

231st season
Tuesday 12 November 2013

Marking one century since the birth of Benjamin Britten

Benjamin Britten

THE TURN OF THE SCREW

Opera in two acts with a prologue

Libretto by **Myfanwy Piper**
after the novella by **Henry James**

Performed in English

Conductor — Pavel SMELKOV

Musical Director: Valery Gergiev

Stage Director: David McVicar

Movement Director: Andrew George

Set and Costume Designer: Tanya McCallin

Lighting Designer: Adam Silverman

Musical Preparation: Irina Soboleva

Music Coach and Consultant: Steven Maughan

Assistant Stage Director — Elena Ivanova

Assistant Set Designer — Jason Southgate

Concert Mistresses — Larisa Gabbitova, Larisa Larionova

*This production was made possible with the support
of the Mariinsky Theatre Trust (UK)*

Stage Manager: Anna Shishkina

*Performance running time: 2 hours and 20 minutes
The performance has one interval*

Cast:

Prologue **Andrei Ilyushnikov**

The Governess **Irina Vasilieva**

Young children in her charge:

Miles **Platon Cherkasov** (debut)

Flora **Larisa Yelina**

Mrs Grose, the housekeeper **Elena Vitman**

Ghosts:

Miss Jessel,

a former governess **Lyubov Sokolova**

Quint,

a former man-servant **Andrei Ilyushnikov**

Servants — extras

The action takes place in and around Bly, a country house in the East of England, in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Chamber Orchestra:

Violin 1 — **Leonid Veksler**

Violin 2 — **Andrei Novodran**

Viola — **Vartan Gnoro**

Cello — **Vladimir Yunovich**

Double bass — **Denis Kashin**

Flute, alto flute, piccolo flute — **Diana Cherezova**

Oboe — **Alexander Trushkov**

English horn — **Karlo Karchava**

Clarinet — **Vadim Bondarenko**

Bass clarinet — **Vitaly Papyrin**

Bassoon — **Igor Gorbunov**

French horn — **Alexander Afanasiev**

Harp — **Lyudmila Rokhlina**

Percussion — **Alexander Novikov,
Yevgeny Zhikalov, Gleb Logvinov**

Piano and Celesta — **Olga Okhromenko**

Synopsis

Act I

An unknown man tells of a woman hired as governess to two children in the country. The sole condition of her employment is that their only relative, a young man-about-town, not be troubled by any further communication from her. Overcome by the gentleman's charm, the woman accepts the position.

On her journey into the country the governess is full of doubts.

Her worries are happily dispelled on her arrival at Bly. The housekeeper, Mrs Grose, is in the midst of coaching the children, Miles and Flora, on how to behave on meeting their new governess. The governess is immediately taken with them. The children rush her off on a tour of the house and grounds.

Life runs smoothly at Bly until the governess receives a letter from Miles' school informing her that the boy has been expelled. Shocked, she asks the housekeeper if she has ever known Miles to bad, and Mrs Grose speaks up in his defence. Their discussion is interrupted by the children playing. Enchanted by their innocence, the governess resolves to say nothing to Miles about the letter.

The governess walks through the gardens in rapt reflection on the beauty of her charges and their surroundings. She spies an unknown man staring at her. Unsettled, she runs back to the house.

The children are playing when the governess calls them away. Alone in the drawing room, she sees the unknown man. She describes the intruder to Mrs Grose, who identifies him as Peter Quint, former valet to the children's uncle. Quint had been left in charge of the household and, according to the housekeeper, had abused his position. The previous governess, Miss Jessel, Quint's lover, had been forced to leave her employment, and had subsequently died. Quint was killed in an accident. The horrified governess fears Quint has returned for the children, and resolves to protect them.

The governess supervises the children at their lessons. Miles is practicing his Latin declensions when he recites a mnemonic unfamiliar to her. On being questioned, he exclaims: 'I found it, I like it, do you?'

Flora and governess sit at the edge of the lake. The governess becomes aware of a woman standing on the far shore watching them. She is convinced that the woman is Miss Jessel, and that Flora has seen her too.

