



# CLARE COLLEGE CHAPEL

## Vocal Recital

Sunday 21 May 2023 at 5.25 p.m.

Hannah Dienes-Williams (Clare) | soprano  
Gregory May (Clare) | piano

<i>Mad Bess</i> , Z. 370	Henry Purcell (1659–95), arr. Benjamin Britten (1913–76)
<i>Thy hand, Belinda</i> from <i>Dido and Aeneas</i>	
<i>Spargi d'amor</i> from <i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	Gaetano Donizetti (1797–1848)
<i>Wie erkenn mein Truelieb</i> From <i>Drei Lieder der Ophelia</i> , Op. 67 No. 1	Richard Strauss (1864–1949)
<i>Tomorrow is St Valentine's Day</i> from <i>Ophelia Sings</i>	Wolfgang Rihm (1952–)
<i>La Mort d'Ophélie</i>	Camille Saint Saens (1835–1921)
<i>Breakdown &amp; Asylum</i> from <i>The Cliff's Edge</i>	Margaret Garwood (1927–2015)
<i>This is what makes us worlds</i>	Nat Jobbins (1997–)

### Programme notes

Content warnings: mentions of mental health and suicide

This recital explores the notion of hysteria, lunacy or madness, a dramatic trope which has long been fascinating to audiences and creators alike. In an age of increasingly scientifically-based information around psychological health, we can critically examine and reflect upon the stereotypes that are engrained in society and often manifest in art and literature. For this recital, I have chosen to cast a spotlight on the gendering of madness, seemingly inevitable when considering the words 'hysteria', which comes from the Greek 'hystera' meaning womb, and 'lunacy', from 'luna', provoking thought about the similarities between the moon causing insanity, and the multi-cultural, historical belief that the moon was closely linked with, if not the governor of the menstrual cycle. It would seem that those with wombs were, more often than not, the victim of madness in art, and this is upheld by the operatic trope of the 'mad scene'. This recital will track portrayals of 'madness' from the public, and spectacularised, to the intimate, first-hand depictions. I hope that examining how women are portrayed in these songs, from the fictional to the real, creates a space for thought about what madness might be artistically conceived as and how that shapes our conceptions of the word itself – whether it is used as a broadly diagnostic (and potentially fear-inducing) term for what is a psychological difficulty requiring care, or a derogatory word used as a form of social control.

The following notes may be helpful in stimulating ideas:

Mad Bess: her madness is tied up with her widowhood, narrative constructed by male gaze, social accusation or mockery of a woman dealing with loss, but musically light-hearted – madness as sort of jolly entertainment. The ending accepts that in Bess' head she is as 'great as a king' which is a surprisingly positive ending - uplifting Bess and acknowledging that she herself may be content in herself despite acting in what is deemed an unusual manner.

Dido: I like to think of this aria as the foundations of the operatic mad scene. It follows a scene in which Dido furiously dismisses Aeneas after he has offered to stay instead of leaving, 'offending' the gods and 'obeying' love. This is actually significantly different to the original Aeneid, in which Aeneas never offers to stay with Dido, and fate is all powerful. In the operatic, 17<sup>th</sup> century retelling, some may argue Dido's declination of Aeneas' offer to stay is a form of self-sabotage, as she then sinks into a seemingly inevitable grief which leads to her implied suicide: 'death must come when he is gone'. Here we see the beginnings of the trope wherein Love is active, and Woman is passive, controlled BY love.

Ophelia: Perhaps one of the most frequently employed characters symbolising erotomania, where Love again is a destructive force, designed to end in melancholy and Ophelia's suicide. The fame of her character meant that fictionalised madness started to inform actual diagnoses based on similar traits. 19th-century psychiatrists used Ophelia as a case study in hysteria and mental breakdown in sexually turbulent adolescence. As Dr John Charles Bucknill, president of the Medico-Psychological Association wrote in 1859, 'Every mental physician of moderately extensive experience must have seen many Ophelias'. Images and staged photographs of Ophelia-like 'mad women', taken in asylums and hospitals, anticipated the fascination with the erotic trance of the hysteric which would be studied by the Parisian neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot and his student Sigmund Freud. Yet again, madness is spectacularised, but dangerously due to the reinforcement of this trope without critical examination, it started to impact actuality, with vastly increasing numbers of women admitted to asylums, often on slender evidence, as the popularity of the trope grew in post industrial revolution Europe. Asylums also were not curative places – their philosophy was generally fear-mongering as a means of controlling those being 'treated'. Treatment consisted of inhumane experimental treatments that could be fatal itself, whilst to the public, asylums functioned as similarly to the circus – families would visit asylums as a day out.

