Benjamin Britten - Peter Grimes (1969)

CD1 *1. Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! 2. The truth the pity and the truth… 3. Interlude – Dawn 4. Oh, hang at open door the net, the cork 5. HI! Give us a hand! 6. Let her among you without fault 7. Look, the storm cone! 8. Interlude - The Storm 9. Past time to close! 10. Loud man, I never did have time… 11. Now the Great Bear and Pleiades 12. Old Joe has gone fishing and young Joe has gone fishing 13. Glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight 14. Come boy! Peter, what for 15. Fool! to let it come to this!* CD2 *1. We planned that their lives should have a new start 2. From the gotter why should we trouble at their ribaldries 3. Interlude – Passacaglia 4. Go there! Go there! Go there! 5. In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home 6. There's an odd procession here 7. Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Nobody here 8. Interlude – Moonlight 9. Assign your prettiness to me 10. Mr. Keene! Mr. Keene! Can you spare a moment 11. Is the boat in 12. Embroidery in childhood 13. Mr. Swallow! Mr. Swallow! Mr. Swallow! 14. Steady! There you are! Nearly home! 15. Peter, we've come to take you home 16. To those who pass, the Borough sounds betray*
Peter Grimes - Jon Vickers Ellen Orford - Heather Harper Captain Balstrode - Geraint Evans Auuntie - Elizabeth Bainbridge Her nieces - Elizabeth Robson, Josephine Barstow Bob Boles - John Dobson Mr, Swallow - Forbes Robinson Mrs. Sedley - Helen Watts Rector Horace Adams - Kenneth Macdonald Hobson - Noel Mangin Ned Keene - Delme Bryn-Jones John - Peter Weber Chorus and Orchestra of The Royal Opera House Covent Garden Colin Davis - conductor Royal Opera House Covent Garden, London - (30/05/1969)

Jon Vickers may have been the person most responsible for the proliferation of Peter Grimes and helping it to become one of Britten's most popular operas. Although his interpretation departed from Britten's vision of the character, his brooding and burnished tenor was a natural fit. This performance, from 1969, is valuable because it displays him in the role before the natural wear and tear of the dramatic repertoire would make the lyrical sections of this role more labored. The Vickers' mannerisms are still present, but he also manages some sublimely beautiful and lyrical singing. He is joined by the great Heather Harper as Ellen Orford. Harper's voice had the perfect amount of lyricism and plushness for this role and she conveys the character's tragic stoicism quite poignantly. Geraint Evans is an excellent Balstrode. The cast is peppered with a panoply of great British singers including Elizabeth Bainbridge, Forbes

Robinson, Delme Bryn-Jones, Helen Watts and even a young Josphine Barstow as one of the Nieces. The sound is very good. --- operadepot.com

Peter Grimes is a big opera with a very tight focus. There are huge choral scenes and a large cast of supporting players but the work holds fast to Grimes himself. Grimes is the ultimate outsider, one whom Britten associated with strongly. He's far from a hero, not even close, but he's no pantomime villain either. "Now the Great Bear", his startling Act II aria, reveals the wounded man beneath the menacing facade. This ambiguity runs throughout the piece, Grimes's nastiness set against the overwhelming mob-like behaviour of the townsfolk.

Another major element is that of nature, the sea ever present in the drama and no more so than in the incredible interludes (music that is frequently heard in concert halls as the "4 Sea Interludes"). The town is dependent on the sea, fishing is how they make their living, but it is a dangerous bargain: they live by the sea and frequently die by it too, as we see with Grimes's successive apprentices.

Ellen Orford provides a counterpoint to the harshness of the environment and town, a schoolmistress spinster who cares for Grimes. He too wishes to marry her, if he can make money, but it is largely a social contract not a loving one (though as with everything in this opera, there is plenty of ambiguity).

Peter Grimes is a tragedy from start to finish but it's also a masterpiece of musical theatre. The sheer force of the music lifting the narrative to realms rarely reached in 20th Century opera. ---theopera101.com

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