

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

Music by Benjamin Britten
Libretto by Ronald Duncan
from LE VIOL DE LUCRÈCE by André Obey

STUDY GUIDE

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Welcome to Pacific Opera Victoria!

This Study Guide has been created primarily to assist teachers in preparing students for their visit to the opera.

It is our hope that teachers will be able to add this to the existing curriculum in order to expand students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts.

Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there not enough time to discuss in class. The opera experience can be made more meaningful and enjoyable when students have the opportunity to learn about the opera before they attend the performance.

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to preserve their vocal chords and avoid unnecessary strain.

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Opera at a Glance – Introduction

What is opera?

The word *opera* comes from the Italian, “a work”, which is in turn based on the Latin word *opera*, which is the plural of *opus*, ‘work, effort’.

An opera is a musical stage drama in which the actors sing most or all of their parts. Opera combines music and drama into an art form which includes many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance.

Operas are divided into scenes and acts that contain a variety of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An aria is a vocal solo that focuses on a character’s emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles. Composers write the score or the music for the opera. The story of the opera is written as a libretto, a text that is easily set to music.

Opera originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500’s, with a small group of men who were members of a Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a chorus to comment on the action. The first major composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera DAFNE premiered in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera.

Opera or Musical Theatre?

What’s the difference between an opera and a musical like LES MISERABLES?

The musical style is different in each; opera music is usually classical and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes jazz. Singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices, whereas the voices of opera singers are so strong that no amplification is needed – even in a large venue. Operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words is more common to musicals. It is interesting to note that there are some operas with spoken words; these are called *Singspiels* (German) and *opéra comique* (French). Examples are Mozart’s THE MAGIC FLUTE and Bizet’s CARMEN, respectively.

Audience Etiquette

The following list of *Dos* and *Do Nots* will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:

- **Do** dress in whatever you find comfortable. However, going to the opera can be an opportunity to dress in formal attire.
- **Do** be on time. Latecomers disturb the rest of the audience and the singers. They will be seated only at suitable breaks – often not until **intermission**.
- **Do** find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher. It is also customary to remove your hat in respect to the artists and to the person sitting behind you.
- **Do** turn off cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- **Do Not** take photos. The flash can be very disturbing to the artists.
- **Do Not** chew gum, eat, drink, or talk. Let the action on stage surround you. As an audience member, you are a very important part of the process taking place. Without you there is no show.
- **Do** get settled and comfortable before the performance begins. Read your programme before the performance; rustling through the programme during the show can disrupt everyone.
- **Do** clap as the lights are dimmed and the **conductor** appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the **conductor** then turns to the **orchestra** and takes up his or her **baton** to signal the beginning of the opera.
- **Do** listen to the **prelude** or **overture** before the curtain rises. This is part of the performance and an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- **Do** sit still; whisper only when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- **Do** applaud (or shout **Bravo!**) at the end of an **aria** or **chorus** piece to signify your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- **Do** laugh when something is funny.
- **Do** read the English **surtitles** projected above the stage to understand the story.
- **Do** listen for subtleties in the music. The **tempo**, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the feelings of a character or give a sense of the action. Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!



presents

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

February 9, 11, 16, 18, 2006, 8 pm
Royal Theatre, Victoria, BC

Music by Benjamin Britten
Libretto by Ronald Duncan
from *Le Viol de Lucrece* by André Obey

First performance July 12, 1946, Glyndebourne, Sussex, England
Sung in English with English surtitles

CAST & CREATIVE TEAM

MALE CHORUS	DAVID POMEROY
FEMALE CHORUS	MONICA WHICHER
COLLATINUS, a Roman Commander	ALAIN COULOMBE
JUNIUS, a Roman Commander	ALEXANDER DOBSON
PRINCE TARQUINIUS, son of the Etruscan King	PHILLIP ADDIS
LUCRETIA, wife of Collatinus	LOUISE GUYOT
BIANCA, Lucretia's nurse	MIA LENNOX WILLIAMS
LUCIA, Lucretia's maid	SOOKHYUNG PARK

Conductor	TIMOTHY VERNON
Director	DIANA LEBLANC
Set and Costume Designer	ALISON GREEN
Lighting Designer	GERALD KING

Resident Stage Manager	JACKIE ADAMTHWAITE
Assistant Stage Managers	NICOLE HANNAH STEVE BARKER

With the Victoria Symphony

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA: Synopsis of the Opera

Act 1, Scene 1

The Male and Female Chorus explain the historical background to the story: It is 509 BC. The tyrannical Etruscan king Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud) has become the ruler of Rome through intrigue and murder. His son, Sextus Tarquinius (the Tarquinius of the opera) is no better; he leads a Roman army against the Greeks to distract attention from conditions in Rome *and treats the proud city as if it were his whore*.

The Choruses explain that they will observe the action of the opera and interpret it from a Christian perspective.

A military camp outside Rome is now revealed. It is a hot summer evening, and a storm is threatening; the sound of crickets (the harp) and bullfrogs (double bass) can be heard.

Sextus Tarquinius and two Roman commanders, Collatinus and Junius, are drinking and quarrelling about women. The previous evening, on a bet, they had ridden to Rome to see if their wives were being faithful in their absence. The only one who was at home behaving properly was Collatinus' wife, Lucretia.

Tarquinius taunts Junius for his wife's infidelity; Junius angrily retorts that the unmarried Tarquinius knows only *the constancy of whores*. Collatinus intervenes and proposes a toast to Lucretia. Shortly after, Collatinus leaves for bed.

The ambitious Junius continues to brood about his own wife's infidelity and the political advantage that Collatinus may gain because of Lucretia's good reputation. Junius keeps insisting to Tarquinius that women *are chaste when they are not tempted*, challenging Tarquinius to put Lucretia's fidelity to the test. Provoked by Junius' challenge and increasingly intrigued by the beautiful Lucretia, Tarquinius declares that he will *prove Lucretia chaste*. He calls for his horse.

In an interlude containing some of the most energetic music of the opera, the Chorus describes Tarquinius' ride through the night to Rome.

Act 1, Scene 2

Lucretia's home. Lucretia is sewing while her servants Bianca and Lucia are spinning. Lucretia imagines she hears a knock and hopes it is a messenger from Collatinus. But no one is at the door. Lucretia laments, *How cruel men are to teach us to love! only to ride away while we still yearn*.

The three women prepare for bed as the Choruses describe the sleeping city and Tarquinius' arrival in Rome. The Choruses continue to describe what is happening as the characters mime the actions.

Tarquinius' loud knock at the door is *too late for a messenger* and *too loud for a friend*. He is admitted and asks for a room for the night. The women reluctantly comply, as *etiquette compels what discretion would refuse*.

They all bid one another good night and depart for bed.

Act 2, Scene 1

The Choruses describe the violence of the Etruscans and the increasing unrest and resentment of the Romans. They reiterate their roles as Christian interpreters of the action.

In her bedroom, Lucretia is asleep with a candle beside her. The Female Chorus sings a lullaby: *She sleeps as a rose upon the night*. Tarquinius' approach is described by the Male Chorus. The prince admires Lucretia's beauty and urges her to wake up. He kisses her, and to the crack of a whip, she wakes.

