

When *Albert Herring* received its first performance at Glyndebourne in June 1947, Benjamin Britten surprised many of his admirers. After the dark psychological landscapes of *Peter Grimes* and *The Rape of Lucretia*, here was an opera of warmth, wit and gentle satire. Yet beneath its comic surface lies one of Britten's most familiar themes: the struggle of the individual against the expectations imposed by society.

The action takes place in the fictional Suffolk market town of Loxford around 1900. The annual May Day Festival faces an unexpected crisis when the local worthies, led by the formidable Lady Billows, discover that every prospective May Queen has, in one way or another, failed to meet their exacting standards of virtue. Their solution is to elect a May King instead, choosing the shy and painfully respectable greengrocer's son, Albert Herring.

A prank involving rum-laced lemonade changes Albert's life. For the first time he escapes the watchful eye of his domineering mother and experiences a night of freedom and adventure. By the opera's conclusion, the timid young man has quietly but decisively discovered his independence.

American audiences encountered this delightful Suffolk comedy remarkably quickly. Barely two years after its Glyndebourne premiere, *Albert Herring* crossed the Atlantic for its first performances in the United States at Tanglewood on 8 and 9 August 1949. The productions were mounted by the Opera Department of the Berkshire Music Center and conducted by Boris Goldovsky.

Reviewing the Tanglewood performances in *The New Yorker*, Robert A. Simon confessed that he was ready to apply for membership in the "Benjamin Britten cult", praising the opera's "believable story, involving believable people" and concluding that "words and music are as one, and the result is triumphant." Contemporary reaction elsewhere was equally enthusiastic. Writing in the *Boston Post*, Warren Storey Smith declared: "Add another success to the long list achieved by Boris Goldovsky. The first American performances, under his direction, of Benjamin Britten's comic opera, *Albert Herring*, at Tanglewood were a triumph, both as regards the opera itself and the production."

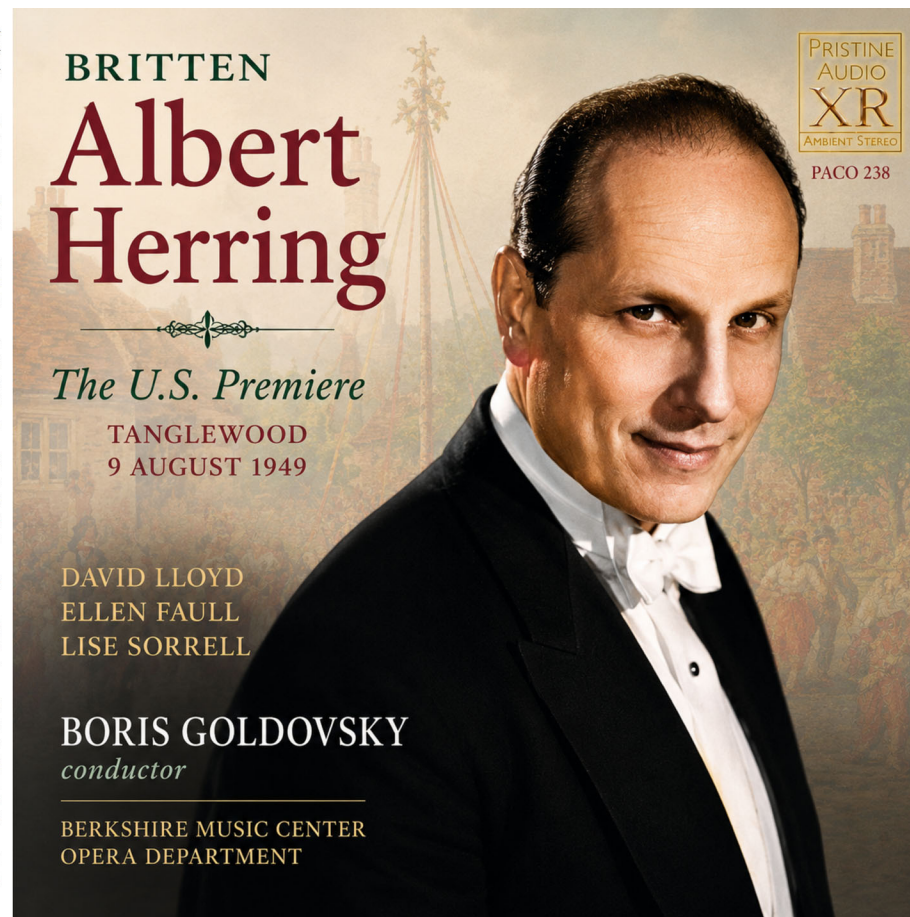
Today Boris Goldovsky is remembered as one of the great champions of opera in America. Born in Moscow in 1908 into a distinguished musical family, he studied in Europe with Artur Schnabel and Ernő Dohnányi before settling in the United States, where he became a conducting student of Fritz Reiner at the Curtis Institute. By the 1940s he was shaping opera departments at both the New England Conservatory and the Berkshire Music Center, later becoming nationally known through touring opera, English-language productions, teaching, broadcasting and his Metropolitan Opera radio commentaries.

