

2 CDs

**NAXOS**

# SEA PICTURES

BRITISH MUSICAL MASTERPIECES INSPIRED BY THE OCEAN



## DISC 1

### Frank Bridge: The Sea (Suite)

- 1 No. 1. Seascape 7:28
- 2 No. 2. Sea-foam 2:35
- 3 No. 3. Moonlight 6:12
- 4 No. 4. Storm 5:29  
*New Zealand Symphony Orchestra,  
James Judd (conductor)*
  
- 5 Arnold Bax: Tintagel 14:32  
*Royal Scottish National Orchestra,  
David Lloyd-Jones (conductor)*

### Edward Elgar: Sea Pictures, Op. 37

- 6 I. Sea Slumber-Song 5:50
- 7 II. In Haven (Capri) 1:55
- 8 III. Sabbath Morning at Sea 5:52
- 9 IV. Where Corals Lie 3:35
- 10 V. The Swimmer 5:52  
*Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano),  
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra,  
Simon Wright (conductor)*

### Benjamin Britten: Four Sea Interludes, Op. 33a

- 11 I. Dawn 3:09
- 12 II. Sunday Morning 3:49
- 13 III. Moonlight 4:25
- 14 IV. Storm 4:41  
*New Zealand Symphony Orchestra,  
Myer Freedmann (conductor) 75:24*

CD 1 playing time: 75:24

## DISC 2

### William Alwyn: Seascapes

- 1 No. 1. Dawn at Sea 2:02
- 2 No. 2. Sea-Mis 2:07
- 3 No. 3. Song of the Drowned Man 2:14
- 4 No. 4. Black Gulls 4:13

*Elin Manahan Thomas (soprano),*

*John Turner (treble recorder),*

*Iain Burnside (piano)*

### Ralph Vaughan Williams: Symphony No. 1,

“A Sea Symphony”,

- 5 I. Song of all Seas, all Ships 18:29
- 6 II. On the Beach at Night, Alone 10:23
- 7 III. (Scherzo) The Waves 7:47
- 8 IV. The Explorers: Grave e molto adagio 27:15

*Joan Rodgers (soprano),*

*Christopher Maltmann (baritone),*

*Bournemouth Symphony Chorus and Orchestra,*

*Paul Daniel (conductor)*

CD 2 playing time: 74:31

Total playing time: 2 hours and 30 minutes

## Sea Pictures

Britain is an island on which nowhere is more than 70 miles (about 110 km) from the sea. It has a wonderfully varied coastline of more than 11,000 miles (nearly 18,000 km) and for centuries it's Navy and merchant ships dominated the world's oceans. So it's hardly surprising that British composers have written not only numerous sea songs, often suggested by traditional shanties, but also many more extended concert works inspired by the sea.

This collection, drawn from an especially rich period of British musical history, takes its title from the song cycle with orchestra *Sea Pictures* [CD 1, tracks 6–10] by **Edward Elgar** (1857–1934). He wrote it in 1899, shortly after his breakthrough *Enigma* Variations, for the celebrated contralto Dame Clara Butt – who gave the first performance at the Norfolk and Norwich Festival in a dress suggesting a mermaid's scales. The poems, by five different authors including the composer's wife, have maritime settings in different parts of the world; recurring themes of love remembered and love abiding are highlighted by musical references to earlier songs in the finale. Elgar himself lived all his life inland, in his native West Midlands and in London; but he was a frequent traveller, and his familiarity with the sea is evident in his imaginative orchestral evocations of its varied but unceasing rise and fall.

**Arnold Bax** (1883–1953) was a Londoner by birth, but his lifelong attachment to Celtic legend, literature and landscape drew him to the rugged coasts of Ireland and south-west England bordering the Atlantic Ocean; and, as he once wrote, 'it is natural that the sea in its many varieties of mood entered very conspicuously into my work'. It certainly dominates his orchestral tone-poem *Tintagel* [CD 1, track 5], composed between 1917 and 1919. The opening and closing sections depict the ancient ruined castle of Tintagel on the dark granite cliffs of north Cornwall, high above the wide expanses of the sea 'on a sunny but not windless summer day'; the increasingly stormy middle section evokes the castle's legendary associations with King Arthur and with the illicit lovers Tristan and Isolde – symbolised by a recurring phrase quoted from Wagner's opera.

