commandment to fulfil,
For needs so it must be.

ABRAHAM

Isaac, Isaac, blessèd must thou be.

ISAAC

Father, greet well my brethren ying,
And pray my mother of her blessing,
I come no more under her wing,
Farewell for ever and aye.

ABRAHAM

Farewell, my sweete son of grace!

ISAAC

I pray you, father, turn down my face,
For I am sore adread.

ABRAHAM

Lord, full loth were I him to kill!

ISAAC

Ah, mercy, father, why tarry you so?

ABRAHAM

Jesu! On me have pity,
That I have most in mind.

ISAAC

Now, father, I see that I shall die:
Almighty God in majesty!
My soul I offer unto Thee!

ABRAHAM

To do this deed I am sorryë.

GOD

Abraham! my servant dear,
Lay not thy sword in no manner
On Isaac, thy dear darling.
For thou darest me, well wot I,
That of thy son has no mercy,
To fulfil my bidding.

ABRAHAM

Ah, Lord of heav'n and King of bliss,
Thy bidding shall be done, i-wiss!
A hornèd wether here I see,
Among the briars tied is he,
To Thee offered shall he be
Anon right in this place.
Sacrifice here sent me is,
And all, Lord, through Thy grace.

ENVOI

Such obedience grant us, O Lord!
Ever to Thy most holy word.
That in the same we may accord
As this Abraham was bayn;
And then altogether shall we
That worthy King in heaven see,
And dwell with Him in great glorye
For ever and ever. Amen.

The heart of the matter

Edith Sitwell (1887-1964)

**3 i Prologue: Where are the seeds of
the Universal Fire**

Where are the seeds of the
Universal Fire
To burn the roots of Death in the
world's cold heart?
When in this world will the cold heart
take fire?

4 ii **Reading: The earth of my heart
was broken and gaped low**

The earth of my heart was broken and
gaped low
As the fires beneath the equator of
my veins.
And I thought the seeds of Fire should
be let loose
Like the solar rains –
The light that lies deep in the heart of
the rose;
And that the bloom from the fallen
spring of the world
Would come again to the cheek grown
famine-white
As winter frost –
Would come again to the heart whose
courage is lost
From hunger. When in this world
Will the cold heart take fire? In the
hour when the sapphire of the bone –
That hard and precious fire wrung from
the earth,
And the sapphire tears the heavens weep
shall be made one.

But, in the summer, great should be the
sun of the heart
And great is the heat of the fires from
elementary and terrestrial nature –
Ripening the kernel of amethysts in the
sun of the peach –
The dancing seas in the heart of
the apricot.
The earth, the sun, the heart, have so
many fires
It is a great wonder
That the whole world is not consumed.

5 **iii Song: We are the darkness in the heat of the day**

We are the darkness in the heat of the day,
The rootless flowers in the air, the
coolness: we are the water
Lying upon the leaves before Death,
our sun,
And its vast heat has drunken us ...
Beauty's daughter,
The heart of the rose and we are one.

We are the summer's children, the breath
of evening, the days
When all may be hoped for, – we are
the unreturning
Smile of the lost one, seen through the
summer leaves –
That sun and its false light scorning.

6 **iv Reading: In such a heat of the earth**

In such a heat of the earth, under
The red bough, the Colossus of rubies
the first husbandman and grave-digger,
the red Adam,
Dug from the earth of his own nature,
the corn effigy
Of a long-buried country god, encrusted
with earth-virtues,
And brought to a new birth
The ancient wisdom hiding behind heat
and laughter,
Deep-rooted in Death's earth.

Gone is that heat. But this is the hour of
brotherhood, the warmth that comes
To the rejected by Life – the shadow
with no eyes –
Young Icarus with the broken alar bones
And the sapped and ageing Atlas of
the slums
Devoured by the days until all days
are done –
To the Croesus of the breadline, gold
from the sun,
And the lover seeing in Woman the
rankness of Nature, –
A monstrous Life-force, the need
of procreation
Devouring all other life ... or
Gravity's force
Drawing him down to the centre of
his earth.
These sprawl together in the sunlight –
the negation

Of Life, fag-ends of Ambition, wrecks
of the heart,
Lumps of the world, and bones left by
the Lion.
Amid the assembly of young
laughing roses
They wait for a re-birth
Under the democratic sun, enriching all,
rejecting no one ...
But the smile of youth, the red mouth of
the flower
Seem the open wounds of a hunger that
is voiceless –
And on their lips lies the dust of
Babel's city;
And the sound of the heart is changed
to the noise of revolutions –
The hammer of Chaos destroying
and rebuilding
Small wingless hopes and fears in the
light of the Sun.
Who dreamed when Nature should be
heightened to a fever –
The ebullition of her juices and humours –
The war of creed and creed, of starved
and starver –
The light would return to the cheek, and
a new Word
Would take the place of the heart?
We might tell the blind
The hue of the flower, or the philosopher
What distance is, in the essence of
its being –
But not the distance between the hearts
of Men.