Lucretia asks, *What do you want with me?*

Tarquinius: *What do you fear?*

Lucretia: *You! In the forest of my dreams you have always been the Tiger.*

They argue and struggle as the Choruses add their comments. Finally Tarquinius draws his sword and rapes her.

In an interlude, the Choruses comment on *virtue assailed by sin* and pray to Mary, the Mother of God.

Act 2, Scene 2

In the hall of Lucretia's home, Bianca and Lucia sing *Oh! What a lovely day!* as they arrange flowers, leaving the orchids, Collatinus' favourite flower, for Lucretia to arrange. Lucretia enters in a daze and becomes hysterical when Bianca gives her the orchids. She tells Lucia to send one of the flowers to Collatinus with a message that *a Roman harlot sent it*.

She then twines the remaining flowers into a wreath. As Bianca begins to grasp what has happened, she tries, too late, to stop the messenger. However, Collatinus arrives almost at once, accompanied by Junius, who has warned him that Tarquinius left the camp the night before and returned at dawn.

Lucretia enters dressed in mourning. She and Collatinus speak of their deep love, and Lucretia tells him that Tarquinius raped her. Although Collatinus assures her that there was no shame since she had not consented, she seizes a sword and stabs herself to death: *See, how my wanton blood washes my shame away!*

All present, including the Choruses, sing a lament. Junius, ever ambitious, seizes the opportunity to address the crowd outside, inciting the rebellion that will follow: *Romans, arise! See what the Etruscans have done!*

The lament continues: *So brief is beauty. Is this it all? It is all.*

Epilogue

The Female Chorus repeats the question: *Is it all?*

In answer, the Male Chorus sings of Christ's forgiveness:

It is not all ...

Though our nature's still as frail

And we still fall ...

He bears our sin

And does not fall ...

And then forgives us all ...

He is all!

Who's Who in THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

MALE CHORUS (tenor) and FEMALE CHORUS (soprano)

Most operas have a chorus, i.e., a group of singers, who may play villagers or onlookers and who sing portions of the opera as a choir. THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA does not have a chorus in this sense. However, the two characters called the Male Chorus and Female Chorus function as a Greek chorus.

In ancient Greek dramas a group of dancers and singers represented the general public and commented on the action, offering background information, and showing how an ideal audience might react to the drama.

Similarly, the Male and Female Choruses in THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA explain some of the historical background of the opera. They describe and comment on the action, sometimes egging on a character or interpreting and judging a character's motives and actions.

Britten and his librettist Ronald Duncan took this concept from André Obey's play LE VIOL DE LUCRÈCE, the most immediate source for the opera. Obey's play uses two narrators, one male and one female, as a dramatic device; the male narrator is allied with the male characters, the female narrator with the female characters.

In addition, the Chorus in the opera is unabashedly Christian. The Male and Female Choruses explain that their role is to interpret the action of the opera from a Christian perspective. Indeed, at the end of the opera, they sing of Christ's forgiveness.

Characters in the Story

Many of the characters in the opera are mentioned in ancient works of literature, including Livy's great history of Rome, which was written 500 years after the events recounted in the opera. The story may or may not have actually happened, but Livy treated it as an historical event.

Like Livy, many writers consider the rape of Lucretia by Tarquinius to be the catalyst that caused the Romans to revolt against the Etruscan kings and establish the Roman Republic.

Below are descriptions of the characters in the opera along with brief sketches of the historical characters on which they are based.

COLLATINUS (bass)

Husband of Lucretia. A Roman commander, political rival and close colleague of his fellow commander, Junius.

The historical character Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus

The husband of Lucretia is said to have been a cousin (or possibly a nephew) of Tarquinius Superbus, the Etruscan King; he was therefore related to the king's son, Sextus Tarquinius, who is the Tarquinius of the opera.

After the rape and suicide of Lucretia, the Tarquins were banished and two consuls were elected to govern Rome. They were Lucretia's husband, Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus, and Lucius Junius Brutus (the Junius of the opera, who is more often called Brutus). However, the people of Rome didn't trust anyone with the name Tarquinius (even though Collatinus had been wronged by Tarquinius, and Brutus himself was more closely related to the Tarquins than Collatinus!). Brutus, along with Lucretia's father, persuaded Collatinus to resign, and a new consul, Publius Valerius Poplicola, was appointed.

JUNIUS (baritone)

A Roman commander, colleague of Collatinus. Junius is upset that his wife has been unfaithful to him. An ambitious man, he is afraid that Collatinus may gain power and influence thanks to Lucretia's good reputation. Junius goads Tarquinius into putting Lucretia's fidelity to the test. When Lucretia kills herself, it is Junius who incites the Romans to rebel against the Etruscans.

The historical character Lucius Junius Brutus

Although he is called Junius in the opera, he is known as Brutus in many of the historical sources and other accounts of the story of Lucretia. He should not be confused with his descendent, Marcus Junius Brutus, who assassinated Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Lucius Junius Brutus is the legendary Roman hero who established Republican government at Rome by driving out the last king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus in 509 BC.

Brutus is also said to have been the nephew of Tarquinius Superbus, and so cousin to the Tarquinius of the opera. His father and brother had been killed by Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, and Brutus saved himself by pretending to be an idiot; he was nicknamed "Brutus," a Latin word meaning dull, stupid, or brutish.

Livy tells that several years before he was expelled, Tarquinius Superbus sent his sons Arruns and Titus to the oracle at Delphi to consult the god Apollo. Brutus went with them.

After executing their father's commission the young men were desirous of ascertaining to which of them the kingdom of Rome would come. A voice came from the lowest depths of the cavern: 'Whichever of you, young men, shall be the first to kiss his mother, he shall hold supreme sway in Rome.' Sextus [the Tarquinius of the opera] had remained behind in Rome and to keep him in ignorance of this oracle and so deprive him of any chance of coming to the throne, the two princes insisted upon absolute silence being kept on the subject. They drew lots to decide which of them should be the first to kiss his mother. On their return to Rome, Brutus, thinking that the oracular utterance had another meaning, pretended to stumble, and as he fell kissed the ground, for the earth is of course the common mother of us all.

After Lucretia killed herself, Brutus seized the moment and revealed his true character; he snatched the dagger from the wound, swore to drive out the royal family, and spearheaded the rebellion that sent the Tarquins into exile and established the Roman Republic. Brutus was elected one of the first two Roman consuls after the rebellion. Later he sentenced his own sons to death for conspiring to restore the Tarquins to the throne. In a subsequent battle he and Arruns, a son of Tarquinius Superbus, killed one another.

PRINCE TARQUINIUS (baritone)

Tarquinius, the Etruscan Prince of Rome, is the son of the Etruscan Tyrant Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud). During the events of the opera, Tarquinius was a commander in a war between Rome and the nearby city of Ardea. By raping Lucretia, Tarquinius set off the rebellion that cost his father the throne and sent the Tarquins into exile.

The historical character Sextus Tarquinius

Sextus Tarquinius was the youngest of the three sons of Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud), the seventh and last king of Rome, ruling from 534 to 510 BC. Tarquinius Superbus had seized power by killing the previous king, Servius Tullius, who was his father-in-law (His wife, Tullia, was his eager co-conspirator). Tarquinius Superbus ruled through fear, violence, and murder.

