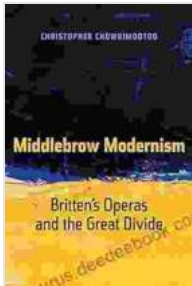


Britten Operas and the Great Divide: California Studies in 20th Century Music 24



Middlebrow Modernism: Britten's Operas and the Great Divide (California Studies in 20th-Century Music Book 24) by Christopher Chowrimootoo

★★★★☆ 4.5 out of 5

Language	: English
File size	: 11837 KB
Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 244 pages
Lending	: Enabled



Benjamin Britten's operas have long been recognized for their musical brilliance, dramatic intensity, and profound exploration of human themes. However, their reception in California during the 20th century has been marked by a complex and fascinating relationship with the concept of the 'Great Divide.' This divide, which emerged in the early 20th century, separated the musical culture of Northern California, dominated by the San Francisco Symphony and its tradition of German Romantic music, from that of Southern California, which embraced a more cosmopolitan and eclectic musical scene.

This article explores the ways in which Britten's operas both reflected and challenged the prevailing musical divide in California. Through an in-depth

analysis of Britten's operas, their reception in California, and the broader musical landscape of the time, we will shed light on the complex interplay between music, culture, and the shaping of musical identity in 20th century California.

Britten's Operas and the Musical Divide

Britten's operas, with their innovative musical language, psychological depth, and exploration of social and political issues, presented a significant challenge to the established musical norms of both Northern and Southern California. In Northern California, where the German Romantic tradition held sway, Britten's operas were often seen as too dissonant, too experimental, and too intellectually demanding.

In Southern California, on the other hand, Britten's operas found a more receptive audience. The cosmopolitan and eclectic musical culture of Los Angeles and its environs was more open to new musical ideas, and Britten's operas were embraced for their originality and emotional power.

The Reception of Britten's Operas in California

The reception of Britten's operas in California varied significantly depending on the region and the specific opera in question. Some of his operas, such as *Peter Grimes* and *Billy Budd*, were more readily accepted in both Northern and Southern California, while others, such as *The Rape of Lucretia* and *Gloriana*, faced more resistance.

In Northern California, the San Francisco Opera was the primary venue for Britten's operas. The company's productions were generally well-received,

but they also sparked controversy. Some critics accused the company of being too avant-garde, while others praised its commitment to new music.

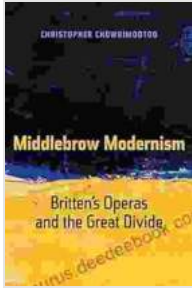
In Southern California, Britten's operas were performed by a variety of companies, including the Los Angeles Opera and the Pasadena Opera. These companies were generally more open to Britten's music, and their productions were often more enthusiastically received by audiences.

Britten's Operas and the Shaping of Musical Identity in California

The performance and reception of Britten's operas in California played a significant role in shaping the musical identity of the state. In Northern California, Britten's operas helped to broaden the musical horizons of audiences and to challenge the dominance of the German Romantic tradition. In Southern California, Britten's operas reinforced the region's reputation for musical eclecticism and innovation.

Ultimately, Britten's operas contributed to the creation of a more diverse and vibrant musical culture in California. They challenged the prevailing musical divide between Northern and Southern California, and they helped to establish a new musical identity for the state that embraced both tradition and innovation.

Benjamin Britten's operas have had a profound impact on the musical culture of California. Through their innovative musical language, dramatic intensity, and exploration of human themes, Britten's operas have challenged musical norms, broadened horizons, and helped to shape the musical identity of the state. The reception of Britten's operas in California has been marked by both controversy and enthusiasm, reflecting the complex and ever-evolving nature of musical culture in the Golden State.

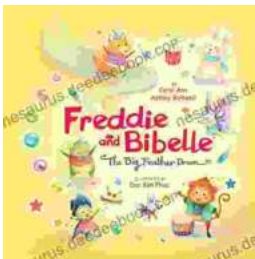


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