

The Button Moulder

a fantasy opera in two acts

by

Edward Lambert

libretto by the composer
after Ibsen's Peer Gynt

Vocal Score / Arrangement for 2 keyboards & percussion

*The Button Moulder was composed in 1989 - 1990
in response to a commission from the
Education Department of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden
with funds made available by Coutts Career Consultants
and was first performed in 1990
by the pupils of Prince William School, Oundle, Northamptonshire*

www.edwardlambert.co.uk

Composer's note

Peer Gynt, with its mixture of reality and fantasy, is a work people of all ages can appreciate on many different levels. In this opera, the play has been adapted and simplified and there has been some updating in Act Two.

The music is intended as an *odyssey* in itself and draws on a wide variety of styles ranging from medieval music to that of the present day, and from different parts of the world; much of it originated from projects the composer had undertaken in schools.

The score was conceived in two layers: the **Concertino** is almost a traditional orchestral ensemble. There are some sections for advanced soloists, but the writing contains much for less able players and there are some passages which beginners can play.

The **Ripieno** contains instruments more usually associated with the classroom (Orff 'Schulwerk') and presents opportunities for a number of non-orchestral musicians to take part. In the original production, twelve players made up the ripieno and they divided their attention between a battery of metallophones and xylophones [bass through treble], unpitched percussion [drums and tambourines plus assorted extras], recorders, guitars and electric keyboards. This group rehearsed separately from the concertino; much of their music is pattern-based and intended to be learnt almost by heart.

The cast included actors and dancers as well as singers.

In this vocal score the accompaniment has been reduced to 2 keyboards and drum kit and this may be used as a performing version. For clarity, these instruments are identified as **Piano** and **Synthesiser** in the score. A few additional instruments are provisionally indicated in the percussion part, but most decisions are left to the performer in the light of resources available.

Duration Act One 40 minutes
 Act Two 40 minutes

The Story

Act 1

Prologue The Button Moulder meets Peer Gynt in his old age and tells him he has come to collect his soul: he is neither good enough for heaven nor bad enough for hell, and so he will be melted down and recycled. After all he has never been himself and so his fate is of little consequence. Peer protests at this ignominious treatment and promises to produce some witnesses to prove his self-hood. Until the next cross-roads, then...

Scene One Young Peer enters with his mother, Aase. He swags about a recent hunting exploit in a dangerous ravine, but when she realises he's making it all up she scolds him for being a good-for-nothing. Why doesn't Peer settle down and do something worthwhile? He could have married Ingrid and got a good dowry if only he had put his mind to it but at this very moment she's getting married to Mads Møhen, the village wimp! On hearing this Peer decides it's never too late and resolves to carry off the bride. In high spirits he carries his mother on his shoulders and dumps her on the mill-house roof. The villagers enter and celebrate the wedding. As the dancing starts Ingrid bursts into tears and runs off, leaving the pathetic Mads at a loss. He re-enters a few moments later to complain to his parents that she has locked herself in the storehouse. They tell him to try again, and as he does so Peer arrives at the party. Aslak the Blacksmith conspires against Peer and when the dancing starts up again all the girls ignore him. His attention is drawn to the arrival of Solveig, an innocent young girl new to the village, and he asks her to dance with him. It is clear she would like to but when she hears his name she too runs away terrified. Mads tries to enlist Peer's

help in getting Ingrid out of the storehouse, but Peer is preoccupied with Solveig, and, when goaded into drinking by a group of teasers, with boastful predictions of his future as Emperor of the World. Solveig now refuses him because he is drunk, and so Peer finally goes off with Mads to break into the storehouse. Aslak enters with the crowd, by now eager for Peer's blood - but he is nowhere to be seen. Mads rushes in and tells everyone that Peer has absconded with Ingrid. Astonished and angry, yet insensible with drink, all see the couple in the distance disappearing up the mountainside.