Sextus Tarquinius was as bad as his father. Livy says he had helped his father conquer the city of Gabii by pretending he needed protection from his father. Having obtained the trust of the citizens of Gabii, he sent a messenger to his father asking what he should do next. His father replied not in words, but by walking up and down his garden, striking off the heads of the tallest poppies. Sextus took this as his cue to kill the

leaders of the city and hand the city over to his father. Livy relates that after the rebellion, Sextus Tarquinius returned to Gabii, which he looked upon as his kingdom, but was killed in revenge.

During the events of the opera, Tarquinius Superbus was trying to conquer the nearby city of Ardea in order to acquire its wealth (he had been building many magnificent but expensive public works and also wanted to appease his subjects by distributing some of the spoils of war). Sextus Tarquinius was a commander in that war.

LUCRETIA (Contralto)

The wife of Collatinus, Lucretia was the only woman found behaving virtuously when some of the commanders paid a surprise visit to Rome to see whether their wives were being faithful in their absence.

The historical character Lucretia

A paragon of beauty, virtue, domesticity, honour, and civic responsibility, Lucretia spins with her maids, pines for her husband, and generally represents the perfect Roman matron, even choosing death rather than dishonour. Her rape and suicide were widely considered the spark that set off the revolt against the Tarquins, leading to the establishment of the Roman Republic.

In many accounts, Lucretia is a minor character, important only as the straw that broke the camel's back – the flashpoint that set off the revolution.

BIANCA, Lucretia's nurse. (Mezzo-Soprano)

LUCIA, Lucretia's maid. (Soprano)

Lucretia's two servants are very devoted to their mistress. These loyal and caring women feature in some of the opera's most charming scenes of domestic tranquility.

The Composer: Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten is considered the pre-eminent British composer of the 20th century. His music combines elements of early music (especially that of Purcell, whom he revered), modern European music, and a deep sense of Englishness.

His love of the voice and his gift for writing for singers has given us a body of major vocal works, including more than a dozen operas, which are widely regarded as the finest English operas since those of Henry Purcell in the 17th century.

Critic David Vernier said Britten *was the most deeply gifted composer of his time, who left the most accessible, diverse, and original body of compositions of the past 200 years. He knew the relationship between language and music, and worked fluently, not only – and most famously – in his native English, but also in French and even Russian. He knew the language of instruments like few other composers in history, and innately sensed how to combine their varied voices. And he knew the human voice and its uniquely expressive and intimate relationship to music.*

Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft, Suffolk, on November 22, 1913 (St. Cecilia's Day). The son of a dentist and a talented amateur singer, Benjamin was the youngest of four children. He began composing at the age of five; he later admitted, *it was the pattern on the paper which interested me and when I asked my mother to play [the music], her look of horror upset me considerably.* He started piano lessons at the age of seven and viola at ten. When he was twelve, he began composition studies with composer Frank Bridge.

In 1930 he entered the Royal College of Music, where he studied composition with John Ireland and piano with Arthur Benjamin.

From an early age he was a prolific and successful composer, whose music was quickly published. John Ireland is said to have commented, *If Britten can write it Boosey's can Hawke it*, referring to Britten's long-time publisher Boosey and Hawkes.

During the 1930s Britten composed music for documentary films produced by the General Post Office; he also composed for BBC Radio and for small theatre groups in London. He worked frequently with the poet W. H. Auden, who provided texts for songs as well as complete scripts for which Britten provided incidental music.

1934 saw the appearance of one of his best known and loved orchestral works: the SIMPLE SYMPHONY for strings. Other early orchestral works included VARIATIONS ON A THEME OF FRANK BRIDGE (premiered in Salzburg in 1937) and the 1938 Piano Concerto.

In 1939 he left England for the USA, with his lifelong companion Peter Pears. A pacifist and a conscientious objector, Britten wanted to escape the looming war in Europe. He was also frustrated by the reception of his works in England and eager to follow his friends, WH Auden and the novelist Christopher Isherwood, to the New World.

En route to the USA, Britten and Pears spent a few weeks in Canada where Britten attended a performance by the CBC of his Frank Bridge Variations. He also composed an orchestral work based on French-Canadian folk-tunes, the CANADIAN CARNIVAL (or KERMESE CANADIENNE), which was completed in December 1939 and which shows the influence of the great American composer Aaron Copland.

In the US, Britten and Pears gave recitals and Britten continued composing. Carnegie Hall premieres of his VIOLIN CONCERTO (1940) and the SINFONIA DA REQUIEM (1941) were conducted by John Barbirolli.

The SINFONIA DA REQUIEM was originally written as a commission from the Japanese government for a work to celebrate the 2,600th anniversary of the Mikado dynasty. Britten termed the piece *a Sinfonia da Requiem, combining my ideas on war and a memorial for Mum and Pop.* It is perhaps not surprising, given the

looming war with Japan, that the SINFONIA was rejected by the Japanese as too Christian and too melancholy – not to mention too pacifist.

Along with the later WAR REQUIEM, the SINFONIA is a monumental testimony to Britten's musicianship and to his profound anti-war principles.

While in America, Britten also wrote his first operatic work, the "choral operetta" PAUL BUNYAN, with a libretto by Auden. It premiered in New York in 1941 to negative reviews; Britten withdrew it, and it was not heard again until it was revised and performed at the Aldeburgh festival in 1976, the year of the composer's death.

Britten briefly considered staying in America, but homesickness, the war, and a chance discovery brought him back to England. During a 1941 trip to California, Britten read an article by E. M. Forster on the 18th century English writer George Crabbe, whose poetry was rooted in the Suffolk landscape where Britten had grown up. In 1942, Britten and Pears returned to England.

Accepted as a conscientious objector, Britten appeared at wartime concerts as a pianist and continued composing. Crabbe's poem "The Borough" became the inspiration for his first major opera, PETER GRIMES, which made its triumphant premiere in London in 1945. Britten had wanted to create a uniquely English opera, and PETER GRIMES was the first of a body of work that essentially reinvented and revitalized English opera.

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

PETER GRIMES was followed quickly by THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, which premiered a year later, in 1946.

Despite the success of PETER GRIMES, opera in England was still not terribly popular. Creating a new opera was a risky and expensive undertaking. In the aftermath of World War II opera houses preferred to concentrate on well-known classical operas in an attempt to rebuild their audiences.

Britten decided he needed to create works that would be less expensive to produce, using a small orchestra and a small group of loyal singers. In March 1946, he, along with Eric Crozier, Peter Pears, and Joan Cross, set up the Glyndebourne English Opera Group, *dedicated to the creation of new works, performed with the least possible expense and capable ... of being toured*. They arranged to present a new "chamber opera," THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, which used a cast of eight and an orchestra of just thirteen players. It was premiered in the intimate 300-seat auditorium at Glyndebourne, an operatic summer festival that was started in 1934 on the estate of John Christie at Glyndebourne in Sussex and that is today world-renowned.

Britten composed THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA in just four months. He wrote the part of Lucretia for Kathleen Ferrier, the great lyric contralto who died of cancer in 1953 at the age of 41. Tenor Peter Pears premiered the role of the Male Chorus, and soprano Joan Cross sang the Female Chorus.

