

Benjamin Britten "I Mun be Married on Sunday"

. Listen and Appraise I Mun be Married on Sunday by Benjamin Britten

About the Song: In 1934 Benjamin Britten wrote a series of 12 songs for the school in Wales where his brother was a teacher. These songs, called Friday Afternoons (that was when pupils had their singing practice), started a long process of writing music for schools and Britten's lifelong interest in music for young people and in music education. Britten set to music text by many different poets and authors. The music always illustrates beautifully the mood of the text.

I Mun be Married on Sunday is one of the Friday Afternoons songs. The text was taken from a play called Ralph Roister Doister by Nicholas Udall (1504-1556), an English playwright and school teacher. The play was written around 1553 and published later in 1567, after the author's death. It is thought of as the first comedy written in English.

In the 1920s and early 30s, children sang mostly nursery rhymes and playground chants, and folk songs with simple accompaniments. When Britten composed these songs, they would have felt very contemporary to the children, just as it does when we sing the latest pop songs at school today.

Do You Like the Song?

There is no correct answer to this: either individuals do, or they don't. You must be able to give a reason: all sensible answers are valid.

What Can You Hear?

- The vocal line: how many singers? Male/female? (A female singer).
- The backing/accompaniment: how many instruments? Which ones?
- The texture: is it thick/thin or in between? Are there many layers of sound, or just one/two? Are there many voices singing/instruments playing or just one/two?
- The tempo: is it fast or slow or in between? (The tempo is quite fast until the final chorus where the song broadens and slows down to finish).
- The dynamics: is the music loud/quiet or in between? Is it the same throughout or does it vary? (The dynamics vary hugely within each verse, ranging from very quiet to loud. The final chorus is broad and very loud to mark the end of the song).
- Unusual words in the text: some words are old-fashioned terms that we don't use today. Which words are new to you? What do you think they mean? (eg mun).

What is the Story Told in this Song?

This song was written for children to sing in the 1930s. The story is based on a five-act play by Nicholas Udall. The play is a comedy and the characters are silly and are there to make us

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laugh. The plot of the play centres around a rich widow, Christian Custance, who is betrothed (promised in marriage) to Gawyn Goodluck, a merchant. Ralph Roister Doister is persuaded by his friend to try to win Christian's love, but his attempts do not succeed. Ralph then tries with his friends to break in and take Christian by force, but they are defeated by her servants and run away. The merchant Gawyn arrives shortly after and the play has a happy ending. The song starts with a chorus stating that Roister Doister must be married on Sunday, and it doesn't matter who the bride is. Verse 1 tells us that Roister has found Christian Custance, a widow worth lots of money. In verse 2 we hear how lovely and sweet Custance is. Verse 3 describes their wedding feast. The final chorus is the same as the first chorus.

What is the mood of the song? Music can evoke many different moods:

- Gentle
- Flowing
- Reflective
- Menacing
- Spooky
- Scary
- Grim
- Light-hearted
- Stirring
- Loving
- Calm
- Cheeky
- Rough
- Passionate
- Sad
- Spiky
- Depressing
- Fun

There are many more. Can you think of some?

What is the mood of this song?

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- Cheeky
- Playful
- Light-hearted
- Fun
- Bouncy
- Lively

How does the music make the story more interesting?

The story itself is fun and full of comedy (see above). The music enhances the words in the following ways:

- The short piano introduction indicates the mood of the song: comedic and playful.
- The chorus sets the scene stating that Roister Doister must be married on Sunday. We hear unison voice and the instruments.
- Verse 1 is loud, introducing us to Roister Doister, a lusty brute.
- In verse 2 the dynamics range from quiet (we are introduced to Christian) to loud (her money!) and back to quiet again (Christian).
- Verse 3 tells us how sweet Christian is and the instruments reflects this with its flowery accompaniment. This verse is the quietest, illustrating the widow's feminine qualities.
- Verse 4 is louder and talks about the wedding day. The accompaniment reminds us of church bells ringing.
- The final chorus is loud and raucous, stating again that Roister Doister must be married on Sunday. The accompaniment is mixed, including all the styles we've heard in the song: flowery passages, chords and accents. There is a broad, loud ending to the song, and the word 'mun' is held for longer than usual, emphasising the necessity to be married on Sunday.