

Graduate Student Lecture Recital

***Get thee to an asylum:
reflecting on the evolution of mental illness and
its portrayal in Thomas's operatic mad scene***

**Naomi Merer, soprano
Mandee Madrid Sikich, piano**

May 8, 2021 | 4 pm PDT | Virtual Event

program

Lecture and Musical Excerpts

- I. Introduction
 - a. Number 1: "Ophelia's Song" from Jake Heggie's *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*
- II. Charles Ambroise Thomas, his 1868 *Hamlet*, and an Introduction to Ophélie
- III. *Bel canto* mad scenes
- IV. French grand opera
- V. A Brief (His)tory of (Hys)teria
 - a. Number 2: "Women have loved before" from Jake Heggie's *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*
- VI. An Analysis of Ophélie's Mad Scene
 - a. Mad Scene from Ambroise Thomas's 1868 *Hamlet*
 - i. Accompanied recitative and arioso: "À vos jeux, mes amis"
 - ii. Waltz: "Partagez-vous mes fleurs"
 - iii. Ballade and Coda: "Pâle et blonde"
- VII. An Analysis of Ophélie's Suicide Scene
 - a. Suicide Scene from Ambroise Thomas's 1868 *Hamlet*
- VIII. Conclusions
 - a. Number 4: "Spring" from Jake Heggie's *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia*

Naomi Merer's doctoral committee:
Professor Benjamin Brecher, Dr. Isabel Bayrakdarian, and Dr. Martha Sprigge

Presented by the University of California, Santa Barbara Division of Humanities and Fine Arts in the College of Letters and Science
and the UC Santa Barbara Department of Music in partial fulfillment of the Doctor of Musical Arts degree.

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Text and Translations

Excerpts from *Songs and Sonnets to Ophelia* (1999)
Jake Heggie (b. 1961)

1. Ophelia's Song Text by Jake Heggie (b. 1961)

The hills are green, my dear one,
and blossoms are filling the air.
The spring is arisen and I am a prisoner there.

In this flowery field I'll lay me
and dream of the open air.
The spring is arisen and I am a prisoner there.

Taste of the honey. Sip of the wine.
Pine for a chalice of gold.
I have a dear one and he is mine.
Thicker than water. Water so cold.

In this flowery field I'll lay me
and dream of the open air.
The spring is arisen and I am a prisoner there.

2. Women Have Loved Before Text by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

Women have loved before as I love now;
At least, in lively chronicles of the past—
Of Irish waters by a Cornish prow
Or Trojan waters by a Spartan mast
Much to their cost invaded—here and there,
Hunting the amorous line, skimming the rest,
I find some woman bearing as I bear
Love like a burning city in the breast.
I think however that of all alive
I only in such utter, ancient way
Do suffer love; in me alone survive
The unregenerate passions of a day
When treacherous queens, with death upon the tread,
Heedless and willful, took their knights to bed.

4. Spring Text by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950)

To what purpose, April, do you return again?
Beauty is not enough.
You can no longer quiet me with the redness
Of little leaves opening stickily.
I know what I know.
The sun is hot on my neck as I observe
The spikes of the crocus.
The smell of the earth is good.
It is apparent that there is no death.
But what does that signify?
Not only under ground are the brains of men
Eaten by maggots.
Life in itself
Is nothing,
An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted stairs.
It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
April
Comes like an idiot, babbling and strewing flowers.

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Excerpts from Hamlet
Charles Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896)
Libretto by Michel Carré (1822-1872)
and Jules Barbier (1825-1901)

Mad Scene
Accompanied Recitative and Arioso section

*À vos jeux, mes amis,
permettez-moi, de grâce, de prendre part!
Nul n'a suivi ma trace!
J'ai quitté le palais aux premiers feux du jour.
Des larmes de la nuit la terre était mouillée;
Et l'alouette, avant l'aube éveillée,
planait dans l'air!
Mais vous, pourquoi vous parlez bas?
Ne me reconnaissez-vous pas?
Hamlet est mon époux...
et je suis Ophélie!
Un doux serment nous lie,
il m'a donné son coeur
en échange du mien...
et si quel'qu'un vous dit
qu'il me fuit et m'oublie,
n'en croyez rien!
non, Hamlet est mon époux
et moi, je suis Ophélie.
S'il trahissait sa foi,
j'en perdrais la raison!*

Waltz

*Partagez-vous mes fleurs!
À toi cette humble branche
de romarin sauvage.
À toi cette pervenche...*

Ballade

Recitative

Et maintenant écoutez ma chanson!

A section

*Pâle et blonde dort sous l'eau profonde
la Willis au regard de feu!
Que Dieu garde celui qui s'attarde
dans la nuit au bord du lac bleu!
Heureuse l'épouse aux bras de l'époux!
Mon âme est jalouse d'un bonheur si doux!
Nymphé au regard de feu,
hélas! tu dors sous les eaux du lac bleu!*

B section

La la la...

*At your games, my friends,
let me, please, take part!
No one has followed me!
I left the palace at the first fires of day.
From the tears of the night the earth was wet
And the lark, before dawn,
was soaring in the air!
But you, why do you speak softly?
You don't recognize me?
Hamlet is my husband
And I am Ophélie!
A sweet vow binds us,
He gave me his heart
in exchange for mine...
and if someone tells you
that he left me and forgot me
never believe them!
no, Hamlet is my husband
and me, I am Ophélie.
If he betrayed his faith,
I would lose my reason!*

*Let me share my flowers with you!
To you this humble branch
of wild rosemary.
To you this periwinkle...*

And now listen to my song!

*Pale and blonde sleeps under the deep water
The Wilis with the gaze of flame!
May God keep the one who tarries
in the night at the edge of the blue lake!
Happy is the wife in the arms of her husband!
My soul is jealous of such a sweet happiness!
Nymph with the gaze of fire,
alas! you sleep under the waters of the blue lake!*

A' section

*La sirène passe et vous entraîne sous
l'azur du lac endormi.
L'air se voile,
adieu blanche étoile, adieu ciel,
adieu doux ami!
Heureuse l'épouse aux bras de l'époux!
Mon âme est jalouse d'un bonheur si doux!
Sous les flots endormi, ah!
pour toujours, adieu, mon doux ami!*

The siren passes and drags you under
the blue of the sleeping lake.
The air mists over,
farewell white star, farewell sky,
farewell sweet friend!
Happy is the wife in the arms of her husband!
My soul is jealous of such a sweet happiness!
Asleep under the waves, ah!
for forever, farewell, my sweet friend!

B' section

La la la...

Coda

*Ah! cher époux!
cher amant!
doux aveu!
tendre serment! Bonheur supreme!
Cruel! Je t'aime!
cruel, tu vois mes pleurs!
pour toi je meurs!
je meurs!*

Ah! dear husband!
Dear lover!
Sweet pledge!
Tender vow! Supreme bliss!
Cruel man! I love you!
Cruel man, you see my tears!
For you I die!
I die!

Suicide Scene

*Le voilà!
Je crois l'entendre!
Pour le punir de s'être fait attendre,
Blanches Willis, nymphes des eaux,
Ah! Cachez-moi parmi vos roseaux!*

There he is!
I believe I hear him!
To punish him for having made me wait,
White Willis, nymphs of the water,
Ah! Hide me amongst your reeds!

*Doute de la lumière,
Doute du soleil,
mais jamais de mon amour!
Jamais!*

Doubt the light,
Doubt the sun,
but never doubt my love!
never!

*Translations of Thomas's mad and suicide scenes are
based on Nico Castel's with some changes made by the
lecturer.*