The English Opera Group and the Aldeburgh Festival

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA lost money once it went on tour, and the collaboration with Glyndebourne ended.

The following year, Britten, along with designer John Piper, and Eric Crozier, who was producer, director, and librettist for many of Britten's operas, formed the independent English Opera Group. Their focus was economics and the revitalization of English opera, as expressed in the group's manifesto: *We believe the time has come when England, which has never had a tradition of native opera, but has always depended on a repertory of foreign works, can create its own operas...We believe the best way to achieve the beginnings of a repertory of English operas is through the creation of a form of opera requiring small resources of singers and players, but suitable for performance in large or small opera houses or theatres...It is part of the Group's purpose to encourage young composers to write for the operatic stage, also to encourage poets and playwrights to tackle the problem of writing libretti in collaboration with composers.*

The English Opera Group premiered Britten's second chamber opera, ALBERT HERRING, as well as additional performances of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA – both operas with small casts and scoring for just 13 instrumentalists.

However, the costs of touring even chamber operas were substantial, and the directors now decided to create an artistic base for the English Opera Group in Aldeburgh, where Britten lived. Britten subsequently wrote many works for the Aldeburgh Festival, which is now world famous, complemented by a year-round arts and education program and an internationally renowned concert hall, The Maltings.

Over the following decades the English Opera Group gave many performances of Britten's operas, commissioned and produced chamber operas by British composers, mounted revivals of operas by John Blow, Handel, Holst, Monteverdi, Mozart, Purcell and others, toured throughout the UK and the Continent, and performed in the USSR in 1964 and in Montreal during Expo '67. Many leading British singers were members of the group, including Janet Baker, Kathleen Ferrier, Heather Harper, Sylvia Fisher, Jennifer Vyvan, Owen Brannigan, Peter Pears, John Shirley-Quirk and Robert Tear. In 1961, Covent Garden took over management for the group, which in 1975 re-formed as the English Music Theatre Company to reflect a broader repertoire that included operas, operettas and musicals. The company stopped operations in 1981.

Music for Children

During 1946 Britten wrote not only THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, but also one of his most beloved works, THE YOUNG PERSON'S GUIDE TO THE ORCHESTRA, based on a theme by Henry Purcell. This is one of many works that Britten wrote with children and amateur performers in mind; others include the Yuletide favourite A CEREMONY OF CAROLS (1942), THE GOLDEN VANITY (a 1966 tale of piracy and treachery on the high seas, written for the Vienna Boys' Choir), LET'S MAKE AN OPERA (THE LITTLE SWEEP, 1949), and the opera NOYE'S FLUDDE (1958).

NOYE'S FLUDDE, based on the story of Noah and the Ark, was scored for nine professional instrumentalists, an orchestra of boys and girls, and, in addition to the principals, a chorus of animals and birds, played by children. The instrumentation includes parts for third violins and second 'cellos to accommodate the children. Britten added such unusual instruments as handbells and slung mugs (cups and mugs of various size and thickness which were slung on string by their handles in order to form a rough scale. They were hit with wooden spoons to produce the sound of the first raindrops hitting the roof of the ark.) He said of his invention of this novel instrument, *I have borne in mind the pleasure the young players will have in playing it.*

Britten's social conscience and pacifism found their way into many of his works for and about children. In 1965 he wrote VOICES FOR TODAY for boy's chorus, double chorus and organ, as part of the celebrations of the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations. He composed the 1968 CHILDREN'S CRUSADE for children's voices and orchestra; this setting of Bertolt Brecht's poem about war orphans in flight from the Nazi invasion of Poland was written to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Save the Children Fund.

A children's chorus is included in what is possibly Britten's most famous work, the WAR REQUIEM, which he was commissioned to write for the 1962 consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral, built beside the ruins of the original cathedral, which had been devastated by German bombing in November 1940. With its interleaving of the Latin Requiem Mass with the war poetry of Wilfred Owen, the WAR REQUIEM was both a denunciation of war and a memorial to those who died, and it was quickly recognized as a landmark work. Britten wrote the piece for three specific soloists, representing three of the nations most deeply scarred by the war: a German baritone (Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau), a Russian soprano (Galina Vishnevskaya), and a British tenor (Peter Pears). Unfortunately the USSR prevented Vishnevskaya from attending the dedication, and at short notice, she was replaced by Heather Harper. A year later,

however, a recording of the WAR REQUIEM was released with Britten conducting the three international soloists for whom he had written the work.

Among Britten's friends were many musicians, and he composed numerous pieces for them. When he selected Galina Vishnevskaya as soprano for the WAR REQUIEM, he became friends with her husband, the great Russian cellist Mstislav Rostropovich; Britten wrote a 1965 song cycle to Pushkin texts, THE POET'S ECHO, op. 76 for them both; for Rostropovich Britten also wrote the CELLO SONATA IN C, op.65, three suites for solo cello, and the SYMPHONY FOR CELLO AND ORCHESTRA, op.68 (1963). For Julian Bream, who often accompanied Peter Pears on both lute and guitar, he wrote a solo guitar piece NOCTURNAL AFTER JOHN DOWLAND, (1963) and for Osian Ellis he wrote the SUITE FOR HARP (1969).

Peter Pears

Tenor Peter Pears was Britten's partner in life and in music. They first met in 1934, when Pears was a member of the BBC Singers. They became reacquainted in 1937 after the death of a mutual friend and began performing together. Over the next four decades Britten wrote most of his song cycles and operas for Pears, performed countless piano/vocal concerts with him, consulted with him on character and plot details in works such as PETER GRIMES and BILLY BUDD, and engaged Pears as co-librettist for A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Pears became one of the greatest interpreters of Britten's music, which includes many works for tenor voices, including SEVEN SONNETS OF MICHELANGELO (1940), THE HOLY SONNETS OF JOHN DONNE (1945), and the famous SERENADE FOR TENOR, HORN AND STRINGS, written for Pears and the celebrated horn player Dennis Brain.

The role of Peter Grimes was the first operatic part that Britten composed for Pears. Pears also premiered the Male Chorus in THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, the title role in ALBERT HERRING (1947), Captain Vere in BILLY BUDD, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, in GLORIANA (1953), and Prologue and the ghost of Peter Quint in THE TURN OF THE SCREW (1954). In 1959 Britten and Pears wrote the libretto from Shakespeare's A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, and Pears performed in it. Britten's final opera, DEATH IN VENICE, completed in 1973, was dedicated to Pears, and the central character, Gustav von Aschenbach, was created for him.

In May, 1973, Britten had heart surgery which left him an invalid for the remainder of his life. His career as accompanist and conductor ceased, but he continued to compose. Among his final works were the dramatic cantata PHAEDRA and the STRING QUARTET NO.3.

In 1976, he was awarded a life peerage as Baron Britten of Aldeburgh - the first composer ever to receive that honour. He died at his home in Aldeburgh on December 4, 1976, and is buried in the churchyard at Aldeburgh, next to Peter Pears.

If Benjamin Britten had done nothing more in his musical career than compose the significant body of work he has left us, he would be considered a major influence on 20th century music. However, he accomplished far more. As an administrator, he was co-founder of the English Opera Group and the Aldeburgh Festival, which remains one of the world's major festivals. He was also an outstanding performer, known both for his conducting and for his skills as a pianist, accompanying such singers as Peter Pears, Janet Baker and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. The *New York Times* called Benjamin Britten the greatest musician of the century, and there are many who would agree.