Bax's contemporary **Frank Bridge** (1879–1941) adopted a more straightforwardly pictorial approach in his suite *The Sea* [CD 1, tracks 1–4], which he completed in 1911. The work depicts, presumably, the coast of Bridge's native Sussex, on which white chalk cliffs overlook the English Channel. According to a programme note written or authorised by Bridge for the first performance, the opening 'Seascape' 'paints the sea on a summer morning. From high cliffs is seen a great expanse of water lying in the sunlight. Warm breezes play over the surface.' The second movement is a scherzo portraying 'Sea-foam', 'which froths among the low-lying rocks and pools on the shore – playfully, not stormily'. The slow third movement is 'Moonlight': 'A calm sea at night. First the moonbeams are struggling to pierce through dark clouds, which at last pass over, leaving the sea shimmering in full moonlight.' The finale is 'Storm', with 'wind, rain and tempestuous seas.

With the lulling of the storm an allusion to the first movement is heard.'

When the ten-year-old **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976) heard a performance of *The Sea* at the 1924 Norfolk and Norwich Festival, he was 'knocked sideways' by it. Already a precociously gifted musician, he soon began studying with Bridge; and there are echoes of *The Sea* in his **Four Sea Interludes** [CD 1, tracks 11-14], the suite which he made from his 1945 opera *Peter Grimes*. The opera is set on the windswept, treacherous coast of East Anglia, in and around the Suffolk fishing town of Aldeburgh where Britten himself later lived for many years. The first Interlude is a picture of a grey North Sea 'Dawn', with wind, waves and shingle all moving gently except for one brief moment. 'Sunday Morning' combines the sound of church bells with an impression of the 'glitter of waves and glitter of sunlight' – words to which the broad string melody is sung in the opera. 'Moonlight' is built out of two apparently slight ideas representing the rise and fall of the sea and the shafts of the moon's rays. 'Storm' depicts not only the turmoil of the elements, but also the turmoil raging in the mind of the outcast fisherman Peter Grimes; a calmer passage suggests his hopes of happiness, but at the end these are swept away.

Blythburgh, a few miles north of Aldeburgh, was the last home of the composer, poet and artist **William Alwyn** (1905-1985), and it was there in 1980 that he wrote his final work, *Seascapes* [CD 2, tracks 1-4]. This is a song-cycle for soprano, treble recorder and piano on four evocative poems by the composer's friend Michael Armstrong. Alwyn wrote that, because he lived on the Suffolk coast and Armstrong on the Channel Island of Jersey, 'we both know the sea in all its moods and ever-changing colours'.

In contrast to this sequence of miniatures is probably the most ambitious sea piece by any British composer: *A Sea Symphony* for soloists, chorus and orchestra [CD 2, tracks 5-8], by **Ralph Vaughan Williams** (1872-1958), the first of his nine symphonies. Written between 1903 and 1909 and first performed at the 1910 Leeds Festival, this sets texts by the visionary American poet Walt Whitman in which the sea is not localised but is a universal metaphor. The music, in places infused by traditional sea shanties, is correspondingly bold and all-embracing. After the thrilling opening invocation, the first movement, 'A Song for all Seas, all Ships', is a celebration of 'all intrepid sailors' and the indomitable nature of the human soul. 'On the Beach at Night Alone' is a nocturnal meditation on the 'vast similitude' that links everything in the universe. The scherzo, 'The Waves', is a more straightforwardly descriptive display-piece. The extended, mostly slow, finale, 'The Explorers', has a text selected from Whitman's *Passage to India*, in which a sea voyage serves as a metaphor for the soul's last journey: 'O farther, farther, farther sail!'

**Edward Elgar**

**Sea Pictures, Op. 37**

**I. Sea Slumber-Song**

*Roden Berkeley Wriothesley Noel (1834-1894)*

Sea-birds are asleep,  
The world forgets to weep,  
Sea murmurs her soft slumber-song  
On the shadowy sand  
Of this elfin land;

I, the Mother mild,  
Hush thee, oh my child,  
Forget the voices wild!  
Hush thee, oh my child,  
Hush thee.

