

PETER GRIMES

Benjamin Britten

Opera in a prologue and three acts

Synopsis

In a small Suffolk fishing village, an inquest is held regarding the death of an apprentice to the fisherman Peter Grimes. Although a verdict of accidental death is declared, Grimes is warned not to take on any more apprentices.

The schoolmistress Ellen Orford is alone in her support of Grimes and she sets out to bring him a new apprentice. Later, in the village pub, the villagers accuse Grimes of being a murderer. When Ellen arrives with the new boy, he immediately takes him home through a fierce storm.

Ellen finds bruises on the boy and realizes Grimes had been mistreating him. She and Grimes quarrel after she asks that the boy get some rest on a Sunday. The villagers overhear their exchange and go to Grimes's hut to see what is going on. They approach just as Grimes was trying to comfort the boy. Seeing them, he pushes him out through a back entrance on to the cliff, where the boy misses his footing and falls to his death.

Grimes and the boy had not been seen for several days, and the villagers assume they are out fishing. Ellen, however, recognizes the boy's sweater which washed up on the beach. An angry group of villagers sets out to find Grimes. When he ambles in, it is clear that he has lost his senses, even failing to recognize Ellen. Captain Balstrode tells him to take the boat out to sea and sink it, which he does. At the coming of dawn, the village returns to another ordinary day.