



# Composer Portfolios

# BRITTEN



Name	Benjamin Britten
Nationality	English
Baptised-Died	1913-1976
Quote	<p><i>'Music does not excite until it is performed.'</i></p> <p><i>'Composing is like driving down a foggy road toward a house. Slowly you see more details of the house- the colour of the slates and bricks, the shape of the windows. The notes are the bricks and the mortar of the house.'</i></p>



## Interesting Stories

### Baron Britten

Britten was so beloved in England that he was awarded a life peerage in 1976. He was the first ever composer to be honoured with such a prize and it resulted in a change of name. Henceforth, Britten became known as Baron Britten of Aldeburgh in the British County of Suffolk. His influence on 20<sup>th</sup>-century composition was so significant that one hundred years after his death, more than 2,000 events held in 39 countries were thrown to celebrate Britten's centenary year.

### The Sham Marriage

It is surprising to many that Britten managed to escape prosecution despite being in an openly gay relationship for years. Britten's sexuality was often at the centre of his life and work, which is why he and his partner (Pears) escaped Britain for America, which was considered to be much more open to gay partnerships. Britten and Pears later returned to Britain at the worst of times, which was also coincidentally the height of Britten's global prominence. When he returned, there was a series of campaigns recommending the decriminalization of homosexuality and to get out of it, Britten suggested that Pears should marry a woman to keep them both safe.

### Facts

- Benjamin Britten was born on November 22, 1913 in Suffolk.
- His father was a dentist and his mother an amateur pianist.
- When he was three months old he had a bout of pneumonia, which almost killed him
- Britten was a keen tennis player and loved cricket
- Britten was a pacifist and asked for exemption from military duty during the Second World War. He promised to do whatever he could for the war effort except fighting.
- In 1963 he received Grammy Awards in three categories for 'The War Requiem'.
- Britten died on 4 December 1976 from congestive heart failure.

### Britten's Music

*Now we know more about the man, why not listen to some of his music!*

- The War Requiem
- A Boy was Born
- Simple Symphony
- Night Mail
- Les Illuminations
- A Ceremony of Carols
- Serenade for tenor, horn and strings
- Peter Grimes
- The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra
- Billy Budd
- Cello Symphony
- Death in Venice