



CURLEW RIVER

by Benjamin Britten

22 October 2021 7pm

23 October 2021 7pm

The Cathedral Church of St Paul
138 Tremont Street
Boston MA 02111

ABOUT ENIGMA CHAMBER OPERA

We're back! Our company launched at the very end of 2019; and we staged our first production, Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*, to sell out audiences, early in 2020. The Boston Globe's AZ Madonna hailed us as 'an auspicious arrival in the Boston arts landscape,' and wrote, '...if this is only the first step for this new company, I eagerly await the second.' And then the pandemic hit, and the world shut down.

Through the lockdown that summer and beyond, we stayed sane by creating an online production of Mozart's *The Impresario*. That one act opera is about a poor, frustrated artist who tries to stage operas, but encounters all sorts of issues - such as lack of funds, and the egos of performers. It seemed the perfect piece to update, exploring all of those same problems with the added difficulties created by social distancing. Just how DO you stage opera during a pandemic? You can find the answer online, at <https://bit.ly/impresarioopera>

It seemed unlikely that we'd be able to stage an 'in person' show in 2021, with so much ongoing uncertainty. A chance conversation one day, however, led to an epiphany: *Curlew River* is the piece we need right now! (For more on that, see my program note.) So with the help of many friends and supporters, here we are. It's so good to be live again - and we're grateful that you're here with us.

We are a small, flexible company made up of a core group of artists (designers, conductors,

singers, director), all of whom are experienced and already very well established in the opera business. The skill and expertise of the group means that we are able to bring together the highest quality of production in a short space of time – just eleven days of rehearsal on average for our shows! – thus keeping down costs.

Enigma is based here in Boston, but our portable productions can easily be taken to different venues around the world. (We had plans for appearances at arts festivals abroad, before Covid intervened...) If you'd like to be a patron of the company, we'd be delighted to have your support. You can make a tax-deductible donation of any size by using this URL:

<https://bit.ly/3aHYGO8>

You can contact us at
team@enigmachamberopera.org

Thanks for taking the ferry across the Curlew River with us tonight.

KIRSTEN Z CAIRNS
Artistic Director and Founder



Enigma
Chamber
Opera

BENJAMIN BRITTEN CURLEW RIVER

A PARABLE FOR CHURCH PERFORMANCE
Op. 71

*Libretto based on the medieval Japanese N -play
'Sumidagawa' of J r Motomasa (1395-1431)*

By WILLIAM PLOMER

The action takes place here and now;
and leads us to the imaginary Curlew River, in East
Anglia, England.

**The performance runs approx. 75 minutes, with no
intermission**

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In praise of darkness and light // The city. 2019

**Please silence all cell phones, watch alarms, and other noise
making devices.**

**Unauthorized use of cameras, filming or recording are not
permitted.**

CAST

THE MADWOMAN
Matthew DiBattista

THE FERRYMAN
Aaron Engebret

THE TRAVELLER
David McFerrin

THE SPIRIT OF THE BOY
Linus Schafer Goulthorpe

THE LEADER OF THE TROUPE (The Abbot)
Paul Soper

THE TRAVELLING PLAYER
Thomas Oesterling

CREW

Kirsten Z Cairns
Artistic Director

Edward Elwyn Jones
Music Director

Peter A Torpey
**Lighting, set and
media designer**

Rebecca Shannon Butler
Costume designer

Mike Janney
Stage Manager

Kat Shanahan
Wardrobe Supervisor

Maja Tremiszewska
Rehearsal pianist

Ashlee Rose Scott
Photographer

Chris Pirrotta
Graphic designer

Kate Johnson
Supertitles Operator

THE INSTRUMENTALISTS

FLUTE

Aimee Toner

HARP

Angelina Savoia

HORN

Nick Auer

PERCUSSION

Mike Williams

VIOLA

Emily Rome

ORGAN

Edward Elwyn Jones

DOUBLE BASS

Daniel Gorn

SYNOPSIS

As if from nowhere, travelling players emerge, singing as they come. Their leader, a holy man, tells us they have come to share a story; a tale which will give hope to those who are lost, light to those in darkness.

