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## Britten vocal music V: Canticles and the Ballad of Little Musgrave

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2023 | 8pm Trinity College Chapel

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PROGRAMME

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- BENJAMIN Britten (1913–1976) *The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard*  
*Tom Baarda* ..... tenor  
*Benedict Randall Shaw* ..... baritone  
*Sam Gray* ..... bass  
*Calvin Leung* ..... piano
- BENJAMIN Britten (1913–1976) *Canticle I: My beloved is mine and I am his*  
*Hugo Williamson* ..... tenor  
*Calvin Leung* ..... piano
- BENJAMIN Britten (1913–1976) *Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac*  
*Alex Thow* ..... countertenor  
*Liam Lichy-Lightman* ..... tenor  
*Harrison Cole* ..... piano
- BENJAMIN Britten (1913–1976) *Canticle III: Still falls the rain*  
*Jamie Shepherd* ..... tenor  
*Georgia Burr* ..... horn  
*Augustine Cox* ..... piano

BENJAMIN Canticle IV: The Journey of the Magi  
 BRITTEN *Alex Thow* ..... *countertenor*  
 (1913-1976) *Elliot Harding-Smith* ..... *tenor*  
*Sam Gray* ..... *baritone*  
*Calvin Leung* ..... *piano*

BENJAMIN Canticle V: The Death of Saint Narcissus  
 BRITTEN *David Bick* ..... *tenor*  
 (1913-1976) *Eleanor Medcalf* ..... *harp*

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TEXT

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**The Ballad of Little Musgrave and Lady Barnard**

As it fell on one holy-day, As many be in the year, When young men and  
 maids together did go Their matins and mass to hear,  
 Little Musgrave came to the church-door - The priest was at private mass -  
 But he had more mind of the fair women Then he had of Our Lady's grace.  
 The one of them was clad in green, Another was clad in pall, And then came  
 in my Lord Barnard's wife, The fairest amongst them all.  
 Quoth she, 'I have loved thee, Little Musgrave, Full long and many a day.' -  
 'So have I loved you, fair ladye, Yet never word durst I say.' -  
 'But I have a bower at Bucklesfordberrry, Full daintily it is dight; If thou'lt wend  
 thither, thou Little Musgrave, Thou's lig in my arms all night.'  
 With that beheard a little tiny page, By his lady's coach as he ran. Says,  
 'Although I am my lady's foot-page, Yet I am Lord Barnard's man.'  
 Then he's cast off his hose and shoon, Set down his feet and ran, And where  
 the bridges were broken down He bent his bow and swam.  
 'Awake! awake! thou Lord Barnard, As thou art a man of life! Little Musgrave  
 is at Bucklesfordberrry Along with thy own wedded wife.' -  
 He called up his merry men all: 'Come saddle me my steed; This night must I  
 to Bucklesfordberrry, For I never had greater need.'  
 But some they whistled, and some they sung, And some they thus could say,  
 Whenever Lord Barnard's horn it blew: 'Away, Musgrave, away! ... -  
 'Methinks I hear the threstle cock, Methinks I hear the jay; Methinks I hear  
 Lord Barnard's horn, Away, Musgrave, away!' -  
 'Lie still, lie still, thou little Musgrave, And huggle me from the cold; 'Tis  
 nothing but a shepherd's boy A-driving his sheep to the fold.'  
 By this, Lord Barnard came to his door And lighted a stone upon; And he's  
 pull'd out three silver keys, And open'd the doors each one.  
 He lifted up the coverlet, He lifted up the sheet:  
 'Arise, arise, thou Little Musgrave, And put thy clothès on; It shall ne'er be said

in my country I have kill'd a naked man.

'I have two swords in one scabbard, They are both sharp and clear; Take you the best, and I the worst, We'll end the matter here.'

The first stroke Little Musgrave struck, He hurt Lord Barnard sore; The next stroke that Lord Barnard struck, Little Musgrave ne'er struck more.

'Woe worth you, woe worth, my merry men all, You were ne'er born for my good! Why did you not offer to stay my hand When you saw me wax so wood?

'For I have slain the fairest lady That ever wore woman's weed, Soe I have slain the fairest lady That ever did woman's deed.

'A grave, a grave,' Lord Barnard cried, 'To put these lovers in! But lay my lady on the upper hand, For she comes of the nobler kin.'

### **Canticle I: My beloved is mine and I am his**

Ev'n like two little bank-divided brooks, That wash the pebbles with their wanton streams, And having rang'd and search'd 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 joyn'd; 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 glitt'ring 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.

Francis Quarles (1592-1644)

### **Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac**

God speaks: 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.

Here Abraham, turning him to his son Isaac, saith:

Make thee ready, my dear darling, For we must do a little thing. This woode 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.

Here Isaac speaketh to his father, and taketh a bundle of sticks and beareth after his father, and saith:

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.

Here they both go to the place to do sacrifice:

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 being minded to slay his son Isaac, lifts up his hands, and saith the following:

Abraham: O! My heart will break in three, To hear thy words I have pitye; 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 hilles 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.

Here Isaac asketh his father's blessing on his knees, and saith:

Isaac: Father, seeing you muste needs do so, Let it pass lightly and over go; Kneeling on my knees 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.  
 Here Isaac riseth and cometh to his father, and he taketh him, and bindeth and layeth him upon the altar to sacrifice him, and saith:  
 Abraham: 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, God's commandment to fulfil, For needs so it must be.  
 Abraham: Isaac, Isaac, blessed 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!  
 Here Abraham doth kiss his son Isaac, and binds a kerchief about his head.  
 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 sorrye.  
 Here let Abraham make a sign as tho' he would cut off his son Isaac's head with his sword; then ...  
 God speaks: Abraham, my servant dear, Abraham, Lay not thy sword in no manner On Isaac, thy dear darling. For thou drest me, well wot I, That of thy son had no mercy, To fulfil my bidding.  
 Abraham: Ah, Lord of heaven and King of bliss, Thy bidding shall be done, i-wiss! A horned wether here I see, Among the briars tied is he, To Thee offered shall he be Anon right in this place.  
 Then let Abraham take the lamb and kill him.  
 Abraham: 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

### **Canticle III: Still Falls the Rain**

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 leap up to my God: who pulles 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."

Edith Sitwell (1887-1964)

#### **Canticle IV: The Journey of the Magi**

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: 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.

T.S. Eliot (1888–1965)

### **Canticle V: The Death of Saint Narcissus**

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.

T.S. Eliot (1888–1965)

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