
BENJAMIN BRITTEN

AND

W. H. AUDEN

Cabaret Songs

for voice and piano

Faber Music Limited
London

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DONALD MITCHELL

CABARET SONGS

W. H. AUDEN
(1907-1973)

BENJAMIN BRITTEN
(1913-1976)

1. Tell me the truth about love

spoken

Voice

Liebe l'amour amor amoris 1. Some

Piano

Tempo rubato

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

colla voce

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

when I asked the man next door Who looked as if he knew, His
 don't know what the black-bird sang Or what the ro-ses said, But it
 get-ting on for thir-ty-five, And still I do not know What

wife was ve-ry cross in-deed And said it would-n't do.
 was-n't in the chick-en run Or un-der-neath the bed.
 kind of crea-ture it can be That bo-thers peo-ple so.

(♩ = 58) (Very much $\frac{3}{2}$)

Does it look _____ like a
 Can it pull _____ ex-tra-
 When it comes, _____ will it

Red. * *Red.* * *sim.*

pair of py - ja - mas Or the ham in a temp'rance ho -
 - or - din - 'ry fa - ces, Is it u - sual - ly sick on a
 come with - out warn - ing Just as I'm pick - ing my

- tel,
 swing,
 nose, } O tell me the truth a - bout love.

Does its o - - dour re - mind one of
 Does it spend all its time at the
 Will it knock on my door in the

lla - mas Or has it a com - fort - ing smell? }
 ra - ces Or fid - dling with pie - ces of string, } 0
 morn - ing Or tread in the bus on my toes, }

tell me the truth a - bout love. Is it
 Has it
 Will it

prick - ly to touch as a hedge is Or soft as ei - der - down
 views of its own a - bout mon - ey, Does it think Pat - riot - is - m e -
 come like a change in the wea - ther, Will its greet - ing be courteous or

fluff, Is it sharp or quite smooth at the ed - ges? }
 -nough, Are its sto - ries vul - gar but fun - ny? } 0
 bluff, Will it al - ter my life al - to -

tell me the truth a - bout love _____ O tell me the truth a - bout love. 2. I
 3. Your

-ge - ther? O tell me the truth a - bout love, _____ O

tell me the truth a - bout love, _____ O tell me the truth a - bout love.

2. Funeral blues

(♩ = 69)

pp

pp

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

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

L.H. }

3

3

- lence the pia - nos_ and with muffled drum

The first system consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "- lence the pia - nos_ and with muffled drum". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. The right hand plays chords and moving lines, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Bring out the cof - fin, let the mourn - ers come. Let

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "Bring out the cof - fin, let the mourn - ers come. Let". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff with the same key signature and time signature. The right hand plays chords and moving lines, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is placed above the vocal line at the end of the system.

aer - o-planes cir - cle moan - ing o - ver-head

p

f

f

with Ped.

The third system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "aer - o-planes cir - cle moan - ing o - ver-head". The piano accompaniment is in a grand staff with the same key signature and time signature. The right hand plays chords and moving lines, while the left hand plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. A dynamic marking of *p* (piano) is placed below the piano part at the beginning of the system. A dynamic marking of *f* (forte) is placed above the piano part at the end of the system. The piano part features triplets in both hands. The instruction "with Ped." is written below the piano part.

Scrib - bling on the sky the mes - sage He Is Dead, Tie

crepe bands round the white necks of the pub - lic doves,

Let the traf - fic police - men wear black cot - ton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,

pp molto marc.

crescendo

My work - ing week and my Sun - day rest, My

crescendo

(*senza 8va*)

noon, my mid - night, my talk, — my song; I

thought that love could last for e - ver: I was wrong. The

ff

stars are not want - ed now: put out ev - 'ry one,

f brillante

The first system of the musical score features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment includes several triplet figures in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand. The dynamic marking is *f brillante*, and the system concludes with a *ff* marking.

Pack up the moon and dis - man - - tle the sun,

f

The second system continues the vocal and piano parts. The vocal line has a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment features more triplet figures in the right hand. The dynamic marking is *f*.

Pour a-way the o - cean and sweep up the woods; For

ff

8 bassa:

The third system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano accompaniment has a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The dynamic marking is *ff*, and the section is marked *8 bassa:*.

no-thing now can e - ver come to a - ny good.

ff

8 bassa

The fourth system concludes the page. The vocal line has a triplet of eighth notes. The piano accompaniment features a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand. The dynamic marking is *ff*, and the section is marked *8 bassa*.