This production also preserves a fascinating early appearance by Sarah Caldwell, later the celebrated founder of the Opera Company of Boston, who at the age of twenty-five served as co-director alongside Goldovsky.

The cast was drawn largely from the young singers of the Berkshire Music Center, among them David Lloyd in the title role, Ellen Faull as Lady Billows and Lise Sorrell as Mrs Herring. Listening today, one is struck by the freshness and commitment of these performances and by the evident affection with which the young cast embraced Britten's still-new work.

The survival of this recording is itself remarkable. Professional tape recording was still a very new technology in the United States in 1949, with the first commercial Ampex machines having entered service only the previous year. The surviving source exhibits pronounced and continuously varying speed instability, with the pitch rising progressively and unevenly over the course of individual reels. Whether this behaviour was introduced during the original recording or during a later playback transfer cannot now be known with certainty, but it is consistent with the mechanical characteristics of early tape transports, particularly changing reel tension and load as the tape pack moved from one spool to the other. Each reel has therefore been carefully analysed and continuously re-pitched in order to restore stable musical pitch throughout the performance.

Seventy-seven years after these pioneering performances introduced *Albert Herring* to American audiences, they still communicate the qualities that so impressed their first listeners: humanity, humour and the irresistible charm of one of Britten's most perfectly realised operas.



BRITTEN
Albert Herring

PRISTINE AUDIO XR
AMBIENT STEREO
PACO 238

The U.S. Premiere
TANGLEWOOD
9 AUGUST 1949

DAVID LLOYD
ELLEN FAULL
LISE SORRELL

BORIS GOLDOVSKY
conductor

BERKSHIRE MUSIC CENTER
OPERA DEPARTMENT

BRITTEN Albert Herring

disc one (65:27)

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

1. The morning room at Lady Billows' house in Loxford (1:49)
2. Doctor Jessop's midwife... (2:21)
3. I hope we're not too early (2:25)
4. Stuff! Tobacco stink! (2:23)
5. Now then! Notebook, Florence! (2:21)
6. The first suggestion on my list (3:58)
7. Is this all you can bring? (2:28)
8. Begging your pardon (3:21)
9. Virtue, says Holy Writ (1:39)
10. Right! We'll have him! (2:49)
11. Interlude (3:11)

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

12. Scene 2 - Bounce me high (2:27)
13. Shop! Hi! Albert! (1:31)
14. Did you ever have a pint at the local? (1:45)
15. Sid I'm sorry but... (2:39)
16. We'll walk to the spinney (2:02)
17. He's much too busy (1:55)
18. Mum wants two penn'oth of potherbs (1:30)
19. Good morning, young man! (1:25)
20. We bring great news to you (2:38)
21. Well, think of that, my lad (2:24)

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

22. Scene 1 - Inside a marquee... (2:04)
23. For three precious weeks (0:50)
24. That's a fine sight for sore eyes! (2:07)
25. Quickly, quickly (2:52)
26. I don't think you ought! (0:44)
27. Quick, here they are! (2:11)
28. Husssh!... Harold Wood! (1:31)
29. Come, let's sit down (1:00)
30. I'm full of happiness (3:07)

disc two (57:37)

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE (continued)

1. As representing our local Council (1:50)
2. My heart leaps up with joy to see (1:44)
3. Erhumph... (1:04)
4. Go on, Albert! (1:47)
5. Albert the Good! (2:07)
6. Bring the plates! Quickly now! (5:57)
7. Albert the Good! (4:09)

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

8. Why did she stare...? (2:25)
9. You oughtn't to whistle (1:18)
10. Come along, darling, come follow me quick! (1:59)
11. Heaven helps those who help themselves (4:36)
12. Albert! Albert? Fast asleep, poor kid! (2:13)

ACT THREE

13. The following afternoon... (2:04)
14. Is she asleep? (2:39)
15. What the hell d'you think I am? (1:37)
16. How's the manhunt? (1:05)
17. Have you found him? (1:58)
18. All that I did! (2:26)
19. Fools! (2:05)
20. In the midst of life is death (4:10)
21. Albert... (2:25)
22. I can't remember anything (4:31)
23. Hi! That's my girl (1:28)

Berkshire Music Center Opera Department
conducted by Boris Goldovsky

CAST
Albert Herring - David Lloyd
Lady Billows - Ellen Faulk
Mrs Herring - Lise Sorrell
Sid - Irvin Nordquist
Nancy - Helen Spaeth
Florence Pike - Elinor Warren
Miss Wordsworth - Beverly Hunziker
Mr Gedge - James Pease
Mr Upfold - Howard Fried
Police Superintendent Budd - Joseph Contreras
Emmie - Nora Riggs
Cis - Frances G. Cammuso
Harry - Bennett Eppes

XR Remastered by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Boris Goldovsky

Recorded at Tanglewood, 9 August 1949

Stage directors: Boris Goldovsky
and Sarah Caldwell

Performed at the Theatre-Concert Hall,
Tanglewood, 9 August 1949

Recorded during the U.S.
premiere production

Total duration: 2hr 3:04

©2026 Pristine Audio