

January 2022 - Hughie Jones

**Rosa ‘Benjamin Britten’
Music and Plants**



Benjamin Britten was an English composer, conductor, and pianist. He was a central figure of 20th century British music with a range of works including opera, other vocal music, orchestral and chamber pieces.

Britten’s masterpiece, the ‘War Requiem’, was premiered in 1962. He had been asked to write a work for the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral. The old cathedral had been left in ruins by an air raid on the city in 1940. Hundreds died. Britten, a pacifist, decided that his work would commemorate the dead of both World Wars in a large-scale score for soloists, chorus, chamber ensemble and orchestra. His text interspersed the traditional Requiem Mass with poems by the war poet, Wilfred Owen. These poems carried people into the horror of war.

How was he able to envision and then create such an undertaking? How could he bring together these varied forms of music to speak ‘War Requiem’? I think being one of the last composers brought up on exclusively live music had a lot to do with it. His father refused to have a gramophone or later radio in the house. What a live performance gives you is possibilities and nuances. All your sense are involved.



And so it is with the English shrub rose named after him - *Rosa 'Benjamin Britten'*. If you catch this rose at an early stage when it first blooms, its smell is described as 'intensely fruity, with wine and pear-drops'. Deep inside, its glowing orange stamens smell of cloves.'Benjamin Britten' is an intriguing rose. Even David Austin himself said he found the colour almost impossible to describe. But warm coral-red blooms in flushes from late spring to fall seem to fit.

With a bushy upright habit, this medium sized shrub can be a specimen plant in the landscape, an addition to a border, a small garden or a flowering hedge. And its leaves stay healthy and attractive with each flush.

David Austin's English roses combine the flower forms and perfume of old roses with the colour range and repeat flowering habits of modern roses. His achievement is in marrying the romantic 'English rose' look with reliable garden performance, disease resistance and a season-long bloom.



*Pictures of Rosa 'Benjamin Britten' taken in
Fragrance Garden at VanDusen*

(The third link is a video of Britten rehearsing War Requiem and gives you an insight into his character and talent. Britten had no idea this rehearsal was being recorded.)

<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/britten/guides/benjamin-britten-life-pictures/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwBEtfXXsvU>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LD8IxkQ96D4>

<https://theconversation.com/first-world-war-poet-wilfred-owen-treated-for-shell-shock-carried-readers-into-the-horror-of-war-148060>

<https://www.gardensillustrated.com/gardens/the-life-and-work-of-david-austin-senior-1926-2018>