Scene Two In Peer's fantasies he has arrived at the Hall of the Mountain King where a large crowd of trolls, gnomes, elves, goblins and other malignant creatures (who curiously resemble the villagers back home) taunt him with a tremendous din. He is accused of seducing the Troll King's daughter (Ingrid). The King tells Peer that he may marry his daughter and share the kingdom provided he becomes a troll. This necessitates fitting a tail on him, and a grotesque ritual dance follows in which a tail is taken from a dead troll and fastened on Peer. He and the Princess are married and she gives birth to an Ugly Brat. At the sight of this monster Peer's fascination for the Princess suddenly wears thin; to cure him the King suggests that his eyes be scratched for he will then see things the way trolls do. This is too much for Peer and he attempts to escape. The trolls are about to flay him when the voice of the Great Boyg suddenly booms out and the trolls freeze in panic. 'Go round about', says the Boyg, but Peer finds there is no way forward. Peer is about to expire when a bell rings in the distance; the Boyg gasps and shrinks to nothing and the trolls flee in disarray as the Hall vanishes. Solveig passes by, ringing a handbell, as Peer lies unconscious on the mountainside.

Scene Three In her hut Aase sings of how the little time left her drags slowly by in the hope of seeing her son once more. Peer enters and Aase is overcome with joy, but she fears for his safety since Peer is now an outcast. They sing of the past and in their imaginations ride a charger across their beloved mountains. As Aase lies back exhausted, Peer arrives at the gates of heaven and demands that she be allowed in. He turns to her to find that, in truth, she has died. He bids her a fond farewell. Solveig enters and explains she has left home to be with him for ever. For a moment they are happy to be alone but Peer remembers the advice of the Boyg to go round about. 'Be patient' he says, as he disappears into the night. Solveig says she will wait for him.

Act 2

Interlude The Button Moulder appears once more to the Old Peer - he has already arrived at the next crossroads, and it is time to go. In photography, he explains, it is possible to work on a negative but Peer's image, so to speak, has faded altogether. Peer once more plays for time - until the next crossroads.

Scene Four Peer, now middle-aged, is entertaining some business acquaintances on a beautiful far-flung island. He tells them of his cunning in obtaining his wealth - and of his imminent operation to back the Fascists and to become Emperor himself. Overcome by moral outrage and then by greed the Businessmen steal his private plane. Peer's despair changes to delight when it blows up after take-off. A hue and cry is heard: the Emperor's clothes have been stolen. Soldiers and slaves are frantically searching for the thieves - who then enter and drop their booty in fright. Peer, fancying himself in such lavish attire, tries the garments on and is immediately hailed as a prophet by a throng of adoring girls whose chief attraction to Peer is the seductive Anitra. But the slaves re-enter and he is arrested for impersonating the Emperor.

Scene Five The prison into which Peer is subsequently thrown is an asylum known as the Black Hole situated somewhere beyond the fringes of humanity. A group of nurses are presided over by a sado-masochistic Warden who holds a showcase trial in the manner of a TV game show: the Improbability Contest. The first 'contestants' are inmates of the madhouse who are there because they are drop-outs. The Warden tells them to shoot themselves, which they do. Scientists follow - they have discovered life's secrets but have received no rewards. If they hang themselves, the Warden says, they will gain immortality. Delighted, they do so. Then a group of Artists, Writers and Composers come forward; they address themselves to Peer since they are the deeds, the thoughts and the songs that he might have accomplished. They have lived in vain and in despair cut their throats. Peer is subsumed by his distress and the inmates rise from their graves to peel him like an onion.

Scene Six Now an old man, Peer has returned to his village where he finds he has become something of a legend in his own lifetime. He meets figures from the past, but is stunned when he hears Solveig's voice in the distance. The Button Moulder comes for him a third time, but Peer knows that his best witness is at hand. She will testify to his true self. The Button Moulder has to wait until the last cross-roads, while Solveig, now a blind old lady, enters, joyous that her wait is over. Peer's self has been with her all the time, she tells him. As day breaks the chorus pass by singing a carol.

CAST by scene

Act One

Prologue: a crossroads

The Button Moulder, *a collector of souls*
Peer Gynt [6] *as an old man*

Scene One: a village in the mountains

Peer Gynt [1] *as a young lad*
Aase, *Peer's mother*
Mads, *the village wimp*
Ingrid, *Mads' bride*
A steward
Mads' father and mother
Aslak, *the village blacksmith*
Solveig, *a young girl new to the village*
Solveig's father, a priest, & mother
Chorus of Villagers: women, men, lads, girls
Dancers: Villagers

Scene Two: the Hall of the Troll King

Peer Gynt [2] *as a Troll groom*
The Troll King
Ingrid, *as the Troll King's daughter*
Voice of the Great Boyg & Birds' cries
Chorus Of Trolls: malignant creatures
Dancers: Trolls, Troll priests, maidens, Ugly Brat

