

“THIS QUEER LIFE...THE LIFE WE’VE BEEN LEADING...”

“When the opera was first performed, homosexuality was virtually a taboo subject and no writer was legally permitted to mention that homosexuality and paedophilia were links in the chain that binds Britten’s music so closely to James’s story, just as it was not permissible to point out that Britten was particularly attracted to authors of a homosexual persuasion, Auden, for example, and Rimbaud, Melville and Wilfred Owen. A homosexual theme lurks in most of Britten’s operas but none more obviously than in *Death in Venice* and *The Turn of the Screw*—so obviously that some kind of autobiographical significance in the choice of these works may safely be deduced. Yet to the innocent ear and the innocent beholder, both are operatic masterpieces on purely musical and dramatic terms. The ambivalence of *The Turn of the Screw* is sustained as convincingly by Britten as by James, even if he does give words to the ghosts.”

Michael Kennedy



“Within weeks of being interviewed by Scotland Yard detectives as part of Maxwell-Fyfe’s witch-hunt to root out ‘make vice’, Britten was working at full pressure on an opera with more than a hint of child abuse and paedophilia. He had to complete his work in a mere five months. His right arm was causing him pain and bursitis (inflammation in the right shoulder) was diagnosed, so he commenced his task by writing his score with his left hand. In spite of the unconcealed fact that he was living in partnership with another man and had been the subject of police scrutiny, he seems to have led a charmed life. Pears may have had a separate bedroom from the start, and spent considerable time apart from Britten, either staying for much of the week in London, or fulfilling concert engagements, but only the most simple-minded observers could have doubted the nature of their relationship. Whether he had the protection of powerful friends, whether the police shrugged their shoulders and thought that attempting a prosecution was more trouble than it was worth, or whether he was just plain lucky, is hard to tell. He was, in fact, at greater risk of prosecution at this stage of life than at any other simply for sharing his life with another adult male, as the fate of hundreds of other less fortunate adult homosexuals during the next few years attests, which makes the very nature of his new opera explicitly risky.”

Michael Wilcox

"He was incredibly warm to me, yes. Was he infatuated with me? Yes, he was. He was a gentleman; there was no sort of overt sexuality about it whatsoever. It was a very kind and very loving and very gentle relationship.

Did he kiss me? Yes, he did. But that was more my need as a young boy alone in his house than it was any threat. I slept in his bed, when I was frightened, and I still felt no sexual threat whatsoever. And I think it would have embarrassed him a damn sight more than it would have embarrassed me at the time."

David Hemmings

As a boy soprano David Hemmings sang in a number of Benjamin Britten's works including the creation of Miles in the premiere of *The Turn of the Screw* (and its subsequent recording). He went on to a major career in the movies appearing in such iconic films as *Blowup* and *Barbarella*. He was born in 1941 and died in 2003.

MILES

Oh I've been sitting, sitting and thinking.

GOVERNESS

Thinking? Of what were you thinking?

MILES

Of this queer life, the life we've been living.

GOVERNESS

What do you mean by that? What life?

MILES

My dear, you know. You're always watching.

"Why is 'love' defeated? Is it Fate? It is a despairing conclusion and the bleakness of this vision may account for Britten's subsequent operatic silence: after ten years of prolific creativity he now ceased operatic composition. Six years passed before he was ready once more to venture into the magic wood in search of the imaginative and emotional riches promised by Quint [Midsummer Night's Dream written by Britten in 1960]."

Michael Oliver



QUINT

Ah, Miles, we have failed.
Now I must go. Farewell.
Farewell, Miles, farewell.