7 v **Canticle III: Still falls the rain,
Op.55**

Still falls the Rain –
Dark as the world of man, black as
our loss –
Blind as the nineteen hundred and
forty nails
Upon the Cross.

Still falls the Rain
With a sound like the pulse of the heart
that is changed to the hammer-beat
In the Potter's Field, and the sound of
the impious feet

On the Tomb:
Still falls the rain
In the Field of Blood where the small
hopes breed and the human brain
Nurtures its greed, that worm with the
brow of Cain.

Still falls the Rain
At the feet of the Starved Man hung upon
the Cross.
Christ that each day, each night, nails
there, have mercy on us –
On Dives and on Lazarus:
Under the Rain the sore and the gold are
as one.

Still falls the Rain –
Still falls the Blood from the Starved
Man's wounded Side:
He bears in His Heart all wounds, – those
of the light that died,
The last faint spark
In the self-murdered heart, the wounds
of the sad uncomprehending dark,
The wounds of the baited bear, –
The blind and weeping bear whom the
keepers beat
On his helpless flesh ... the tears of the
hunted hare.

Still falls the Rain –
Then – O Ile leape up to my God: who
pulle me doune –
See, see where Christ's blood streames
in the firmament:
It flows from the Brow we nailed upon
the tree
Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart
That holds the fires of the world, – dark-
smirched with pain
As Caesar's laurel crown.

Then sounds the voice of One who like
the heart of man
Was once a child who among beasts
has lain –
"Still do I love, still shed my innocent
light, my Blood, for thee."

8 vi **Reading: I see Christ's wounds weep
in the Rose on the wall**

I see Christ's wounds weep in the
Rose on the wall.
Then I who nursed in my earth the
dark red seeds of Fire –
The pomegranate grandeur, the dark
seeds of Death,
Felt them change to the light and fire
in the heart of the rose ...
And I thought of the umbilical cords
that bind us to strange suns
And causes ... of Smart the madman
who was born
To bless Christ with the Rose and his
people, a nation
Of living sweetness ... of Harvey who
blessed Christ with the solar fire
in the veins,
And Linnaeus praising Him with the
winged seed! –
Men born for the Sun's need –
Yet theirs are hymns to God who walks
in darkness.
And thinking of the age-long sleep,
then brought to the light's birth
Of terrestrial nature generated far
From heaven ... the argillaceous clays,
the zircon and sapphire
Bright as the tears of heaven, but deep
in earth –
And of the child of the four elements
The plant – organic water polarised to
the earth's centre –

And to the light: – the stem and root, the
water-plant and earth-plant,
The leaf, the child of air, the flower, the
plant of fire –
And of One who contracted His Immensity
And shut Himself in the scope of a
small flower
Whose root is clasped in darkness ... God
in the span
Of the root and light-seeking corolla ...
with the voice of Fire I cry –
Will He disdain that flower of the world,
the heart of Man?

9 vii **Epilogue: So, out of the dark**

So, out of the dark, see our great
Spring begins
- Our Christ, the new Song, breaking out
in the fields and hedgerows,
The heart of Man! O the new temper
of Christ, in veins and branches!

10 **Canticle IV: Journey of the Magi, Op.86**
T.S. Eliot (1888-1965)

"A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter."
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting their
liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out, and
the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging
high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a
temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling
of vegetation;
With a running stream and a
water-mill beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped
away in the meadow.
Then we came to a tavern with
vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing
for pieces of silver,
And feet kicking the empty
wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so
we continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment
too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say)
satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down

This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had
seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different;
this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death,
our death.

We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the
old dispensation,

With an alien people clutching
their gods.

I should be glad of another death.

11 **Canticle V: The death of Saint
Narcissus, Op.89**

T.S. Eliot

Come under the shadow of this gray rock –
Come in under the shadow of this gray rock,
And I will show you something
different from either

Your shadow sprawling over the sand
at daybreak, or

Your shadow leaping behind the fire
against the red rock:

I will show you his bloody cloth and limbs
And the gray shadow on his lips.

He walked once between the sea and
the high cliffs

When the wind made him aware of
his limbs smoothly passing each other
And of his arms crossed over his breast.