Eithne Tabor: These two poems are taken from 'Songs of a Psychotic', a collection of poetry by Eithne Tabor, someone who there is very little information shared about, only that she wrote these poems in a mental hospital and was admitted around the age of 18. The two poems here depict her experience in losing control during a breakdown, followed by questioning the asylum, calling it a 'prison of lost dreams'. Garwood could not get any information from Tabor's publisher as to her whereabouts; only after a lot of searching, did she manage to make contact at a half-way house connected to a hospital in Washington. After meeting Eithne, in a conversation which was supervised, she never saw her again – 10 years later the half-way house had disappeared. The song cycle was published in 1989.

'Madness' has gone from spectacle on stage to taboo in reality. In the last song, I hope to provide some sort of idea about how we might deal with madness and find a non-derogatory space for it in reality. The lines 'you rearrange my parts until no more hurting' really struck me: what could be a brutal image akin to the maltreatment women received in asylums, becomes shrouded in care, where love is an active choice and a healing force rather than a romanticised, doomed one. The last lines of

the song are these: 'Our love fills the air. Our love eats the deadly sounds men make when they see how much magic we have away from them.'

This felt especially poignant to me as I imagined each character - who had been doomed by a male author to die after their love was unrequited or made impossible - saying this instead. The word 'magic' especially made me consider how magic is a deviation from the expected, another form of knowledge or reality. For both me and my wonderful friend Nat, who kindly wrote such beautiful music to set this poem, this last sentence feels like a little clue as to how we find space for madness as a non-secretive, but also non-diagnostic term for the imperfection of human existence. This song reminds us that love as a choice, is malleable itself - it can be tamed, and it does not gender. Those who face psychological difficulties should be treated with care without patronisation, isolation or censorship, helping to ease their path through life and find increasing agency in their lives. Through inclusive dialogue about real life psychological difficulties, and the examination of how fictionalised madness functions as the fetishization of extraordinary behaviour, we can positively reclaim 'madness' as a word to represent the non-logical parts of life which are universally common.

**Hannah Dienes-Williams** is a Soprano in her third year at Clare, studying Music. Before Cambridge, Hannah was a chorister at Guildford Cathedral for 9 years, in which time she was a finalist in the BBC Chorister of the Year competition twice, a featured soloist on tours and two CDs, and was the young soprano soloist for a Decca recording of Rebecca Dale's *Materna Requiem* alongside Louise Alder.

Since starting at Cambridge, Hannah has been selected for the Pembroke Lieder Scheme in her first and second years, benefitting from regular tuition in art song from Joseph Middleton, and masterclasses with Mark Padmore, Lucy Crowe and Nicky Spence. She is a frequent recitalist and particularly enjoys performing 20th century art song. In her first year, she was awarded Second Prize in the Clare Song Competition and a winner of the CCMS Concerto Competition in her third year. Hannah is grateful to have gained operatic experience at university including the roles of: Almirena (*Rinaldo*, Handel), Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart), Soprano (*Denis and Katya*, Venables), Adele (*Die Fledermaus*, Strauss), Galatea (*Acis and Galatea*, Handel) Ino (*Semele*, Handel), La Fée (*Cendrillon*, Viardot) Dido (*Dido and Aeneas*, Purcell), Mrs P (*The Man who Mistook his Wife for a Hat*, Nyman) and Pamina (*The Magic Flute*, Mozart).

Outside of Cambridge, Hannah is a frequent soloist with regional choral societies, having sung many oratorio works with orchestra, as well as Mahler's *Fourth Symphony* at St John's Smith Square with Cavatina Orchestra. She recently sang Harawi by Messiaen at Paris Conservatoire for a research project on, and subsequent premiere of, Yvonne Loriod's unpublished song cycle. Hannah also sings in the Clare College Choir and is grateful for the opportunities to perform in exciting places and venues. She is grateful to her singing teachers, and the support she will receive to attend the Royal Academy of Music next year as a Masters student in Vocal Studies.

**Gregory May** is a third-year music student studying at Clare College. After learning with various private piano teachers, he received a scholarship to attend the Junior department of the Royal Academy of Music, being taught piano by Fiona Harris and composition by Edmund Jolliffe and David Knotts, who continues to be a great support. He was one of the winners in his age category in the 2020 BBC Young Composer Competition, which resulted in a commission for the BBC Concert Orchestra. He currently studies piano with Rolf Hind and composition with Christian Mason.

