

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

Paul Bunyan

AN OPERETTA IN TWO ACTS
AND A PROLOGUE

Op. 17

LIBRETTO BY W. H. AUDEN

FABER *ff* MUSIC

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The orchestral material is available on hire from the
publishers, as is the alternative version of the work
scored for two pianos and percussion (1 player)
A German singing translation by Erich Fried is also available

CHARACTERS

CHORUS of OLD TREES	S A T B	} — In the Prologue
FOUR YOUNG TREES	S S T T	
THREE WILD GEESE*	MS MS S	
NARRATOR	Baritone or Tenor	In the Ballad Interludes
The Voice of PAUL BUNYAN		Spoken part
JOHNNY INKSLINGER, book-keeper		Tenor
TINY, daughter of PAUL BUNYAN		Soprano
HOT BISCUIT SLIM, a good cook		Tenor
SAM SHARKEY } — two bad cooks	{ Tenor	
BEN BENNY }	{ Bass	
HEL HELSON, foreman	Baritone	
ANDY ANDERSON	{ Tenor	
PETE PETERSON		
JEN JENSON		
CROSS CROSSHAULSON		
JOHN SHEARS, a farmer	{ Bass	
WESTERN UNION BOY	{ Bass	
	Baritone	
	Tenor	
FIDO, a dog	High Soprano	
MOPPET } — two cats	{ Mezzo Soprano	
POPPET }	{ Mezzo Soprano	
QUARTET of the DEFEATED (Blues)	Contralto, Tenor, Baritone, Bass	
FOUR CRONIES of HEL HELSON	Baritones	
HERON, MOON, WIND, BEETLE, SQUIRREL	Spoken parts	

Chorus of LUMBERJACKS, FARMERS and FRONTIER WOMEN

* These roles can be doubled with those of Fido and the two cats.

ORCHESTRA*

- 2 Flutes, 2nd doubling Piccolo
- 1 Oboe
- 2 Clarinets in B $\flat$, 2nd doubling Alto Saxophone in E $\flat$
- 1 Bass Clarinet in B $\flat$
- 1 Bassoon
- 2 Horns in F
- 2 Trumpets in C
- 2 Tenor Trombones
- 1 Tuba

Timpani, doubling percussion

Percussion — Triangle, Cymbals, Side Drum, Bass Drum,
Woodblock, Tenor Drum, Xylophone,
Glockenspiel, Tambourine, Gong,
Vibraphone

Harp

Piano, doubling Celesta

Strings

Trumpet 1 and Percussion (Side Drum) are offstage in No. 13.

The Ballad Interludes are accompanied by guitar (or banjo) with solo violin (doubling the tune) and double bass (pizzicato) ad lib. (or other appropriate instruments).

*An alternative version of the work, scored for two pianos and percussion (1 player), is available on hire from the publishers.

The first performance of PAUL BUNYAN was given
 by the Columbia Theatre Associates
 of Columbia University, New York
 with the co-operation of
 the Columbia University Department of Music
 and a Chorus from the New York Schola Cantorum,
 conducted by Hugh Ross
 and directed by Milton Smith
 in Brander Matthews Hall, New York, on
 5th May 1941

Among the cast were:

<i>The voice of Paul Bunyan</i>	<i>Milton Warchoff</i>
<i>Johnny Inkslinger</i>	<i>William Hess</i>
<i>Tiny</i>	<i>Helen Marshall</i>
<i>Narrator (ballad singer)</i>	<i>Mordecai Bauman</i>

The work was first revived in a studio performance
 broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 1st February 1976
 The producers were Ernest Warburton and Charles Lefeaux
 and the BBC Northern Singers and Northern Symphony Orchestra
 were conducted by Steuart Bedford

Among the cast were:

<i>The Voice of Paul Bunyan</i>	<i>Stephen Murray</i>
<i>Johnny Inkslinger</i>	<i>Peter Pears</i>
<i>Tiny</i>	<i>Norma Burrowes</i>
<i>Narrator (ballad singer)</i>	<i>George Hamilton IV</i>

The first European stage performance was given
 by the English Music Theatre
 at the Maltings, Snape, on 4th June 1976
 as part of the 29th Aldeburgh Festival
 The producer was Colin Graham
 and the designer, Margaret Harris
 The English Music Theatre Orchestra
 was conducted by Steuart Bedford

Among the cast were:

<i>The Voice of Paul Bunyan</i>	<i>Paul Maxwell</i>
<i>Johnny Inkslinger</i>	<i>Neil Jenkins</i>
<i>Tiny</i>	<i>Iris Saunders</i>
<i>Narrator (ballad singer)</i>	<i>Russell Smythe</i>

PREFATORY NOTE

As the performance details set out on page viii make clear, it was 35 years before Britten's first full-scale musical work for the theatre was revived, and it might be helpful to assemble here some information about the work's origins and the intentions of the composer and his librettist.