Isles in elfin light  
Dream, the rocks and caves,  
Lulled by whispering waves,  
Veil their marbles bright.  
Foam glimmers faintly white  
Upon the shelly sand  
Of this elfin land;

Sea-sound, like violins,  
To slumber woos and wins,  
I murmur my soft slumber-song,  
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.

Ocean's shadowy might  
Breathes good night,  
Leave woes, and wails, and sins.  
Good night...Good night...  
Good night...

**II. In Haven**

*Caroline Alice Elgar (1848-1920)*

Closely let me hold thy hand,

Storms are sweeping sea and land;  
Love alone will stand.

Closely cling, for waves beat fast,  
Foam-flakes cloud the hurrying blast;  
Love alone will last.

Kiss my lips, and softly say:  
Joy, sea-swept, may fade to-day;  
Love alone will stay.

**III. Sabbath Morning at Sea**

*Elizabeth Barret Browning (1806-1861)*

The ship went on with solemn face;  
To meet the darkness on the deep,  
The solemn ship went onward.  
I bowed down weary in the place;  
For parting tears and present sleep  
Had weighed mine eyelids downward.

The new sight, the new wondrous sight!  
The waters around me, turbulent,  
The skies, impassive o'er me,  
Calm in a moonless, sunless light,  
As glorified by even the intent  
Of holding the day glory!

Love me, sweet friends, this sabbath day.  
The sea sings round me while ye roll afar  
The hymn, unaltered,  
And kneel, where once I knelt to pray,  
And bless me deeper in your soul  
Because your voice has faltered.

And though this sabbath comes to me  
Without the stolèd minister,  
And chanting congregation,  
God's Spirit shall give comfort.  
He who brooded soft on waters drear,  
Creator on creation.

He shall assist me to look higher,  
Where keep the saints, with harp and song,  
An endless endless sabbath morning,  
And on that sea commixed with fire,

Off drop their eyelids raised too long  
To the full Godhead's burning.

#### **IV. Where Corals Lie**

*Richard Garnett (1835-1906)*

The deeps have music soft and low  
When winds awake the airy spry,  
It lures me, lures me on to go  
And see the land where corals lie.

By mount and mead, by lawn and rill,  
When night is deep, and moon is high,  
That music seeks and finds me still,  
And tells me where the corals lie.

Yes, press my eyelids close, 'tis well,  
But far the rapid fancies fly  
The rolling worlds of wave and shell,  
And all the lands where corals lie.

Thy lips are like a sunset glow,  
Thy smile is like a morning sky,  
Yet leave me, leave me, let me go  
And see the land where corals lie.

#### **V. The Swimmer**

*Adam Lindsay Gordon (1833-1870)*

With short, sharp violent lights made vivid,  
To southward far as the sight can roam,  
Only the swirl of the surges livid,  
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.

Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,  
The rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,  
Waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward,

On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, gray coast and a seaboard ghastrly,  
And shores trod seldom by feet of men -  
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast  
lie,  
They have lain embedded these long years ten.

Love! Love! When we wandered here together,  
Hand in hand! Through the sparkling weather,  
From the heights and hollows of fern and  
heather,  
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer, the shores were firmer -  
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;  
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,  
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold.

So, girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder  
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,  
And strong winds treading the swift waves  
under  
The flying rollers with frothy feet.

One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims  
on  
The sky line, staining the green gulf crimson,  
A death-stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun  
That strikes through his stormy winding sheet.

O brave white horses! you gather and gallop,  
The storm sprite loosens the gusty rains;  
O brave white horses! you gather and gallop,  
The storm sprite loosens the gusty rains;

Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop  
In your hollow backs, on your high-arched  
manes.  
I would ride as never man has ridden  
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden;

I would ride as never man has ridden  
To gulfs foreshadow'd through strifes  
forbidden,  
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.  
Where no love, no love wanes.

## **Williams Alwyn**

### **Seascapes**

Michael Armstrong (1923-2000)

#### **1. Dawn at Sea**

The breeze is scented with canvas  
horizons are waiting for masts  
Green eyes blinded like pearls  
stare from the wake of the ship  
The palace invaded by waves  
is ivory burnished with salt  
and daylight torn from the sky  
glows through the white corridors.

#### **2. Sea-Mist**

The negro ghosts are dancing  
wrapped in their white shawls.  
The bell beyond the harbour  
calls to unseen waves.  
Somewhere the wingless birds  
are waiting for the wind.

