

## Children's Play? Benjamin Britten's *Noye's Fludde* and the Adventure of Composing Excellent (Classical) Music for Children

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### Theoretical Context

The paper we will present expands on parts of a master thesis on the music pedagogy of Benjamin Britten. Point of departure of this thesis was Britten's remarkable sensitivity, as an established classical musician, to the *educational* urgency of a number of ambiguities shaping the public role of (classical) music in contemporary society. While remaining critical of its shortcomings, the ultimate endeavour has been to develop a *post-critical* perspective on his work, and thus to reclaim Britten's most valuable insights into the said ambiguities—including those implicit in some of his musical projects for/with children (e.g., the opera *Noye's Fludde*).

### Aims

The paper's overarching aim is to show how a post-critical pedagogy might help established and/or purportedly hegemonic musical traditions to reassess their own past in terms that *affirm* undeveloped, 'minor' potentialities, rather than criticize major deficiencies. More specifically, we propose to do so for the case of Britten's children's opera *Noye's Fludde*, in whose genesis we discern a pedagogy that tries to couple a 'classical' conception of musical excellence to a contemporary ideal of democratic accessibility and plurality.

### Methodology

Our research has been mainly conceptual-discursive in nature. On the one hand it is based on the study of scientific literature: both on the current state of affairs in music-educational theory (particularly with regard to classical music), on post-critical pedagogy, and on Benjamin Britten, his music(-education)al ideas and compositions for children. On the other hand, for the case of *Noye's Fludde*, we have also studied non-textual materials, such as scores, (video) recordings, and documentaries.

### Findings

The paper's main finding has been that some of Benjamin Britten's views on the significance and possibilities of composing for/with children are very much worthwhile to be reclaimed (in a post-critical vein) for contemporary practices of (classical) music education. Especially Britten's keen sense of certain ambiguities endemic, not to say *fundamental*, to any concrete practice of public music education, seem highly valuable—and perhaps more than ever—in trying to answer particular challenges which the field is facing today.

### Final considerations

Although we agree that the opposite might sometimes seem true, it is absolutely not our purpose to hold a normative plea for the use of Western classical music (let alone Britten's) in music education. What we *do* plead for, is a more nuanced and careful appreciation of this tradition (along with others), in view of its irreducible potentiality to inspire us with surprisingly contemporary and practical pedagogical answers.

### **References**

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