When the work was composed, both Britten and Auden were living in New York and it seems clear from a letter of Auden's that the original suggestion came from the New York office of Boosey & Hawkes, who were then Britten's publishers. 'The choice of subject', wrote Auden, 'was dictated by the demands of Boosey & Hawkes for something suitable for high schools. The sources were the New York Public Library.'^{*}

We reproduce on page xi the explanatory article about the operetta that Auden wrote for the *New York Times*. It appeared on 4th May 1941, the day of the preview of the work, preceding the first performance on the 5th. This is an illuminating and characteristically elaborate text and an important document. For the programme, however, something altogether shorter and simpler was devised, which succinctly outlines the basic dramatic and poetic concept which the composer and librettist wished to bring to the attention of their first audiences. This is the original programme note:

Paul Bunyan is the first operatic collaboration between Mr. W.H. Auden, one of the best-known young English poets, and Mr. Benjamin Britten, one of the most distinguished young English composers. The Columbia Theater Associates welcome the opportunity to present the world première of this interesting composition. The authors describe their work as a choral operetta, '... with many small parts rather than a few star roles'. They explain that they conceive of Paul Bunyan, the giant hero of the Lumbermen, and one of the many mythical figures who appeared in American folklore during the Pioneer period, as '... a projection of the collective state of mind of a people whose tasks were primarily the physical mastery of nature. This operetta presents in a compressed fairy-story form the development of the continent from a virgin forest before the birth of Paul Bunyan to settlement and cultivation when Paul Bunyan says goodbye because he is no longer needed, i.e., the human task is now a different one, of how to live well in a country that the pioneers have made it possible to live in'.

After its first performance *Paul Bunyan* was withdrawn by the composer. When he began revising it in 1974 it was given its present opus number, formerly allocated to another withdrawn work, *A.M.D.G.*, settings of Gerard Manley Hopkins for unaccompanied chorus, dating from 1939 and published posthumously in 1989.

For the 1976 revival of the operetta, Britten made certain revisions, though he was always emphatic that these did not amount to a thorough-going 'revised version'. They were for the most part minor adjustments and modifications of a few numbers, and the omission of two numbers. These revisions belong to 1974, while the composition of a small quantity of 'new' music followed in 1975. The table below sets out brief details of these revisions, omissions and additions:

Prologue

Britten had originally thought of an *Overture*, for orchestra, to precede the Prologue. No full score of the *Overture* has come to light and it seems probable that the idea was dropped even before Britten had got round to orchestrating it. Certainly, there was no *Overture* played at the first performance. A complete composition sketch, however, survived. An orchestration of the *Overture* by Colin Matthews is available from the publishers as an independent concert item; it has been recorded on Virgin Classics VC 7 91 107-2. The present brief *Introduction* for orchestra (No. 1) was composed, like the rest of the new music, in 1975.

* From a letter of Auden's to Daniel G. Hoffman, quoted in Hoffman's *Paul Bunyan: last of the frontier demigods*, Philadelphia, 1954, p.144.

Act I, Scene 2

No. 12a: *Slim's Song*: revised 1974.

[No. 15 in the 1941 performance was *Love Song* (for Inkslinger and Lumberjacks): this the composer omitted in 1974.]

No. 15a: *Tiny's Song*: revised 1974.

No. 17 in the original production was a *Lullaby of Dream Shadows* (for Film Stars and Models, and Chorus): this finale – which did not survive in the production beyond the preview of the operetta given on 4th May 1941 – was not restored by the composer in 1974, who composed new music for Bunyan's third *Goodnight*, which now brings Act I to an end. This was to an already existing text by Auden which had its origins in an attempt – abortive, as it turned out – by the poet and composer to re-think the operetta not long after its 1941 première. The words found no music at that time but proved perfectly to suit the composer's needs in 1975.

Act II, Scene 1

No. 20: *The Mocking of Hel Helson*: revised 1974.

Both the omitted *Love Song* and *Lullaby of Dream Shadows* are included on Virgin Classics VC 7 91107-2. A complete recording of the operetta in its revised (1975) format is available on Virgin Classics VCD 7 90710-2.

Omissions apart, Britten left the sequence of numbers unchanged and the text conforms in all major respects to Auden's original libretto, published separately by Faber Music in 1976. A subsequent edition published by Faber & Faber in 1988 contains an essay by me – 'The Origins, Evolution and Metamorphoses of *Paul Bunyan*, Auden's and Britten's "American" Opera' – which gives the fullest account of the work's history and chronology. For details of the reception of the operetta in New York in 1941, see Vol. II of *Benjamin Britten: Letters from a Life*, edited by Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed, London, Faber & Faber, 1991.

In identifying the time of day and seasons throughout the work (see page vi) I have followed the indications given in the original 1941 programme.

DONALD MITCHELL
LONDON
1977, REVISED 1992-3

AN OPERETTA

BENJAMIN BRITTEN OP. 17

1. INTRODUCTION

Slow and solemn

Slow and solemn

2 Flutes

Oboe

2 Clarinets in B $\flat$

Bass Clarinet in B $\flat$

Bassoon

2 Horns in F

2 Trumpets in C

2 Trombones

Tuba

Timpani

Percussion

Harp

Piano

Slow and solemn

Violins 1

Violins 2

Violas

Violoncellos

Doublebasses

1
Fl. *mf* *f* *pp* *cresc.*

2
Ob. *mf* *f* *pp* *cresc.*

1
Cl. *f* *pp* *cresc.*

2
B. Cl. *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Bsn. *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Hn. 1.2 *a2* *p cresc.* *sim.*

Tpt. 1.2 *(a2)* *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Tbn. 1.2 *a2* *p cresc.* *sim.*

Tuba

Timp.

Perc. (Cym.) *pp slow cresc.*

Harp

Piano

Vln. 1 *mf* *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Vln. 2 *mf* *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Vla. *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Vc. *f* *pp* *cresc.*

Db.