

**Richard Rodney Bennett (b. 1936) Tom O'Bedlam's Song for tenor & cello (1961)**

Sir Richard Rodney Bennett is an extraordinarily eclectic composer. As a young man, he studied in Paris for two years under his idol, Pierre Boulez, and his early works reflect this hard-core modernist training. But he also loved jazz and popular music such as Cole Porter, and, like Walton and Britten, successfully composed for the cinema. Since 1957 he has composed the scores of over 50 films. The films funded his concert-hall work: operas, symphonies, concertos, choral and chamber works. He plays and writes jazz for fun.

*Tom O'Bedlam's Song* dates from his serialist youth and is dedicated to Peter Pears. The text is an anonymous poem probably written in the early 1600s. The term "Tom O'Bedlam" was used to refer to beggars who had or feigned mental illness; some of them may have been former inmates of the Bethlem Royal Hospital (Bedlam). This institution, founded in 1247 as a poor house, had by the early 1400s started to specialise in caring for the mentally ill and is the world's oldest psychiatric institution. Despite its provisions, there were many mentally-ill vagrants at large in the 1600s, forced to beg to survive. Edgar in *King Lear* disguises himself as mad "Tom O'Bedlam": "*Who gives anything to poor Tom? whom the foul / Fiend hath led through fire and through flame...*"