Scene Three: Aase's hut

Peer Gynt [3] *as a young man*
Aase
Solveig
Voice of the Great Boyg

Act Two

Interlude: another crossroads

The Button Moulder

Peer Gynt [6]

Scene Four: an exotic island

Peer Gynt [4] as a middle aged business man

A group of business men

Slaves and their Overseer[s]

Thieves

Voice of Peer [1]

Anitra, an exotic temptress

Chorus of soldiers

Chorus of [dancing] girls

Scene Five: a madhouse

Matron of the Madhouse

Warden of the Madhouse

Group of Nurses

Peer Gynt [5] in the madhouse

Chorus of Drop-outs, Scientists & Artists: inmates

Scene Six: a crossroads near the village

Peer Gynt [1]

Peer Gynt [2]

Peer Gynt [3]

Peer Gynt [4]

Peer Gynt [5]

Peer Gynt [6]

Mads, as in scene one, grown older

Aslak, as in scene one, grown older

Ingrid, as in scene one, grown older

The Troll King, as in scene two, grown older

Solveig, now an old lady

The Button Moulder

Chorus of Villagers: men, women, youths as in Scene One

CAST *overview*

Major singing roles:

The Button Moulder, <i>a collector of souls</i>	tenor/soprano
Peer Gynt 1 <i>as a young lad</i>	treble/soprano
Peer Gynt 3 <i>as a young man</i>	soprano/treble
Peer Gynt 4 <i>as a middle aged business man</i>	baritone
Peer Gynt 6 <i>as an old man</i>	baritone
Aase, <i>Peer's mother</i>	soprano
Solveig, <i>a young girl, later an old lady</i>	soprano
Anitra, <i>a beautiful native</i>	soprano <i>and</i> dancer

Smaller singing roles:

Mads, <i>the village wimp</i>	baritone
Aslak, <i>the village blacksmith</i>	baritone [bass]
Matron <i>of the Madhouse</i>	contralto

Spoken &/or dancing roles:

Peer Gynt 2 <i>in the Troll Kingdom</i>	spoken /[dancer]
Peer Gynt 5 <i>in a madhouse</i>	silent/dancer
Ingrid, <i>Mads' bride</i>	silent/dancer
The Troll King	spoken
Warden <i>of the Madhouse</i>	spoken
Voice of the Great Boyg	spoken [off]

The following can be cast from the Chorus:

Mads' father	baritone
Mads' mother	mezzo-soprano
Solveig's father, <i>a priest</i>	baritone
Solveig's mother	mezzo-soprano

Groups from within the Chorus:

Villagers [women, men, girls, lads]
Business men
Thieves
Slaves & Overseers
Nurses

Chorus of villagers, trolls [*spoken*], dancing girls, soldiers and inmates

Dancers: villagers, trolls, Ugly Brat, dancing girls

Peer was originally designed to be taken by up to six performers (including an actor and a dancer). But the part could also be played by two performers, for example, a soprano for Act One and a baritone for Act Two. The role of the Button Moulder was originally written for a professional tenor. Although the treble clef is used throughout, female, treble and broken voices are interchangeable and parts can be played as male or female characters.

Instrumentation

Concertino

flute 1 & 2

oboe

clarinet 1 & 2, [1 doubling alto saxophone *ad lib*]

horn

timpani, tabla or bongos, congas, bass drum & low toms

violin 1 & 2 [*or solo & tutti*]

cellos 1 & 2 [*or solo & tutti*]

double bass

Ripieno

guitar(s) [preferably acoustic *and* electric bass]

recorder(s) 1 & 2 [preferably a range]

Metallophones ['glocks', preferably a range from bass to soprano]
doubling tambourines & drums, etc.

Xylophones (preferably a range from bass to soprano),
doubling tambourines & drums, etc.

percussion: drum kit, tam-tam

synthesiser(s) 1 & 2

Electronic sounds

Troll sounds, birds' cries and the beating of wings, Voice of the Great Boyg, jet taking off & subsequent explosion, atmospherics in the madhouse, canned applause & cheers, etc.

All the above refer to individual parts, which can be doubled ad lib.

Each Concertino instrument has some 'virtuoso' passages for advanced, or solo, players, but also passages for beginners.

The metallophone and xylophone parts are intended for diatonic instruments with F# and Bb bars. As with the recorders, their ranges may not correspond to the instruments available - octave displacements can therefore be made ad lib.

In the vocal score, the accompaniment is arranged for 2 keyboards and percussion and the work may be performed in this version.