3. Johnny

a tempo
p semplice

O the val - ley in the summer when

f marc. portato *p*

rit.

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

a tempo

grass_ at our feet and the birds up a - bove Whis - pered so soft_ in re -

Detailed description: This is a musical score for a piece titled 'Johnny'. It consists of three systems of music. The first system features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a rest followed by the lyrics 'O the val - ley in the summer when'. The piano accompaniment starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a 'marc. portato' (marked) tempo. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics 'I — and my John Be - side the deep ri - ver — walk on and on While the'. The piano accompaniment continues with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The third system continues the vocal line with lyrics 'grass_ at our feet and the birds up a - bove Whis - pered so soft_ in re -'. The piano accompaniment continues. The score includes various musical notations such as rests, notes, stems, beams, and dynamic markings.

- ci - pro-cal love, And I leaned on his shoulder, 'O John-ny, let's play': But

The first system of music consists of a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a melodic phrase in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 2/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment provides harmonic support with chords and moving lines in both the right and left hands.

he frowned like thun - der, and he went _____ a - way.

portato

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part is marked *portato*. The system concludes with a key signature change to two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a time signature change to 2/4.

O the

tr.

f

The third system features a vocal line with a long note and a piano accompaniment. The piano part includes a trill (tr.) in the right hand and a strong dynamic marking (*f*) in the left hand. The system concludes with a key signature change to two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a time signature change to 2/4.

eve - ning near Christ-mas as I well re - call When we

mf

8^{va}

The fourth system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The piano part is marked *mf* and includes an 8va marking above the right hand. The system concludes with a key signature change to two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a time signature change to 2/4.

went to the Cha - ri - ty Ma - ti-nee Ball, The

floor_ was so smooth and the band_ was so loud And

John - ny so hand - some I felt so proud; 'Squeeze me

(suffocate)
mf

tigh - ter, dear John - ny, let's dance_ till day': But

rit. *p*

he frowned like thun - der and went _____ a - way.

portato

Detailed description: This system contains the first two staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are "he frowned like thun - der and went _____ a - way." The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a tempo marking of *portato*. The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some slurs and ties.

Lento: quasi recit.

Shall I ev - er for - get at the Grand Op - e - ra _____

Detailed description: This system contains the third and fourth staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo marking is *Lento: quasi recit.* The lyrics are "Shall I ev - er for - get at the Grand Op - e - ra _____". There is a five-measure rest in the vocal line before the lyrics begin. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a common time signature (C). The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some slurs and ties.

When mu - sic poured out of each won - der - ful - star? _____

ff

Detailed description: This system contains the fifth and sixth staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are "When mu - sic poured out of each won - der - ful - star? _____". There is a three-measure rest in the vocal line before the lyrics begin. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a common time signature (C). The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some slurs and ties. A dynamic marking of *ff* is present.

Di - a - monds and pearls hung like _____

tr.

accel.

Detailed description: This system contains the seventh and eighth staves of music. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are "Di - a - monds and pearls hung like _____". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a common time signature (C). The music features a mix of eighth and quarter notes, with some slurs and ties. A dynamic marking of *tr.* is present. The tempo marking *accel.* is also present.

i - vy__ down Ov - er each gold and sil - ver__ gown;

'O John-ny I'm in hea-ven,' I whis-pered to say: _____

ff

Tempo I

But he frowned like thunder and went__ a-way.

portato

Tempo di Valse

p _____ *p* _____

O, O but he was as

con Ped. _____ *etc.*

fair as a gar - den in flower, As slen - der and tall as the

great Eif - fel Tower, When the waltz_ throbbd out down the long pro - me -

-nade O his eyes and his smile went straight to my heart; 'O

rit.

mar - ry me, John - ny, I'll love and o - bey': But

he frowned like thun - der and he went _____ a - way.

portato

ossia

Detailed description: This system contains three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The lyrics are "he frowned like thun - der and he went _____ a - way." The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The word "portato" is written above the piano part. An "ossia" section is indicated by a bracket and a dotted line, showing an alternative piano accompaniment for the final part of the system.