The powerful imaginative force of Quint and Miss Jessel draw the sleeping children into the garden at night. The governess and Mrs Grose, frantic with worry, finally discover them and send them back to bed. Miles tells the governess: 'You see, I am bad, aren't I?'

Act II

Peter Quint and Miss Jessel lock in a bitter colloquy of reproach and troubled passions. The governess, meanwhile, feels suffocated by a sense of helplessness against the evil enclosing her.

Sunday service is beginning at the local church. As the organ sounds, Flora and Miles play a word game based on the Benedicite. The children's playing delights Mrs Grose but disturbs the governess, who believes them possessed by the ghosts. Mrs Grose suggests that they all might benefit by joining the congregation inside, and bundles Flora into church. Before following, Miles inquires when he will be returning to school, and asks the governess whether his uncle thinks what she thinks. The governess, upset by the boy's implied challenge to her authority, vows to leave Bly immediately.

She runs back to the house to pack while the children are still at play. An overpowering sense of Miss Jessel's presence arrests her at the doorway to the schoolroom. She finds the courage to challenge the ghost and drive it from the room. But the growing danger convinces her that she must not abandon the children. Instead, she writes a letter to her employer beseeching him to see her at once.

Miles sits in his bedroom before undressing for bed. The governess warns the boy of her letter in an attempt to force him to confess his relationship to the ghosts. Quint's voice orders the boy to stay silent. A bedroom candle is blown out.

Miles, coaxed by the voice of Quint, steals the governess' letter.

Miles entertains the two women with a piano recital, while Flora sits playing at cat's cradle. The governess confides to Mrs Grose that she has written the letter. The housekeeper eventually nods off and, with the governess' attention distracted by Miles' surprising virtuosity, Flora seizes the opportunity to slip away undetected.

The women find Flora by the lake. The governess accuses the girl of going there to meet Miss Jessel. She believes she sees the ghost and hears its voice appealing to the girl not to betray their friendship, but Mrs Grose sees and hears nothing. Flora lashes out at the governess: 'I can't see anything, nobody, nothing'. The girl pleads with Mrs Grose to take her away. The governess, devastated, realises that Flora is lost to her forever.

Before leaving to deliver Flora back to her uncle, the housekeeper warns the governess that her letter was never delivered. The governess steels herself for a confrontation with Miles. The boy confesses to taking the letter, but as the governess presses him to name his associate, Quint makes his presence ever more felt.

Marking one century since the birth of Benjamin Britten

Three centuries after the death of Henry Purcell – “Britain’s own Orpheus” – Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) became the first British composer to gain an international reputation. He attracted musicians and audiences alike with the primordial nature of his talent, his incomparable musical erudition and his absolute command, so to speak, of every “trade secret” of his profession as a composer. These features may be observed even in Britten’s earliest works – such as the *Simple Symphony* for strings and the *Sinfonietta* for chamber orchestra.

Britten composed numerous symphonies (among them *Spring* and *Sinfonia da Requiem*), cantata and oratorio works (including the acclaimed *War Requiem*), instrumental concerti, chamber ensembles and vocal cycles... A brilliant pianist, Britten often performed in ensembles with friends such as the outstanding British singer Peter Pears (the first performer of many of his vocal cycles and operatic roles), Galina Vishnevskaya and Mstislav Rostropovich... A composer with a keen interest in tuition, Britten dedicated much of his attention to musical education for the next generation. In this sense, his incredibly witty *Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* (*Variations and Fugue on a Theme of Purcell*) and the children’s music production *Let’s Make an Opera!* (children love taking part in it) spring readily to mind.

Essentially, opera was to be the most important genre in Britten’s career. He produced revised versions of Henry Purcell’s opera *Dido and Aeneas* and the once incredibly popular *Beggar’s Opera* of John Gay and John Christopher Pepusch. He wrote the chamber operas *Curlew River* and *Noye’s Fludde* (the latter is dedicated to Dmitry Shostakovich). Russian theatres have staged and continue to perform Britten’s operas *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Rape of Lucretia*... Benjamin Britten was one of the 20th century’s most respected composers; his name is regularly listed on the playbills of countless music theatres and concert halls.

Iosif Raiskin