

Second Season - - - Premier Event

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA IN HUNTSVILLE

CULTURAL SERIES



presents

CURLEW RIVER

by

Benjamin Britten

Featuring Members of The Little Orchestra Society of New York

Thomas Scherman, Music Director

8:15 p.m. October 27, 1967

Huntsville High School Auditorium

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Next University Cultural Series event:

November 17, 1967

**"Canterbury Tales"**

Solo dramatization of Chaucer's great work, played  
by Australian actor Bob Inglis

## Program Notes

For more than fifty years Bach had tried to compose to please his employers. The Musical Offering was speedily completed in 1747, near the end of his life and at a time when the old composer had become more isolated, composing largely for himself. Bach was challenged to write the work after a visit to the Court of Frederick the Great, a patron of music and a flutist of remarkable ability. Upon his arrival, he asked the King to give him a musical theme for improvisation. Bach improvised for a time and greatly pleased the King, who asked for more. The composer could not accept such a challenge, but he did decide then to compose a work based on the theme after he returned to Leipzig and his study.

Bach executed a vast cycle of compositions around the royal theme which contains three ingredients that provide melodic attractiveness and contrapuntal workability. The work begins with a statement of this subject, (a) movement upward along the tonic chord, (b) diminished seventh leap downward, and (c) descending chromaticism. An acrostic in Latin was entered on the first page of the music as a friendly challenge to Frederick to solve the musical puzzles offered in the two Ricercars, ten Canons and central Trio Sonata; the sections which make-up The Musical Offering.

The origins of Britten's *Curlew River* date back to 1956 when the composer visited Tokyo in the company of his friend, the Prince of Hesse and the Rhine. In his contribution to the Britten 50th Birthday Symposium, Prince Ludwig writes about an encounter with a medieval Japanese No-play. He tells how, at first, it was difficult to overcome the strangeness of the language—"deadly serious gibberish"—and the style of production—"No scenery, except a stylized painting of a pine tree." More immediately comprehensible and appealing were the "magnificent costumes" and the "wonderful masks which can change their expression by a tilt of the head."

Prince Ludwig goes on to write what is in essence the story of *Curlew River*. "The ferryman is waiting in his boat; a traveler turns up and tells him about a woman who will soon be coming to the river. The woman is mad, and she is looking for her lost child. Then she appears, and the ferryman does not wish to take a mad person, but in the end he takes her in his boat. On the way across the river the two passengers sit behind each other on the floor as if in a narrow boat, while the ferryman stands behind them, symbolically punting with a light stick. The ferryman tells the story of a little boy who came this way a year ago this very day. The child was very tired, for he had escaped from robbers who had held him. He crossed the river in this boat, but he died

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## PROGRAM

The Musical Offering ..... J. S. Bach

|                   |                   |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Marguerite Kuehne | Andrew Mikita     |
| Arlie Furman      | Violet Jackson    |
| Sol Montlack      | Patricia Toms     |
| George Koutzen    | Virginia Hourigan |
| Samuel Candiotti  | Brooks Tillotson  |
| Wallace Deyerle   |                   |

Soloists of The Little Orchestra Society  
THOMAS SCHERMAN, conductor

### INTERMISSION

*Curlew River* ..... Benjamin Britten

Libretto based on the Medieval Japanese No-Play Sumidigawa  
of Juro Montomasa  
by William Polmer

### The Monks and Acolytes

|                 |                    |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Madwoman .....  | Kenneth Riegel     |
| Ferryman .....  | William Metcalf    |
| Abbot .....     | John West          |
| Traveller ..... | John Robert Dunlap |

### Chorus of Monks

William Woodruff  
David Vosburgh  
Mark Howard  
Thomas Rosinsky  
Ned Styres  
Thomas Love  
Fawayne Murphy  
David Forssen

### The Musicians

|                         |             |
|-------------------------|-------------|
| Thomas Scherman .....   | Organ       |
| Sol Montlack .....      | Viola       |
| Samuel Candiotti .....  | Bass        |
| Andrew Mikita .....     | Flute       |
| Brooks Tillotson .....  | French Horn |
| Wallace Deyerle .....   | Percussion  |
| Nanette N. Kramer ..... | Harp        |

### Acolytes

and

The Voice of the Spirit

Musical Preparation by  
THOMAS SCHERMAN

Staged by  
Vlado Habunek

Settings & Costumes by  
Bosidar Razica

Chorus Director  
Jonathan Dudley

Lighting  
Richard Casler

Costumes executed by  
Betty Williams

Production Manager: Bernie Joy

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New York City

## PROGRAM NOTES (Continued)

from exhaustion on the other side. The woman starts crying. It was her son. The ferryman is sorry for her and takes her to the child's grave."

Over the years the memory of this play remained with the composer. Mr. Britten writes: "The whole occasion made a tremendous impression on me, the simple, touching story, the economy of style, the intense slowness of the actions, the marvelous skill and control of the performers, the beautiful costumes, the mixture of chanting, speech, and singing, which, with the three instruments, made up the strange music — it all offered a totally new 'operatic' experience."

Using the format of English medieval religious drama, the composer provides the necessary link that bridged the gap between Tokyo and Aldeburgh, and it was on the transplantation of Sumidagawa to Curlew River and a Church in the Fens that Britten and his collaborator, William Polmer, have built their parable.