

CHANDOS COLLECT

Seascapes

Sibelius: The Oceanides
Berlioz: Le Corsaire
Mendelssohn: The Hebrides
Bridge: Seascape
Bax: Tintagel

CHAN 6538

Seascapes

1	Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)		
	The Hebrides (Fingal's Cave), Op. 26	10:12	
	Overture		
	Scottish National Orchestra		
	Sir Alexander Gibson		
2	Sir Arnold Bax (1883–1953)		
	Mediterranean	3:51	
	London Philharmonic Orchestra		
	Bryden Thomson		
3	Frank Bridge (1879–1941)		
	Seascape	6:53	
	from <i>The Sea</i>		
	Ulster Orchestra • Vernon Handley		
4	Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)		
	Sea Songs	3:46	
	March		
	Bournemouth Sinfonietta		
	George Hurst		
5	Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)		
	II Sunday Morning	3:50	
	from 'Four Sea Interludes' from <i>Peter Grimes</i>		
	Ulster Orchestra • Vernon Handley		
6	Hector Berlioz (1803–1869)		
	Le Corsaire, Op. 21	8:08	
	Overture		
	Scottish National Orchestra		
	Sir Alexander Gibson		
7	Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)		
	The Oceanides, Op. 73	10:41	
	Scottish National Orchestra		
	Sir Alexander Gibson		
8	Benjamin Britten		
	IV Storm	4:21	
	from 'Four Sea Interludes' from <i>Peter Grimes</i>		
	Ulster Orchestra • Vernon Handley		
9	Sir Arnold Bax		
	Tintagel	15:01	
	Ulster Orchestra • Bryden Thomson		
			TT 67:30

Seascapes

Of all the elements, the sea is the most naturally musical. It moves with a musical rhythm, and the sound it makes is a form of music. Yet composers seem a landlubberly lot on the whole, for whom the sea is to be sailed or flown over with as little discomfort as possible, or viewed from a safe distance. Just imitating the sea's ebb and flow, wind and waves, would not, of course, be enough. Seascapes in music can reflect a deeper poetic vision, as proven when Mendelssohn became one of the first classical composers to respond to a nautical experience.

At the age of twenty, in 1829, he paid the first of many visits to Britain and travelled widely, voyaging as far north as Fingal's Cave, then newly discovered on the island of Staffa. The majestic swell of the ocean surging into the giant cave – and the feelings it aroused in him – became his musical subject-matter, but he admitted that his maritime impressions were not easily expressed: he wrote home that his musical working-out smacked 'more of counterpoint than blubber, seagulls and salt cod', and his overture was extensively revised before it took its final form as *The Hebrides* in 1832.

Berlioz viewed his seascape from the sanctuary of an old tower looking out to the

Mediterranean while on a holiday in Nice in 1844. He too revised his work considerably before conducting its first performance in Paris the next year. The title, *Le Corsaire*, alludes not to Byron's poem but to *Le Corsaire rouge*, a translation of *The Red Rover* by J. Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851), the first major American novelist, whose tales Berlioz much enjoyed. His overture rapidly develops a contrast of storm and calm in its romantic impression, and develops the opening themes in vividly imaginative orchestration.

Ancient mythology, not nautical experience, was the source for Sibelius in *The Oceanides*: sea-nymph daughters of Oceanus, the all-embracing sea-god who was thought to encircle the land-world and to be the source of all life. Sibelius first entitled it 'Rondo of the Waves', thus giving a clue to his translucent writing for passages of woodwind and strings, and notably harp, against a large orchestral background which only once rises to a climax, near the end. It was commissioned for a festival in Norfolk, Connecticut, and Sibelius conducted its first performance there in 1914.

All the remaining seascapes here are by British composers, the earliest being a

movement of that title from the four that make up *The Sea*, a symphonic suite dating from 1910. Bridge, who later became an influential teacher of Benjamin Britten, began as a composer in the romantic tradition, and *The Sea* impressively combines nature poetry with clarity of instrumental writing. 'Seascape', its first movement, evokes vivid images in the music's lapping and rolling phrases, swelling forth and receding in a continuous flow.

In that same year Vaughan Williams nearly made his mark with *A Sea Symphony*, his setting of Walt Whitman's verse which spoke with a young man's wholehearted feelings of the sea as a powerful influence on the character of those who live and die by it. He later took three traditional naval tunes, 'Princess Royal', 'Admiral Benbow' and 'Portsmouth', to combine in his *Sea Songs*, a quick march he composed for military band in 1923 and transcribed for orchestra in 1942.

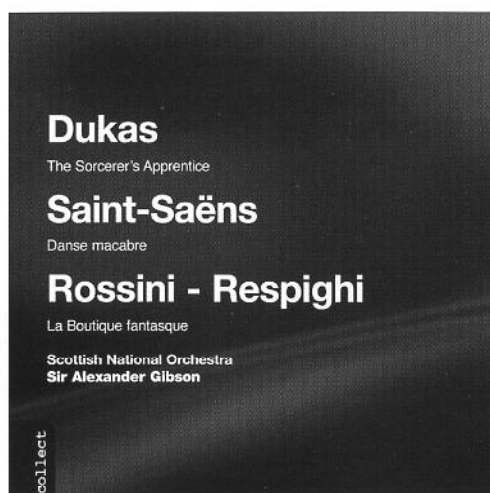
Bax called himself a 'brazen romantic' and his two very different seascapes demonstrate this. *Mediterranean* is his orchestration in 1922 of a piano piece written two years previously, a rich and sensuous impression in

languorous waltz-time with an unmistakable Spanish connection. Just before that, in 1919, he completed his best-known work, *Tintagel*, legendary castle of King Arthur and King Mark on the north Cornish coast, where the gentle heave of a summer sea first billows in from the wide Atlantic, and grows more restless with the rising wind.

Several of Britten's works are marked by a keen awareness of the sea. It sweeps like an agency of fate through *Peter Grimes* (1945), the tragedy of an East Anglian fisherman as society's outcast, in which the sea's ceaseless motion and changing moods are a constant background to the human drama. The opera's acts are preceded or divided by the 'Sea Interludes', which Britten arranged for separate concert performance. *Sunday Morning* is an impression of sunlight sparkling on gently lapping waves with a hint of church bells, contrasting with the fury of *The Storm* in which a wild, repetitive theme rears up through the orchestra like the angry battering of waves on the foreshore.

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SEASCAPES - Scottish National Orch./Ulster Orch./Gibson/Handley/Thomson

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