#### **3. Song of the Drowned Man**

Sea song  
of the breathless cave  
Beyond the surf  
a tongueless bell.  
Sea song  
from the burnished wave  
before the curve  
a glaucous swell.  
Sea song  
8

from the beaten cove  
Beneath the foam  
a hollow shell.

#### **4. Black Gulls**

Bird in the sky, white gull,  
black against the blue  
sliding across my eyes  
that water from the glare.  
A messenger perhaps?  
Borne on outstretched wings  
soon to melt away  
and leave the heavens bare.  
Today the placid sea  
flows down from the sky,  
water combines with air  
to make a violet haze.  
A frill of bubbled lace  
flutters along the shore  
and wet sand to the south  
bursts into a blaze.  
Then another gull  
black as the one before  
appearing from behind  
to hold my troubled gaze.  
Resting in the wings  
it drifts away from land.  
A speck above the sea  
it dies in a violet haze.  
Invocations

**Ralph Vaughan Williams**  
**Symphony No.1 'A Sea Symphony'**  
(Walt Whitman 1819-1892)

**I. A Song for all Seas, all Ships**  
(Baritone / Soprano / Chorus)

Behold, the sea itself,

And on its limitless heaving breast, the ships;  
See, where their white sails, bellying in the  
wind, speckle the green and blue,  
See, the steamers coming and going,  
steaming in or out of port,  
See, dusky and undulating,  
the long pennants of smoke.  
Behold, the sea itself,  
And on its limitless heaving breast, the ships.

(Baritone)

Today a rude brief recitative,  
Of ships sailing the seas,  
each with its special flag or ship-signal,  
Of unnamed heroes in the ships - of waves  
spreading and spreading far as the eye can  
reach,  
Of dashing spray,  
and the winds piping and blowing,  
And out of these a chant for the sailors  
of all nations,  
Fitful, like a surge.  
Of sea-captains young or old, and the mates,  
and of all intrepid sailors,  
Of the few, very choice, taciturn,  
whom fate can never surprise nor death  
dismay,  
Picked sparingly without noise by thee, old  
ocean, chosen by thee,  
Thou sea that pickest and cullest the race in  
time,  
and unitest the nations,  
Suckled by thee, old husky nurse, embodying  
thee,  
Indomitable, untamed as thee.

(Soprano)

Flaunt out, O sea, your separate flags of  
nations!

Flaunt out visible as ever the various flags  
and ship-signals!  
But do you reserve especially for yourself and  
for  
the soul of man one flag above all the rest,  
A spiritual woven signal for all nations,  
emblem of  
man elate above death,  
Token of all brave captains and of all intrepid  
sailors and mates,  
And of all that went down doing their duty,  
Reminiscent of them, twined from all intrepid  
captains young or old,

(Baritone)

A pennant universal, subtly waving all the  
time,  
o'er all brave sailors,  
All seas, all ships.

## II. On the Beach at Night, alone

(Baritone / Chorus)

On the beach at night alone,  
As the old mother sways her to and fro singing  
her husky song,  
As I watch the bright stars shining,  
I think a thought of the clef of the universes  
and of the future.  
A vast similitude interlocks all,  
All distances of space however wide,  
All distances of time,  
All souls, all living bodies though they be  
ever so different,  
All nations, all identities that have existed  
or may exist,  
All lives and deaths, all of the past, present,  
future,  
This vast interlude spans them,

and always has spanned,  
And shall forever span them and shall  
compactly  
hold and enclose them.

### III. Scherzo: The Waves (Chorus)

After the sea-ship, after the whistling winds,  
After the white-gray sails taut to their  
spars and ropes,  
Below, a myriad, myriad waves hastening,  
lifting up their necks,  
Tending in ceaseless flow toward the track  
of the ship,  
Waves of the ocean bubbling and gurgling,  
blithely prying,  
Waves, undulating waves, liquid, uneven,  
emulous waves,  
Toward that whirling current, laughing  
and buoyant with curves,  
Where the great vessel sailing and tacking  
displaced the surface,  
Larger and smaller waves in the spread of  
the ocean yearnfully flowing,  
The wake of the sea-ship after she passes,  
flashing and frolicsome under the sun,  
A motley procession with many a fleck  
of foam and many fragments,  
Following the stately and rapid ship,  
in the wake following.

