

Editorial

“I certainly write music for human beings”[1]

The year 2013 is one of great events, when we remember not only Verdi and Wagner but also Gesualdo. But there is another important anniversary for the music world, the centenary of the birth of a great composer of musical theatre and choral music: Benjamin Britten.

“I believe...it is the composer’s duty, as a member of society, to speak to or for his fellow human beings”, Britten used to say, and certainly his music speaks in particular of children and to children. When he was five, he already enjoyed playing the piano and composing, and perhaps for this reason he dedicated a good part of his musical and theatrical production to childhood and to adolescence.

He offered to his “fellow-men music which may inspire them or comfort them, which may touch them or entertain them, even educate them”: this is the goal of Britten’s artistic expression. The music is first and foremost a language with which it is possible to transmit messages, a means of communication between human beings that must be understandable and accessible to all. But the educational value of his work is not only in the content: in Britten’s compositions children are not only viewers and listeners but become directly involved, as singers, actors and musicians. It is a music experienced firsthand, not only heard but performed, created and recreated by the children: a means of expression *par excellence*, the voice is the first instrument at our disposal.

These topics are still of great interest: the denunciation of child exploitation, the search for peace, the right to happiness, childhood as a time of growth, and especially the right to self-expression. In his works, Britten tells about all of this without ever giving into easy sentimentality, but uses spontaneous speech, which is direct, sometimes humorous and playful and, above all, always full of life. The world of children for Britten is not a fictional universe in which to recreate artificially, but an authentic childhood in all its expressions.

Above all the composer does not forget that, at any age, fun is the most effective tool in education, “pleasing people today as seriously as we can”. Britten teaches us that music is a game to be taken seriously.

Official website: www.brittenpears.org

[1] All quotes are taken from the speech of Benjamin Britten for the Aspen Prize, 1964

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