Britten's Operas

The "choral operetta" PAUL BUNYAN, with words by W. H. Auden (Columbia University, 1941, revised in 1976).

PETER GRIMES, with words by Montagu Slater, based on the poem THE BOROUGH by George Crabbe.

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA, premiered in Glynebourn in 1946, with a libretto by Ronald Duncan from André Obey's 1931 play LE VIOL DE LUCRÈCE.

ALBERT HERRING, Glyndebourne 1947, a comic opera with libretto by Eric Crozier, based on Maupassant's story LE ROSIER DE MADAME HUSSON.

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA, a new version of John Gay's opera, first performed at Cambridge in 1948.

LET'S MAKE AN OPERA with Eric Crozier (1949), which included a one-act opera THE LITTLE SWEEP.

DIDO AND AENEAS, a new version of Purcell's opera, 1951.

THE WANDERING SCHOLAR, a new edition of Holst's opera revised with Imogen Holst, 1951.

BILLY BUDD, premiered at Covent Garden in 1951, revised in 1960, with a libretto by E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier, based on Herman Melville's novella.

GLORIANA (premiered at Covent Garden in 1953) to a text by William Plomer, based on Lytton Strachey's ELIZABETH AND ESSEX; a commission for the coronation of Elizabeth II.

THE TURN OF THE SCREW, first performed in Venice in 1954, from the Henry James novel, with libretto by Myfanwy Piper.

NOYE'S FLUDDE, premiered at Aldeburgh in 1958, from one of the Chester cycle of miracle plays, written for performance in a church (Orford Ness in Suffolk).

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (1960) from Shakespeare's play, with a libretto by Britten and Peter Pears.

The CHURCH PARABLES: CURLEW RIVER (1964), THE BURNING FIERY FURNACE (1966), and THE PRODIGAL SON (1968) to words by William Plomer, performed at Orford Church in Aldeburgh, and based on the style of Japanese *Noh* plays.

OWEN WINGRAVE (1970), a commission for BBC television, with libretto by Myfanwy Piper, from the novella by Henry James.

DEATH IN VENICE (1974), from the novella by Thomas Mann, with libretto by Myfanwy Piper.

The Music of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

Twentieth-century music, and particularly twentieth-century opera, can be daunting to the listener who is more comfortable with the familiar tunes and harmonies of operas by Mozart, Verdi, or Puccini. The audience is unlikely to leave the opera house whistling hit tunes from THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA. Add a harrowing story replete with tragedy, violence, and a heavy overlay of Christian interpretation, and this opera may seem downright forbidding.

The music of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA cannot be relegated to the background for easy listening. It demands the listener's attention, but rewards it with extraordinarily expressive harmonies.

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA has been called Britten's most lyrical opera. Despite its tragic subject matter, it is an approachable opera with some amazing musical moments. Britten's subtle use of harmony and his gift for sensitive vocal writing draw evocative sounds and intriguing textures from the small orchestra and cast.

Written for an orchestra of just thirteen players and seventeen instruments, and a cast of eight singers, this is Britten's first chamber opera, a work written for small resources, capable of being performed in an intimate setting rather than in the largest of opera houses. On this scale, the emotions of the characters take centre stage and are reflected wonderfully in the music that Britten wrote for the opera.

The music is searingly expressive of emotions that vary from tenderness to anguish and fury. Gorgeous depictions of the natural world include a stifling summer's night in the first scene, where the sound of crickets and bullfrogs is wonderfully evoked by the harp and double bass. A dynamic interlude of energetic, breathlessly martial music vividly depicts Tarquinius' gallop through the night to Rome and the hapless Lucretia. And when Tarquinius awakens Lucretia, the shock of the moment is conveyed with the crack of a whip.

The result is an operatic experience that is extraordinarily emotional and dramatic.

The Impact of the Legend of Lucretia

The ancient legend of the rape of Lucretia has long captivated writers, artists, composers, theologians, and political thinkers. The story has become part of the texture of western thought, resonating again and again over the centuries in discussions of revolution, citizenship, morality, feminism, the roles of men and women, and the place of the individual in the state.

The legend of Lucretia has inspired many writers, including Livy, Ovid, Machiavelli, Chaucer, and Shakespeare; composers, including Respighi and Handel; and artists such as Rembrandt, Botticelli, Cranach, Dürer, and Titian

The earliest sources describe the rape of the Roman matron Lucretia by Sextus Tarquinius as the flashpoint that caused the Etruscans to be thrown out and the Roman Empire to be established.

We don't know whether the story is a myth or historical fact. Titus Livius (aka Livy) told it as a true story in his great 142-book history of Rome titled *AB URBE CONDITA LIBRI (THE FOUNDING OF THE CITY)*. However, Livy wrote his history some 500 years after the events of the story, and by this time myth and truth were thoroughly tangled together.

For Livy, all roads led to Rome, specifically the Rome of the Republic. For him, Lucretia's personal tragedy was important as a catalyst for the larger political and historical events. For the Romans, rape was perceived as an offence, not against a woman, but against the honour of her husband and her family, and in this case, Roman society itself. At the same time, Romans were already discontented under the Tarquinian kings and considered them tyrants. Politics being politics, any atrocity could have served as the pretext for a revolution.

Many works based on this story focus less on Lucretia than on the political events and the character of Lucius Junius Brutus (the Junius of the opera, usually known as Brutus).

Britten's opera adds yet another layer – a Christian interpretation of an event that took place half a millennium before the birth of Christ. This may seem strange, but it is far from new. As early as the 5th century, St. Augustine, in his book *THE CITY OF GOD*, weighed in on the state of Lucretia's soul, pronouncing her innocent of adultery, but guilty of the greater sin of suicide.

Taken in this context, the layer of Christian interpretation that Britten imposed becomes one more facet of a story that can be told in a couple of sentences, but that is surprisingly complex, mirroring the intricacies of human nature, society, politics, and morality.

The legacy of the story of Lucretia is found everywhere – in numerous plays, operas, poems, paintings, political commentaries, even a samurai film.

The Story of Lucretia in Literature and Music In Chronological Order

The Roman tragic poet **Lucius Accius** (170 BC - c.86 BC) wrote some 50 plays, including an historical play, BRUTUS (now lost). Accius' plays appear to have been popular crowd-pleasers, heavy on violent plots, flamboyant characterizations, and forceful rhetoric

Titus Livius, aka **Livy** (59 BC - A.D.17) is best known for his lengthy history of Rome, AB URBE CONDITA LIBRI (BOOKS FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE CITY). This work, covering the history of Rome from its beginnings to 9 BC, was truly a labor of love; it took him forty years to write and, when finished, it consisted of 142 books, of which only 35 have survived.

Livy believed the story of Lucretia to be true and credits the rape of Lucretia with precipitating the revolt which dethroned the Etruscan kings of Rome and established the Roman Republic. Although he is more interested in the fate of Rome than of Lucretia, Livy's history does express a certain sympathy for Lucretia.