When he walked over the meadows
He was stifled and soothed by his
own rhythm.

By the river

His eyes were aware of the pointed
corners of his eyes

And his hands aware of the pointed
tips of his fingers.

Struck down by such knowledge
He could not live men's ways, but
became a dancer before God.

If he walked in city streets
He seemed to tread on faces,
convulsive thighs and knees.
So he came out under the rock.

First he was sure that he had been a tree,
Twisting its branches among each other
And tangling its roots among each other.

Then he knew that he had been a fish
With slippery white belly held tight
in his own fingers,
Writhing in his own clutch, his
ancient beauty
Caught fast in the pink tips of his
new beauty.

Then he had been a young girl
Caught in the woods by a drunken
old man

Knowing at the end the taste of his
own whiteness
The horror of his own smoothness,
And he felt drunken and old.

So he became a dancer to God.
Because his flesh was in love
with the burning arrows
He danced on the hot sand
Until the arrows came.
As he embraced them his white
skin surrendered itself to the
redness of blood, and
satisfied him.

Now he is green, dry and stained
With the shadow in his mouth.

NATIONAL SERVICE ACTS.
Certificate of Registration in Register of Conscientious Objectors.

LSE R.O. Case No. L21044 Date 3 - MAY 1945

Holder's Name BRITTEN Edward Benjamin
Home Address 45 St John's Wood High St N W 8
Date of Birth 22-11-1913
Holder's Signature Benjamin Britten

This is to certify that the above person by order of the competent Tribunal is—
* (a) registered unconditionally in the Register of Conscientious Objectors.
* (b) registered conditionally in the Register of Conscientious Objectors.
* (c) registered in the Register of Conscientious Objectors as a person
liable to be called up for military service but to be employed
only in non-combatant duties.

H. E. Schagen
(Regional Controller, Ministry of Labour and National Service W. H. B. 5 Region.)

READ THIS CAREFULLY.
Care should be taken not to lose this certificate, but in the event of loss application for a duplicate should be made to the nearest Office of the Ministry of Labour and National Service.
If you change your home address or your name you must complete the space on the other side of this certificate and post it at once. A new certificate will then be sent to you.
A person who uses or lends this certificate or allows it to be used by any other person with intent to deceive, renders himself liable to heavy penalties.

N. S. 62. *M1198 5/42 702

Stone Records and Oxford Lieder are very grateful to Truffehunter for its generous support of this recording.

Produced and edited by Matthew Bennett.

Engineered and mastered by Julian Millard.

Recorded 15-16 February 2013 at Holywell Music Room, Oxford, U.K., by kind permission of Wadham College, Oxford.

Steinway Technician: Joseph Taylor.

Publishers: Boosey & Hawkes (tracks 1-3,5,7,9); Duckworth Overlook (4,6,8); Faber Music (10-11).

Booklet notes © 2013 Paul Kildea, author of *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century*, published by Penguin Press.

Sung text of *The heart of the matter* from *Collected poems* by Edith Sitwell, reprinted by permission of Peters Fraser & Dunlop (www.petersfraserdunlop.com) on behalf of the Estate of Edith Sitwell.

Sung text of *Journey of the Magi* and *The death of Saint Narcissus* from *Collected poems 1909-1962* by T.S. Eliot © Estate of T.S. Eliot, reprinted by permission of Faber & Faber Ltd.

Front cover: photograph of the enthronement of Bishop of Coventry Neville Gorton in 1943; reproduced by permission of The Press Association.

Inside front cover: photograph of Daniel Norman © 2006 Rupert Jefferson, photograph of Benjamin Maclean © 2012 The School Photography Company, photograph of William Towers © 2005 Rob Moore, photograph of Roderick Williams © 2010 Benjamin Ealovega.

Page 9: photograph of Britten at Crag House c.1949 by Roland Haupt, image courtesy of www.britten100.org.

Page 21: Britten's Conscientious Objectors Certificate 1943, image courtesy of www.britten100.org.

Inside back cover: photograph of Harriet Walter © 2009 Georgia Oetker, photograph of Christopher Gould © 2007 Peter Everard Smith, photograph of Richard Watkins © 2004 Keith Saunders, photograph of Hugh Webb © 2011 Jay Morthland.

Reverse inlay: photograph of Peter Pears and Britten in Brooklyn 1940, image courtesy of www.britten100.org.

Printed in the E.U.



HARRIET WALTER

CHRISTOPHER GOULD

RICHARD WATKINS

HUGH WEBB

5 0 6 0 1 9 2 7 8 0 3 1 4

STONE
records