

Noye's Fludde is a one-act opera by the British composer Benjamin Britten, intended primarily for amateur performers, particularly children. First performed on 18 June 1958 at that year's Aldeburgh Festival, it is based on the 15th-century Chester "mystery" or "miracle" play which recounts the Old Testament story of Noah's Ark. Britten specified that the opera should be staged in churches or large halls, not in a theatre.

By the mid-1950s Britten had established himself as a major composer, both of operas and of works for mixed professional and amateur forces – his mini-opera *The Little Sweep* (1949) was written for young audiences, and used child performers. He had previously adapted text from the Chester play cycle in his 1952 *Canticle II*, which retells the story of Abraham and Isaac. *Noye's Fludde* was composed as a project for television; to the Chester text Britten added three congregational hymns, the Greek prayer *Kyrie eleison* as a children's chant, and an *Alleluia* chorus. A large children's chorus represents the pairs of animals who march into and out of the ark, and proceedings are directed by the spoken Voice of God. Of the solo sung roles, only the parts of Noye (Noah) and his wife were written to be sung by professionals; the remaining roles are for child and adolescent performers. A small professional ensemble underpins the mainly amateur orchestra which contains numerous unconventional instruments to provide particular musical effects; bugle fanfares for the animals, handbell chimes for the rainbow, and various improvisations to replicate musically the sounds of a storm.

At its premiere *Noye's Fludde* was acclaimed by critics and public alike, both for the inspiration of the music and the brilliance of the design and production. The opera received its American premiere in New York in March 1959, and its first German performance at Ettal in May of that year. Since then it has been staged worldwide; the performance in Beijing in October 2012 organised by the KT Wong Foundation was the first in China of any Britten opera. The occasion of Britten's centenary in 2013 led to numerous productions at music festivals, both in the UK and abroad.

The present recording was made by the BBC at the Aldeburgh Festival in 1958 on the occasion of the work's world première, and has been XR remastered in Ambient Stereo from mono BBC Transcription Service vinyl LP discs.

Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op. 10, is a work for string orchestra. It was written in 1937 at the request of Boyd Neel, who conducted his orchestra at the premiere of the work at that year's Salzburg Festival. It was the work that brought Benjamin Britten to international attention.

Britten studied with Frank Bridge from 1927. In 1932 he began writing a set of variations on a theme from one of Bridge's works, as a tribute to his teacher, but he was distracted by other matters and the work went nowhere.

In May 1937, the organisers of the Salzburg Festival invited Boyd Neel and his orchestra to perform three works at that year's Festival, in August, only three months away. One of those works had to be a previously unperformed work by a British composer. Neel knew Britten from having conducted his film score for *Love From a Stranger* in 1936, so he asked him to write a new work for a string orchestra. Britten accepted the commission and immediately started work on a new set of variations on a theme by Bridge. Britten took as his theme the second of Bridge's *Three Idylls for string quartet*, Op. 6, No. 2. The first sketch was completed in 10 days, and the work was fully scored by 12 July.

He dedicated the work "To F.B. A tribute with affection and admiration". Both Bridge and Britten attended rehearsals of the work.

The work was given its concert premiere, as planned, on 27 August 1937 in Salzburg. However, its broadcast premiere occurred two days earlier; it was played live on Radio Hilversum on 25 August. Its British premiere took place on 5 October of the same year.

It was first recorded in July 1938 for Decca 78rpm release by Neel conducting his own string orchestra – the first of many recordings of this well-loved work – from which the present release has been XR remastered in Ambient Stereo.

Andrew Rose (with notes drawn from *Wikipedia*)



britten
world premières

Pristine
XR
PACO 202

noye's fludde
owen brannigan
gladys parr
trevor anthony
english opera group players
conducted by charles mackerras

world première performance
aldeburgh festival, 1958

**variations on a
theme of frank bridge**
the boyd neel string orchestra
conducted by boyd neel

world première recording, 1938

live and studio recordings

britten

world premières



1. RADIO Introduction to Noye's Fludde (0:17)

BRITTEN Noye's Fludde, Op. 59

(world première performance)

2. Lord Jesus Think On Me (3:06)
3. I God That All This Worlde Hath Wroughte (2:34)
4. Have Done You Men and Wemen All (2:25)
5. Now In the Name Of God I Will Begyne (4:24)
6. Noye Noye Take Thou Thy Company (5:48)
7. Wiffe Come In Why Standes Thou Their (5:06)
8. Ha Children Me Thinkes My Botte Removes (8:21)
9. Now Forty Dayes Are Fullie Gone (5:22)
10. Noye Take Thy Wife Anone (2:30)
11. Noye Heare I Behette Thee a Heste (1:08)
12. The Spacious Firmament On High (6:42)
13. RADIO Conclusion to Noye's Fludde (0:44)

CAST

The Voice of God (spoken role) - Trevor Anthony
 Noye (bass-baritone) - Owen Brannigan
 Mrs Noye (contralto) - Gladys Parr
 Sem (treble) - Thomas Bevan
 Ham (treble) - Marcus Norman
 Jaffett (tenor or treble) - Michael Crawford
 Mrs Sem (girl soprano) - Janette Miller
 Mrs Ham (girl soprano) - Katherine Dyson
 Mrs Jaffett (girl soprano) - Marilyn Baker
 Mrs Noye's Gossips (girl sopranos) - Penelope Allen, Doreen Metcalfe,
 Dawn Mendham, Beverley Newman
 The Raven (silent role) - David Bedwell
 The Dove (silent role) - Maria Spall
 Children's chorus of animals and birds; congregation

English Opera Group Players
 Orchestra of Children
 conducted by Charles Mackerras

Recorded at the Aldeburgh Festival, 18 June 1958

BRITTEN Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge, Op. 10

(world première recording)

14. Introduction and Theme (1:53)
15. Variation 1: Adagio (2:17)
16. Variation 2: March (1:10)
17. Variation 3: Romance (1:38)
18. Variation 4: Aria Italiana (1:13)
19. Variation 5: Bourrée classique (1:13)
20. Variation 6: Wiener Waltzer (2:34)
21. Variation 7: Moto perpetuo (1:10)
22. Variation 8: Funeral March (3:15)
23. Variation 9: Chant (1:05)
24. Variation 10: Fugue and Finale (6:26)

The Boyd Neel String Orchestra
 leader Frederick Grinke
 conducted by Boyd Neel

Recorded 14-15 July, 1938, West Hampstead Studios, London

Issued September 1938 as Decca X.226-28

Matrix numbers: AR.2810-15

XR Remastered in Ambient Stereo by Andrew Rose
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