

Selling Britten



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At the end of the nineteenth century Britain was a country without an opera culture, and in the concert halls the Austro-Germanic symphonic repertory reigned supreme. In the following fifty years the art-music culture changed dramatically. Radio, the gramophone and the recording industry, government arts subsidies, Covent Garden, and a post-war resurgence in national and civic pride which contributed to the spread of music festivals, were the agents of change. Born in 1913, Benjamin Britten was well placed to take advantage of these market forces, which he did consistently and skilfully from the 1930s onwards. His relationships with Boosey & Hawkes, Decca, Covent Garden, the Aldeburgh Festival, the English Opera Group, and the Arts Council, had a huge influence on the music he wrote. This book explores the effect of these commercial and national institutions on the music of one of the foremost British composers of the twentieth century.

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