Publius Ovidius Naso, aka **Ovid**, (43 BC - 17 AD) was one of the greatest Roman poets, known to the English-speaking world as Ovid. Best known for his love poems and for the great collection of myths called METAMORPHOSES, Ovid also wrote the FASTI, a long, unfinished poem on the religious festivals of the Roman year and their mythological background. Each book takes one month of the Roman calendar and discusses the rising and setting of stars and constellations, the religious festivals, and their mythological explanations. Unfortunately, only the first six books of the poem (January to June) are extant. Ovid tells us that February 24, the Regifugium (or Flight of the King) commemorates the flight of Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud), last king of the Romans. He recounts the nastiness of the Tarquins, the rape of Lucretia, and the expulsion of the Tarquins, incited by Brutus.

Dio Cassius Cocceianus (c. 155 - c. 235), known in English as Dio Cassius or Cassius Dio, was a noted Roman historian and public servant. He wrote (in Greek) a massive history of Rome. Of the 80 books, some 19 survive in full, along with fragments of the others. His history covers a period of 983 years, from the arrival of Aeneas in Italy, and the subsequent founding of Rome, to AD 229. Among the fragments are a recounting of how Brutus overthrew the Tarquins as a response to the rape of Lucretia.

St. Augustine (354 - 430), a reformed sinner and Catholic theologian, discussed the state of Lucretia's soul in his celebrated work THE CITY OF GOD (written between 413 and 426). While he pronounces her innocent of adultery (this was progress, as in Roman eyes, a victim of rape brought dishonour on her husband and family), Augustine said that Lucretia was guilty of the greater sin of suicide.

Giovanni Boccaccio (1313 - 1375), an Italian writer, humanist, and one of the founders of the Renaissance, wrote CONCERNING FAMOUS WOMEN (DE CLARIS MULIERIBUS, 1360 - 1374), a set of biographies of famous women. Number XLVIII tells of Lucretia, Wife of Collatinus.

Coluccio Salutati (1331 - 1406) was one of the most important political and cultural leaders of Renaissance Florence. His short DECLAMATIO LUCRETIAE is an exchange of speeches between Lucretia and her kinsmen just before her suicide. They try to assure her that she has protected her chastity *non solum in nominum oculis sed etiam in secretis domus penetralibus* (not only in the eyes of men but even in the most secret chambers of the house).

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340 - 1400), the most famous English poet of the Middle Ages, wrote THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN, a poem which recounts ten stories of virtuous women: Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucrece (Lucretia), Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis and Hypermnestra.

Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 – 1527) was a Florentine statesman, political philosopher, historian, musician, poet, and comedic playwright. His most famous book is *THE PRINCE*, a pragmatic guidebook on acquiring and keeping political power; the word *Machiavellian* is now used to describe someone who sacrifices moral principles in order to attain power.

Another of his books, *DISCOURSES ON LIVY*, comments on several aspects of the story of Lucretia. Brutus, who played the idiot to protect himself, illustrates the principle that *It may at times be the highest wisdom to simulate folly*. Machiavelli also notes that if Lucretia had not been raped, some other pretext would have been found for rebellion, simply because Tarquinius Superbus, *having disgusted all Rome by his many acts of cruelty and pride, ... disposed the minds of the Romans to revolt against him on the first occasion that might offer*.

In a chapter headed *How States are Ruined on Account of Women*, Machiavelli cites several examples, including Lucretia, in which *women have been the cause of great dissensions and much ruin to states, and have caused great damage to those who govern them*.

Machiavelli also parodies the story of Lucretia in his comic play *THE MANDRAKE ROOT (MANDRAGOLA)*. Callimaco falls in love with the beautiful Lucrezia, who is married to old and foolish Nicia. Callimaco tricks Nicia into giving his approval for their love affair. When Lucrezia discovers the deception, she reacts, not as an outraged or suicidal victim, but as a Machiavellian manipulator in her own right.

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616), perhaps the greatest of all writers in English, is, of course, best known for his plays and sonnets. *THE RAPE OF LUCRECE* is a long narrative poem, which he wrote around 1594, based on the story described in both Ovid's *FASTI* and Livy's history of Rome. It is one of the best-known and most discussed treatments of the story of Lucretia.

Thomas Heywood (c. 1575 – c. 1650), an English dramatist, anticipated Hollywood by several centuries when he took the story of Lucretia, capitalized on the sex and violence, changed the ending, and made it a musical. Although he based his 1608 play *RAPE OF LUCRECE* on Livy's history, he ended with Tarquin and Brutus receiving fatal wounds after engaging in single combat. Heywood also introduced some comic songs – *severall Songs in their apt places, by Valerius the merry Lord among the Roman Peeres*.

Nathaniel Lee (1653 – 1692), an English Restoration dramatist, focuses on the political events in *LUCIUS JUNIUS BRUTUS, FATHER OF HIS COUNTRY* (1680). The rape of Lucretia was the straw that broke the camel's back, giving Brutus the pretext to depose the Tarquins. The play caused offence for some lines on Tarquin's character that were taken to be a reflection on King Charles II.

French composer **Michel Pignolet de Montéclair (1666-1737)**, wrote some two dozen cantatas, including *LA MORTE DI LUCRETIA* (1728)

Reinhard Keiser (1674 to 1739), a Hamburg colleague of Handel, was a leading early composer of German opera. He wrote more than 100 operas, including a five-act “mourning-play” about Lucretia, which was performed at the Hamburg Opera House in November 1705.

The great German-born British composer **Georg Frideric Handel (1685 – 1759)** composed his cantata *LA LUCREZIA* in about 1708. It is scored for a solo singer with continuo.

Handel's cantata is based on Shakespeare's poem *THE RAPE OF LUCRECE* and consists of a soliloquy in which the ravaged Lucretia sings about her plight and finally takes her own life by stabbing herself while vowing vengeance on her attacker when they meet in the underworld. *LA LUCREZIA* has been called *one of the most extraordinary and virtuosic cantatas ever written for the soprano voice*.

François Marie Arouet (aka **Voltaire**, 1694–1778) was a great French philosopher and author . He wrote a play **BRUTUS**, which focused on the tragedy surrounding the attempt of Brutus’ sons to re-establish the Tarquins on the throne. Love of his country outweighs family feelings and Brutus condemns his sons to death. Written in 1730, **BRUTUS** was revived in 1790 during the French Revolution and made a considerable impact.

Italian dramatist **Vittorio Alfieri** (1749 – 1803) was strongly influenced by classical stories. His dramas include **CLEOPATRA**, **ANTIGONE**, **AGAMMEMNON** and **BRUTUS THE FIRST**, a play about Lucius Junius Brutus, the rebellion, his sons’ plot against the new republic, and their execution. Alfieri’s predominant theme was the overthrow of tyranny, and his writing contributed to the Italian independence movement **Risorgimento**.

American playwright **John Howard Payne** (1791–1852) achieved his greatest hit with **BRUTUS; OR, THE FALL OF TARQUIN** (1818). One of the most famous nineteenth-century tragedies in English, this play launched the career of Edmund Keen, one of England’s greatest actors and was also performed by the great American actor Edwin Booth (brother of John Wilkes Booth). The play focuses on the after-story of Lucretia, when Brutus, as a consul of the Roman Republic, condemns his sons to death for treason.

