

Benjamin Britten & W. H. Auden
BALLADS
from "Paul Bunyan"
for Voice and Piano or Guitar



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Publisher's Note

Paul Bunyan was Britten's first work for the musical theatre, written in collaboration with W.H. Auden for performance at the University of Columbia, New York, in May 1941. (It was subsequently withdrawn until its revival in England in 1976.) The work explores the folk legend of the giant lumberjack who clears the virgin forests of America to make way for civilization. It is in essence a parable of the conquest of nature and the development of human society. The main human characters are prototype figures: Hel Helson, the man of brawn but no brain; Johnny Inkslinger, the man of speculative intelligence; Slim, the charmer who marries the boss's daughter.

To express this parable in the most direct and accessible language, Britten and Auden deliberately drew on the familiar idioms of contemporary American song and dance. There are big set numbers, ranging from romantic pieces to blues, and the scenes are linked by narrative ballads which exploit the singularly American idiom of "Country and Western." The first number introduces Paul Bunyan and his mission. The second outlines his brief married life. The third occurs after Helson unwisely tries to prove himself in a fight against the giant; the loggers have now been joined by farmers and the physical mastery of nature is so far advanced that Bunyan's work is nearly done. The work ends with a Christmas party at which he bids them farewell.

In the original production the ballads were accompanied by the singer himself on the banjo. The composer later devised an "elastic scoring" scheme for banjo or guitar with violin (or other appropriate instrument) doubling the melody and string bass ad lib.

1. The Cold Wind Blew

3

The cold wind blew through the fair - y stood be -

crook - ed thorn, Up in the North a boy was born. His hair was black, his side his bed; You shall nev - er, nev - er grow old, she said, 'Paul Bun - yan is to

eyes were blue, His mouth turned up at the cor - ners too. A whence she came. You be - your name, Then she de - part - ed

1. D 2. p

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1 F Dm7 Gm7 C F Dm7

must be - lieve me when I say He grew six inch - es
grew so fast, by the time he was eight, He was as tall as the
or - dered a jack - et, the New Eng - land mills For months had no more un - em -

cresc.

Gm7 C7 F Dm7 F7 C7

ev - 'ry day. You must be - lieve me when I speak, He
Em - pire State. The length of his stride's a his - tor - i - cal fact; —
ploy - ment ills. When he want - ed a snap - shot to send to his friends, They

1. 2. 3.

f gained three - four - six pounds ev-'ry week. He
Three - point - sev-en miles to be ex - act. When he
found they had to use a tel - e - pho - to lens. But

f