

At the beginning of 1937 Britten was busy composing the incidental music for *The Ascent of F6*, the famous play by W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. It was first performed by the Group Theatre, at the Mercury Theatre, London, on 26th February 1937.

One of the most striking musical numbers was a Blues (in Act II, scene v), a setting of Auden's text 'Stop all the clocks'. Hedli Anderson, the singer, who was later to become the wife of Louis MacNeice, was a member of the original cast. She made a very considerable impression in the Blues, perhaps not least on the composer and his colleagues.

Later in 1937, in June, when Britten was visiting Auden at Colwall (near Malvern), where the poet was teaching at a prep school, he not only wrote a 'new version' of the *F6* Blues – almost certainly the solo version that is published here: Hedli Anderson, too, was at Colwall on this occasion and the song was tried out on the boys with great success – but also busied himself with what he described as 'cabaret songs', though not naming them individually, as he did in the case of 'Stop all the clocks'.

We know in fact, from Britten's 1937 diary, that 'Johnny' had already been composed on 5th May; that another cabaret song was sketched the next day; another on the 7th; and yet another on the 8th. It was only 'Johnny', however, that was named.

On the 10th Britten went through the songs with Hedli Anderson and her accompanist – 'they are going to be hits, I feel!' wrote the composer in his diary. The successive entries would seem to indicate that at least five cabaret songs should exist from this time, including, that is, the 'new version' of the *F6* Blues, but excluding 'Tell me the truth about love' and 'Calypso', the first of which belongs to early January 1938 and the second to 1939 – the poem belongs to May or early June, by which time both the poet and composer were in North America, Britten in Canada, Auden in the States (hence the geography of 'Calypso'). So it seems there are still some cabaret songs to be discovered, among them one entitled 'I'm a jam tart'.

Whatever the total turns out to be, the four collected together here are splendid examples of the genre. They not only provide ample evidence of the composer's and poet's wit and high spirits, but are also wholly characteristic of a particular kind of vernacular music that resulted from the collaboration between two brilliantly endowed young men in the thirties. They were also partners in another kind of music, of course. It is important to remember that Britten's settings of Auden's poems, *On this Island*, belong to precisely this same period. The two contrasting styles mirror the world and the times in and through which they moved.

The songs of course carry no dedication. But as this note makes clear, they were written for – indeed, inspired by – Hedli Anderson (1907–1990); and I am sure both the composer and the poet would have wanted her name to have been associated with the songs in their published form.

For two of the songs we have included metronome marks as an indication of the composer's tempi. These are based on informal recorded performances by Britten and Peter Pears in the possession of The Britten-Pears Library at Aldeburgh.

DONALD MITCHELL

# CABARET SONGS

W. H. AUDEN  
(1907-1973)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN  
(1913-1976)

## 1. Tell me the truth about love

*spoken*

Voice

Liebe l'amour amor amoris 1. Some

Piano

*Tempo rubato*

say that Love's a lit - tle boy And some say it's a bird, Some  
looked in - side the sum - mer - house, It was - n't e - ver there, I've  
feel - ings when you meet it, I Am told you can't for - get, I've

*colla voce*

say it makes the world go round And some say that's ab - surd: But  
tried the Thames at Mai - den - head And Bright-on's bra - cing air; I  
sought it since I was a child But have - n't found it yet; I'm

## 2. Funeral blues

(♩ = 69)

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It begins with a tempo marking of (♩ = 69) and a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The piano introduction consists of two measures of whole rests in the treble and a complex, syncopated accompaniment in the bass. The first vocal line starts with a piano (*pp*) dynamic and includes the lyrics: "Stop all the clocks, cut off the tel - e - phone,". The piano accompaniment for this section features a steady bass line and a right hand with chords and triplets. The second vocal line continues with the lyrics: "Pre-vent the dog from bark-ing with a juic-y bone, Si-". The piano accompaniment continues with similar harmonic support, including triplets in the right hand.

*pp*

Stop all the clocks, cut off the tel - e - phone,

*pp*

Pre-vent the dog from bark-ing with a juic-y bone, Si-

## 3. Johnny

a tempo  
*p semplice*

O the val - ley in the summer when

*f marc. portato*

*p*

This system contains the first two staves of the musical score. The vocal staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. It begins with a whole rest for two measures, followed by a melodic line. The piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The right hand starts with a half note chord, followed by a series of eighth and sixteenth notes. The left hand plays a similar rhythmic pattern. Dynamics include *f marc. portato* for the piano and *p* for the vocal.

rit.

I — and my John Be - side the deep ri - ver — walk on and on While the

*rit.*

This system contains the third and fourth staves. The vocal staff continues the melody with a half note rest. The piano accompaniment features chords and moving lines. The tempo marking *rit.* is placed above the vocal staff.

a tempo

grass\_ at our feet and the birds up a - bove Whis - pered so soft\_ in re -

*a tempo*

This system contains the fifth and sixth staves. The vocal staff continues the melody. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support. The tempo marking *a tempo* is placed above the vocal staff.