

October 14, 2021 – Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring*

Celebrate the coronation of the May King on this week's Thursday Night Opera House broadcast of Benjamin Britten's comic opera *Albert Herring*. Based on Guy de Maupassant's novella *Le Rosier de Madame Husson*, the setting of this comic opera was transposed to a fictional English village. With *Albert Herring*, Britten and librettist Eric Crozier had the ambitious goal of re-establishing a uniquely English operatic tradition. It was to serve as the first production of the English Opera Group, an organization founded to promote operatic works by English composers. The premiere took place on June 20, 1947, at the Glyndebourne Festival.

The story takes place in the East Suffolk village of Loxford in 1900. Lady Billows (soprano **Josephine Barstow**), her personal assistant Florence Pike (mezzo-soprano **Felicity Palmer**), and a committee of local notables--the Mayor (tenor **Stuart Kale**), the Police Superintendent (bass **Robert Lloyd**), the Vicar (baritone **Peter Savidge**), and the school teacher Miss Wordsworth (soprano **Susan Gritton**)--are unable to find a suitably chaste girl to crown as Queen of May so they decide instead on a May King, the virtuous Albert Herring (tenor **Christopher Gillett**). At his coronation, Sid (baritone **Gerald Finley**) and Nancy (mezzo-soprano **Ann Taylor**) spike Albert's lemonade; emboldened, he sets out with his prize money to sample the delights of alcohol and female companionship, blaming his mother, Mrs. Herring (mezzo-soprano **Delia Jones**), for a repressive upbringing. The dignitaries are scandalized, but Albert's friends cheer his emancipation.

Steuart Bedford conducts the Northern Sinfonia in this 1997 recording.

Here's a link to Opera Australia's listening guide to *Albert Herring*:
<http://youtu.be/osrcgLcr3IY>.

Following the opera, we'll hear soprano **Jennifer Paschal** in Britten's 1937 song cycle *On This Island*, and tenor **Peter Pears** will sing three songs from *The Holy Sonnets of John Donne* (1945).