O last night I dreamed of you, John - ny, my lo - ver; You'd the

Detailed description: This system contains three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The lyrics are "O last night I dreamed of you, John - ny, my lo - ver; You'd the". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The piano part features a steady accompaniment of chords in the bass line.

sun_ on one arm and the moon_ on the o - ther, The

Detailed description: This system contains three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The lyrics are "sun_ on one arm and the moon_ on the o - ther, The". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of two flats and a common time signature. The piano part features a steady accompaniment of chords in the bass line.

sea it was blue_ and the grass it was green, ev - 'ry star rat-tled a

(gliss. pp) tr.

Detailed description: This system contains the first line of the song. The vocal line is in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves: a right-hand staff in a treble clef and a left-hand staff in a bass clef. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the left hand and chords in the right hand. A trill is marked in the right hand with the instruction '(gliss. pp)'. The lyrics are 'sea it was blue_ and the grass it was green, ev - 'ry star rat-tled a'.

round tam - bou-rine; Ten thousand miles deep in a

tr. 7 pp

Detailed description: This system contains the second line of the song. The vocal line continues with the lyrics 'round tam - bou-rine; Ten thousand miles deep in a'. The piano accompaniment includes a trill in the right hand marked 'tr.' and a seven-measure phrase marked '7'. A piano dynamic marking 'pp' is present. The lyrics are 'round tam - bou-rine; Ten thousand miles deep in a'.

Lento

pit there I lay: But you_ went a-way.

pp rit.

ossia

Detailed description: This system contains the final line of the song. The tempo is marked 'Lento'. The vocal line has the lyrics 'pit there I lay: But you_ went a-way.'. The piano accompaniment features a piano dynamic marking 'pp' and a ritardando marking 'rit.'. An 'ossia' section is provided for the piano part. The lyrics are 'pit there I lay: But you_ went a-way.'.

4. Calypso

Molto moderato, poco a poco accelerando

The musical score is written in 2/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It consists of four systems, each with a vocal line and piano accompaniment.

System 1: The piano accompaniment begins with a bass line of eighth notes and a treble line of chords. Dynamics include *pp cresc. molto*, *ff*, and *sf pp*. The tempo is marked *Molto moderato, poco a poco accelerando*. The vocal line is mostly rests.

System 2: The vocal line begins with the lyrics: "Dri-ver, drive fas-ter and make a good run Down the". The piano accompaniment continues with a steady eighth-note bass line and chords. Dynamics include *pp sempre ritmico*.

System 3: The vocal line continues with: "Springfield Line un-der the shin-ing sun... Fly like an ae-ro - plane,". The piano accompaniment maintains the eighth-note bass line and chords.

System 4: The vocal line concludes with: "don't pull up short Till you brake for the Grand Cen - tral Sta-tion, New York." The piano accompaniment continues with the eighth-note bass line and chords.

p dolce

For there in the mid-dle of

poco meno p

[con *Red.*]

stacc.

that wai - ting hall Should be standing the one that I love best of all. If he's

not there to meet me when I get to town, I'll stand on the pavement with

stacc.

p dolce

tears roll - ing down. Dri-ver, drive fas-ter, Dri-ver, drive fas - ter. For

cresc.

p

he is the one that I love to look on, The ac-me of kind-ness and

per-fec - tion. He pres-ses my hand and he says he loves me Which I

find an ad-mi-ra-ble pe-cu-li-a-ri-ty. Dri-ver, drive fas-ter,

Dri-ver, drive fas - ter Dri-ver, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter.

p dolce

The woods _____ are bright green _____ on both

pp

sides of the line; The trees _____ have their loves _____ though they're

f

diff-'rent from mine. But the poor fat old ban-ker in the

sf

sun-par-lour car Has no-one to love him ex-cept his ci-gar.

sf

accel. *pp molto cresc.*

Dri-ver, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter,

pp molto cresc.

f

fas-ter. If I were the head of the Church or the

f

State I'd pow-der my nose and just tell them to

sf *mf*

wait. Drive fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter,

mf

Più presto

fas-ter. For love's more im - port - ant and

pow - er - ful than Ev - en a priest or a

po - li - ti - cian, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter,

cresc. *f*

fas-ter.

accel. *whistle*

Prestissimo

(repeat ad lib.)

ff

Ah

mf dim.

la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la

p morendo (sempre pochitissimo)

Fas-ter, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter, drive fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter, fas-ter,

p morendo