### IV. The Explorers (Baritone / Soprano / Chorus)

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,  
Covered all over with visible power and  
beauty,  
Alternate light and day and the teeming  
10

spiritual darkness,  
Unspeakable high processions of sun and  
moon  
and countless stars above,  
Below, the manifold grass and waters,  
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden  
prophetic intention,  
Now first it seems my thought begins to span  
thee.

Down from the gardens of Asia descending,  
Adam and Eve appear, then their myriad  
progeny after them,  
Wandering, yearning, with restless  
explorations,  
with questionings, baffled, formless, feverish,  
with never-happy hearts, with that sad  
incessant refrain, -  
"Wherefore unsatisfied soul?  
Whither O mocking life?"

Ah who shall soothe these feverish children?  
Who justify these restless explorations?  
Who speak the secret of the impassive earth?  
Yet soul be sure the first intent remains,  
and shall be carried out,  
Perhaps even now the time has arrived.  
After the seas are all crossed,  
After the great captains have accomplished  
their work,  
After the noble inventors,  
Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his  
songs.

O we can wait no longer,  
We too take ship, O Soul,  
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,  
Fearless for unknown shores on waves

O vast Rondure, swimming in space,  
Covered all over with visible power and beauty,  
Alternate light and day and the teeming  
spiritual darkness,  
Unspeakable high processions of sun and moon  
and countless stars above,  
Below, the manifold grass and waters,  
With inscrutable purpose, some hidden  
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Now first it seems my thought begins to span  
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Finally shall come the poet worthy that name,  
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songs.

O we can wait no longer,  
We too take ship, O Soul,  
Joyous we too launch out on trackless seas,  
Fearless for unknown shores on waves  
of ecstasy to sail,  
Amid the wafting winds  
(thou pressing me to thee, I thee to me, O Soul),

Caroling free, singing our song of God,  
Chanting our chant of pleasant exploration.  
O Soul, thou pleasest me, I thee,  
Sailing these seas or on the hills,  
or walking in the night,  
Thoughts, silent thoughts, of Time and Space  
and Death, like water flowing,  
Bear me indeed as though regions infinite,  
Whose air I breathe, whose ripples hear,  
lave me all over,  
Bathe me, O God, in thee, mounting to thee,  
I and my soul to range in range of thee.

O thou transcendent,  
Nameless, the fibre and the breath,  
Light of the light, shedding forth universes,  
thou centre of them.  
Swiftly I shrivel at the thought of God,  
At Nature and its wonders, Time and Space  
and Death,

But that I, turning, call to thee,  
O Soul, thou actual me  
And lo, thou gently masterest the orbs,  
Thou matest Time, smilest content at Death,  
And fillest, swellest full the vastnesses of Space.  
Greater than stars or suns,  
Bounding, O Soul, thou journeyest forth;

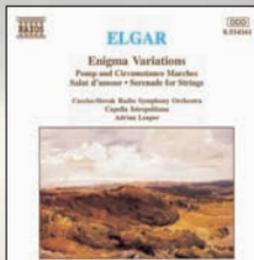
Away, O Soul! Hoist instantly the anchor!  
Cut the hawsers - haul out - shake out every sail!  
Sail forth, steer for the deep waters only,  
Reckless, O Soul, exploring, I with thee,  
and thou with me,  
For we are bound, where mariner has not  
yet dared to go,  
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.  
O my brave Soul!  
O farther, farther sail!  
O darling joy, but safe!  
Are they not all the seas of God?  
O farther, farther, farther sail!



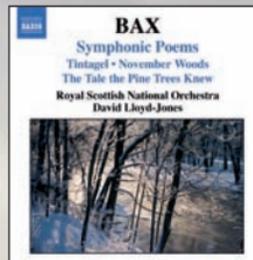
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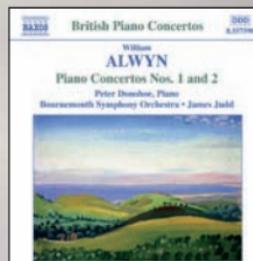
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British composers have written many beautiful sea songs and also many concert works that evoke the ever-changing moods of the sea, wind and sky. This maritime collection presents several sublime late-Romantic masterpieces, taking you on an emotional journey towards new horizons.

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