

# The Friday Afternoons Songs by Benjamin Britten

## Extension Activities

Here are a variety of activities, all related to Benjamin Britten's life and music. Some will be more appropriate for your students in terms of age and sophistication than others. Choose the activities that are best suited to your class and decide how and when to use them over the 6 Units of Work. Use the planning grid at the end of this document to organise your activities.

### Suggested activities:

There are three main areas to consider when learning more about Benjamin Britten:

- His life.
- His music.
- Where he lived.

Create your own log in to [www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk](http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk) to find out interesting information about Benjamin Britten.

### His Life

The man <http://www.britten100.org/new-to-britten/the-man>.

Here [http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk/benjamin\\_britten](http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk/benjamin_britten) you can see an outline of his life and a timeline. Download 'The Young Persons Guide to Britten' from the Britten-Pears Foundation. This document gives insight into Britten's social views, cultural understanding and his commitment to education. It guides you through the decades of his life with reference to all his musical works. Britten was an inspirational man, one of Britain's greatest composers. He had progressive views and loved writing music for young people.

### His Music

To listen to more of Britten's works as part of these Listen and Appraise activities, go to the Britten100 website <http://www.britten100.org/new-to-britten/the-music>.

This site was launched to provide a focus for the centenary of Britten's birth in 2013. Here you can explore many more of his works. There are seven search criteria on the site:

- Mood
- Genre
- Instrument
- Writers
- Speed
- Date
- Popularity

You could start your journey by clicking on ‘popularity’ and listening to works that young people have voted as their favourite. Choose from any of the other options as you progress through the 6 units.

For more information about the Friday Afternoons songs have a look here:

[http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk/the\\_project](http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk/the_project)

## Where He Lived

- <http://www.britten100.org/new-to-britten/brittens-east-anglia>
- [http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk/aldeburgh\\_music](http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk/aldeburgh_music)

## Other Cross Curricular Activities:

Consider the texts that Benjamin Britten used in his 12 Friday Afternoons songs. His sources ranged from unknown and well-known authors to old Folk poems He set text to music in magical and inventive ways that made the words come to life.

- These songs were written in the 1930s for children to sing at school. Do composers still write songs like this for children? How do these songs differ from songs children might sing or listen to at school today?
- As you learn the songs from each unit, read the text aloud as well as singing it. What do the words mean? What story does the text tell us? Does it rhyme? What about the structure of the text? Can you find other texts that might fit to music?
- Has text been used in other styles of music? Think of all vocal music from Opera and Pop Music to religious works.
- In which other compositions does Britten set text? Can you find any specific examples?
- In this unit, you can listen to two of Britten’s Friday Afternoons songs, and also to new arrangements of each one. An arrangement (or a cover, in Popular Music culture) gives a new slant on a song or piece of music. An arrangement/cover can sound a bit – or very – different from the original. Encourage children to find, compare and contrast arrangements or cover versions. You could start with any of these:
  - Don’t Stop Believin’: original by Journey; covers by Glee and by Petra Haden.
  - Jump: original by Van Halen; cover by Paul Anka.
  - Your Song: original by Elton John; cover by Ellie Goulding.
  - I Could Have Danced All Night: from the original soundtrack of My Fair Lady; cover by Jamie Cullum.
  - “The Gliding Dance of the Maidens” from the Polovtsian Dances by Borodin; Stranger in Paradise – the popular song from the 1953 musical Kismet.
  - The Italian Concerto by Bach; the same piece performed by the Jacques Loussier Trio.

There are more Units of Work around many other styles of music at [www.charanga.com](http://www.charanga.com)

- Read some silly rhymes and poems or children's books eg Dr Seuss' 'The Cat in The Hat' and 'Fantastic Mr Fox' by Roald Dahl. How are these texts similar or different to the texts that Britten uses in the Friday Afternoons songs?
- Listen to uploaded versions of some of the Friday Afternoons songs on the homepage at [www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk](http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk). Upload your versions.
- Listen to the Naxos recording of The London Children's Choir singing all 12 songs [www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk](http://www.fridayafternoonsmusic.co.uk). Click on the different coloured circles at the top of the page to choose a song.

## **Activities Specific To This Unit – Cuckoo! and Old Abram Brown**

### **Cuckoo!**

In the song Cuckoo!, the call of the cuckoo is used as a melodic ostinato (a repeated rhythmic and/or melodic pattern). In Popular Music an ostinato is called a riff. Ostinati and riffs can be found in all musical styles.

- Listen to Ravel's Bolero, Pachelbel's Canon and the theme from Jaws by John Williams. Can you hear the ostinato pattern?
- Listen to Mamma Mia by ABBA. The riffs in the introduction can be heard throughout the rest of the song.
- Find some more popular music riffs. Listen to Smoke On the Water, Day Tripper and We Will Rock You for starters.

There are more Units of Work around popular music at [www.charanga.com](http://www.charanga.com)

### **Old Abram Brown**

Old Abram Brown is a round.

- What is the definition of a round?
- Do you know these famous rounds: Frère Jacques, London's Burning, Three Blind Mice?
- Can you sing them as a class in 2 parts? In 4 parts?
- Make up new words to the tune of Old Abram Brown or another round.