François Ponsard (1814 - 1867) was a French dramatist, whose first tragedy, **LUCRÈCE**, was performed in 1843 to great acclaim.

The composer **Ottorino Respighi** (1879 – 1936) read Shakespeare’s poem **THE RAPE OF LUCRECE** in 1935. After consulting Livy and Andre Obey’s play **LE VIOL DE LUCRÈCE**, he began to write a one-act opera, **LUCREZIA**, with Claudio Guastalla as librettist. As with Obey’s play and Britten’s opera, Respighi’s opera makes use of a kind of Greek chorus, amalgamating Obey’s two narrators into a single “La Voce,” sung by a mezzo-soprano. Respighi’s opera was left unfinished at his death. His wife completed the scoring, with the help of the composer Ennio Porrino. The opera was first performed at La Scala, Milan, in February, 1937.

French Playwright **Andre Obey** (1892-1975) wrote **LE VIOL DE LUCRÈCE** in 1931. This was the main source for Britten’s opera and introduces the device of the male and female narrators, which Britten adopted as the Male and Female Choruses. The play was subsequently translated into English by Thornton Wilder, who won Pulitzer Prizes for the novel **THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY** and the plays **THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH** and **OUR TOWN**.

Benjamin Britten (1913 - 1976) wrote his chamber opera **THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA**, op. 37, in 1946. Ronald Duncan wrote the libretto, which omits a key part of the story as told by many sources including Livy and Ovid: Tarquinius’ threat to dishonour Lucretia by killing a slave and leaving the two of them to be found. As Livy wrote, *When he saw that she was inflexible and not moved even by the fear of death, he threatened to disgrace her, declaring that he would lay the naked corpse of the slave by her dead body, so that it might be said that she had been slain in foul adultery. By this awful threat, his lust triumphed over her inflexible chastity.*

The main source for the opera was André Obey’s 1931 play **LE VIOL DE LUCRÈCE**. Obey’s use of two narrators is maintained in the opera in the roles of the Male and Female Choruses.

GATE OF HELL, a 1953 Japanese Samurai film directed by **Teinosuke Kinugasa**, was set in 12th century Japan and based on **THE RAPE OF LUCRECE**. This is the tale of a warrior whose love dishonors a married woman. During a palace revolt the warrior Moritoh rescues the beautiful Lady Kesa. After the revolt fails, Moritoh is told that he can have anything that he wants. He wants the married Lady Kesa to be his wife and becomes dangerously and tragically obsessed with her. The film won an Academy Award for the best foreign film of 1954.

Selected Recordings

Britten's music was regularly recorded, often with the performers for whom it was written and often with Britten himself conducting. This has resulted in a treasury of authoritative interpretations. When THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA was first performed, there were two alternating casts; recordings exist of one cast and of both the original Lucretias, Nancy Evans and Kathleen Ferrier. A later 1970 recording has Britten as conductor and Peter Pears singing the Male Chorus.

Excerpts from the Opera

Live excerpts of a performance in October 1946 in Amsterdam.

English Opera Group Orchestra with conductor Hans Oppenheim. Lucretia: Kathleen Ferrier. Male Chorus: Peter Pears. Female Chorus: Joan Cross. Tarquinius: Otakar Kraus.

Music & Arts CD 901

Abridged 1947 recording of the revised version of the opera

English Opera Group Chamber Orchestra with Reginald Goodall (one of the original two conductors). Lucretia: Nancy Evans. Male Chorus: Peter Pears. Female Chorus: Joan Cross. Tarquinius: Frederick Sharp. EMI CMS 7 64727-2: a 2 CD set called BRITTEN - OPERA EXCERPTS AND FOLKSONGS

The complete Opera

Recording made for a BBC broadcast October 11, 1946

English Opera Group Orchestra, with Reginald Goodall, conductor. Lucretia: Kathleen Ferrier. Male Chorus: Peter Pears. Female Chorus: Joan Cross. Tarquinius: Otakar Kraus. On a 2 CD set along with STRATTON (1949 recording of a suite of incidental music written for a play by Lucretia's librettist, Ronald Duncan; the score is now lost; this recording is all that remains).

Pearl - GEMS0231. 2 CDs

1970 Studio Recording with Conductor Benjamin Britten

English Chamber Orchestra. Lucretia: Janet Baker. Male Chorus: Peter Pears. Female Chorus: Heather Harper. Tarquinius: Benjamin Luxon. On a 2-CD set with the cantata PHAEDRA, which Britten wrote for Janet Baker.

Decca (London) 425 666-2

BRITTEN CONDUCTS BRITTEN. OPERAS VOLUME 2.

Decca has recently started releasing a series of Britten's operas, most of them with the composer conducting. Volume 2 is a 10-CD set that includes the 1970 studio recording of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA with Janet Baker, plus A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM (1966); PHAEDRA (1977, conducted by Steuart Bedford); THE TURN OF THE SCREW (1955); DEATH IN VENICE (1974, conducted by Steuart Bedford); GLORIANA (1993, conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras).

Decca 475 6029

1993 studio recording with the City of London Sinfonia, Richard Hickox, conductor.

Lucretia: Jean Rigby. Male Chorus: Nigel Robson. Female Chorus: Catherine Pierard. Tarquinius: Donald Maxwell.

CHANDOS 9254 2 cds

DVD Video

English National Opera with conductor Lionel Friend. Lucretia: Jean Rigby. Male Chorus: Anthony Rolfe-Johnson. Female Chorus: Kathryn Harries. Tarquinius: Russell Smythe.

Kultur Video (DVD) Catalog #: 2929

Selected Links

Benjamin Britten

<http://www.brittenpears.org/>

The Britten-Pears Foundation, established to promote the musical legacy of Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears. Excellent information on Britten, Pears, and Britten's works.

<http://www.musicweb-international.com/britten/index.htm>

Biography of Britten, Britten's principal works, discography

<http://www.geocities.com/Vienna/Strasse/1523/britworks.htm>

List of Britten's Complete Works with discography

http://www.karinvanarkel.com/perform/britten1_e.html

Fine biography of Britten

http://www.classicstoday.com/features/f1_0701.asp

Discussion of Benjamin Britten by David Vernier

Original Sources based on the story of Lucretia

<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/Liv1His.html>

Livy's history. The story of Lucretia is in sections 1.57 to 1.60

http://www.tkline.freemove.co.uk/OvidFastiBkTwo.htm#_Toc69367697

Ovid's Fasti Book II: February 24: The Regifugium

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/2*.html

Cassius Dio's history

<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/GoodWomen/lucretia.html>

Text (in Middle English) of Legend of Lucretia from THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN by Geoffrey Chaucer.

<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120101.htm>

St. Augustine's commentary on Lucretia (chapters 19 and 20)

<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/machiavelli/works/discourses/ch03.htm>

Book 3 of Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy (The story of Lucretia is mentioned in Chapters II, V, and XXVI).

<http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/plays/Luc.html>

Shakespeare's text of THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

<http://www.charlise.com/lucretia.html>

Selected paintings based on the story of Lucretia

THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA: Commentary and Information

<http://www.brittenpears.org/?page=britten/repertoire/opera/lucretia.html>

Repertoire guide to THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA and link to Aldeburgh Education's Resource Pack LUCRETIA IN CONTEXT

http://www.guardian.co.uk/friday_review/story/0,3605,499106,00.html

A feminist and historic perspective by Germaine Greer

The Opera Singer

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17th century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. By tightening the diaphragm, the singer exhales the right amount of air to make the vocal cords vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As sound passes through the mouth, it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. The shape of the mouth and placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to tone and sound of the words.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often study at least one foreign language. After university, singers begin to work in the professional world. Their first roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach for specific roles.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles a singer performs depend mostly upon his or her vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that further determine which roles he or she can sing safely. The roles a singer performs often change over the years as the singer's voice develops and matures. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound, and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

After a role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, he or she arrives at the opera company for the rehearsals. Time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound; therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice; however, in recent years people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. In addition, the health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

The Six Basic Vocal Categories

Soprano: The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

Mezzo-Soprano: The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

Contralto: The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually plays unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

Tenor: The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone colour and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

Baritone: The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone colour. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

Bass: The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone colour. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for a baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano role or a low range baritone singing a bass role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

Coloratura: a light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

Lyric: A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies; for example, Fiordiligi in COSI FAN TUTTE is a role for a lyric soprano.

Dramatic: A dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

Glossary of Opera Terms

Act- a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

Aria- “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

Aside- a secret comment by an actor directly to the audience that other characters can’t hear.

Basso buffo (Italian) - a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

Basso profondo (Italian) - the most serious bass voice.

Baton- short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

Bel Canto- Italian phrase meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

Blocking- directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

Bravo (Italian) - a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

Cadenza- a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off vocal ability.

Castrato (Italian) - a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

Chamber Opera- An opera intended for a smaller, more intimate setting than many operas. Usually, a chamber opera is scored for small orchestra (a chamber orchestra), has a small cast, and can be performed in a smaller venue than a large-scale opera. The term chamber opera was coined in the 20th century but has also been applied to small-scale works of the 17th and 18th centuries. Benjamin Britten’s THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA is a chamber opera.

Choreographer- the person who designs the steps of a dance.

Chorus- a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

Classical- the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

Composer- the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

Comprimario (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

Conductor- the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers.

Countertenor- a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo soprano range.

Crescendo- a build in the volume or dynamic of the music

Cue- a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.

Curtain Call- the moment at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

Designer- a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. The designers work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

Diva- literally, “goddess” in Italian. A female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

Dress Rehearsal- the final rehearsal before opening night includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

Duet- music that is written for two people to sing together.

Encore- a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is performed when the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

Ensemble- a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

Falsetto- the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

Finale- the last musical number of an opera or an act.

Grand Opera- spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically-based plot, a huge cast, an unusually large orchestra, and ballet. The term also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

Helden- German prefix meaning “heroic”. Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

House- the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

Interlude- a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

Intermission- a break between acts of an opera. The lights come up and the audience is free to move around.

Librettist- the writer of the opera’s text.

Libretto- Italian for “little book.” It is the text or story of the opera.

Lyric- used to describe a light to medium weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

Maestro- means “master” in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor.

Mark- to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer’s voice so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the Dress Rehearsal, singers try to sing at full voice for part if not all of the rehearsal.

Motif or Leitmotif- a recurring musical theme that identifies an emotion, person, place or object.

Opera- a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word opus, which means “work.”

Opera buffa (Italian) - an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

Opera seria (Italian) - a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

Opera-comique (French) or **Singspiel** (German) - a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

Operetta- lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

Orchestra- an ensemble comprising string, woodwind, brass, and percussion instruments, and led by a conductor.

Orchestra pit- sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

Overture- an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude; can be played as a separate piece.

Pitch- how high or low a note sounds.

Prelude- a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

Prima Donna- literally, “first lady” in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, the term often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is **primo uomo**.

Principal- a major singing role or the singer who performs such a role.

Production- the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

Props- objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

Proscenium- the front opening of the stage, which frames the action.

Quartet- four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc.

Raked Stage- a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

Recitative- lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. A recitative is used to advance the plot.

Rehearsal- a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

Score- the written music of an opera or other musical work.

Serenade- a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

Soubrette (French) - pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

Spinto (Italian) - a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

Stage Director- the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality.

Stage Manager- the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

Supernumeraries (Supers) - performers who appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

Supertitles- the English translations of the opera’s language, which are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story.

Synopsis- a short summary of the story of the opera.

Tableau- a moment at the end of a scene or act, when all singers on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It’s as if that moment has been captured in a photograph.

Tempo- speed of the music.

Trill- very quick alternation between two adjacent notes.

Trio- an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

Trouser role-the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a **pants role**.

Verismo- a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century.

Workshop #1 – Exploring Plot and Character

Objectives:

- Students will be able to express their knowledge of character by writing a character sketch.
- Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA through verbal and written expression.

Activity #1: The Story

- Have students read a version of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA. You can use the synopsis found in the Study Guide. You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Stop to discuss.

Activity #2: Sharing with a group

- After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, students can create a list of qualities that they feel are key to understanding the story and its characters.

Activity #3: Character sketch

- Students will create (on their own or in a group) a character sketch for one of the main characters (for example, Lucretia, Tarquinius).
- Have students fill out the “Character Profile” sheet in detail, asking these questions:

What can be assumed about this person?

What is the character’s relationship with the other characters?

Why does the character make the choices he or she does?

- Remind students to include evidence from the opera to support their claim.
- Remind students of the music sung by their character. Do the emotions conveyed through the music fit the character sketches?

Activity #4: Creating a journal from point of view of a character

- Students will pick a point of conflict for the character they have chosen in the last activity and write a journal of those events from the character’s point of view.
- Explain that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character in the first person. Students are to express only information that their character would know; they may use the character profile for assistance.

Character Profile

Character's Name : _____

Physical Characteristics (style and physical attributes): _____

Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how does he/she think?)

Emotional Characteristics (is he/she generally cheerful, sad, snobbish, "off-balance" etc.?)

Family: _____

Career/Income (if applicable): _____

Interests and Hobbies: _____

Other interesting facts

Workshop #2 – Writing a Review of THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

Objectives:

- Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays.
- Students will use observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences.
- Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Pacific Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought!

Activity #1: Sharing thoughts with the group

Individually students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?

What did you think about the sets, props and costumes?

Would you have done something differently? Why?

What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?

What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

Activity #2: Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

a clearly stated purpose

a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern

a summary paragraph

capturing the interest of the reader

precise nouns

revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few examples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper. Have the students fill out the “Review Outline” worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

Activity #3: Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Activity #4: Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

Review Outline

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Summary/Closing Paragraph

Teacher's Comments

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: _____ School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax: _____ Grade(s) you teach: _____

Email: _____ Subjects: _____

Have you attended other arts events with your students in the past year? Yes No

If yes, what were they? _____

Were you able to use the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities before attending the opera?
Yes No

If not, please elaborate: _____

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide? _____

What would you add/delete?

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?
 Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself?

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals? Yes No

How would you like to receive information? Fax Email Letters Other _____

Further comments and suggestions _____

Please return this form to:

Pacific Opera, 1815 Blanshard Street, Suite 500, Victoria, BC V8T 5A4 Fax: 250.382.4944