The troupe transform themselves into characters. The Ferryman will lead us where we need to go; the Traveller is ever journeying, always on a quest. Both have heard the Madwoman singing; the Ferryman says he will wait for her, so that he can find out more of her tale.

The Madwoman is seeking her son, who was stolen from her. She has journeyed all the way across the country, but has not been able to find him. Her desperate grief and longing have driven her to distraction. The Ferryman tells her and the other passengers on his boat about a child who died on the banks of the river, one year ago this very day. He also had been stolen from his home.

Learning that this child came from the Black Mountains, the Madwoman realizes it is indeed her son – and he is dead. Distraught, she weeps at his grave; those around her offer prayers for his soul. Another voice, however,

joins their prayer – and the Madwoman sees a glimpse of her child, joyful and safe, in a better world than this.

Perhaps this mystery can bring us all hope; or at least peace, of a kind. The players return to the mundane world, leaving us to find our own way onwards.

PROGRAMME NOTE

What is ‘the life of the world to come’? – by which I mean not some afterlife, but the world to come in *this* life. How do we move forward after lockdown; rediscover a world where we will embrace, socialise, feel safe on a crowded train? How do we find a way out of political turmoil, division, chaos? Is there a better world around the corner, somewhere? How do we get there?

Pondering these questions, *Curlew River* came into my mind. It seems the perfect story for the road we are all travelling now. A human being who has suffered deep, profound trauma – a child being stolen from her – is on a quest. She is looking for her son; or perhaps, all she really hopes to find is herself. She keeps moving forward because it is the only thing she can do; putting one foot in front of the other, working to a single, obsessive goal, is how she survives.

Trauma affects the brain, robbing us of our ability to reason on a higher level. The animal, or reptilian, brain kicks in, and all we can do is put up a ‘fight or flight’ response. Is the Madwoman fighting to find her child, or fleeing from her own despair? Either way, her rational brain is no longer in charge, as she strays further and further into the labyrinth of her desperate need, driven by trauma.

A Ferryman appears, to help her cross a river. In mythology, water often represents the veil between two worlds, and frequently there is a Charon-type figure

to guide us over. On the far bank, the Madwoman finds – what? Not her child; not alive, anyway. But she does find what in modern parlance we would call ‘closure’. She learns what happened to her boy, and her grief is unlocked. And then, in a ‘sign of God’s grace’, the spirit of her son appears to her, and tells her to be comforted, for they will meet again.

What are we to make of this miraculous appearance of the child? Can we believe it? We are not, after all, seeing real proof of an afterlife. Even the players performing for us are only retelling a story; we are several steps removed from a ‘true’ experience. From a religious perspective, the message is clear: all will be well, when we are reunited with our loved ones in heaven. If we do not, however, share that conviction, *Curlew River* does not offer proof that will change our minds.

Yet the parable still, I believe, offers us a message of solace. The Madwoman was alone, wandering and bewildered. On the banks of a river, she found people to guide her; to answer her most desperate question; to pray with her; to share her sorrow. This, I believe, is the light in the darkness for us all. When we wander, confused and heartbroken, we will find companions to walk beside us. There will be answers, guidance, comfort; and even though the sadness cannot be magically taken away, ultimately we will find our way, together, out of trauma, to a place of HOPE.

My hope tonight is that *Curlew River* offers you the promise of a better world to come, in this life – soon. May we find it together.

KIRSTEN Z CAIRNS

ARTIST PROFILES

REBECCA SHANNON BUTLER COSTUME DESIGN

Rebecca Shannon Butler holds a BFA from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design.



She is the Costume Director at Boston Conservatory at Berklee, where recent favorites include *Urinetown*, *Dead Man Walking*, and *The Frogs*.

Freelance costume design credits include: Guerilla Opera (*ELLIS*); Boston Conservatory (*Urinetown*, *Hair*, *Reflections*, *A Day in Hollywood/A Night in the Ukraine*); Actors' Shakespeare Project; Boston Gay Men's Chorus; and Intermezzo: The New England Chamber Opera Series.

Butler was a founding member of the designer's studio the Industrial Stitchers Guild, and has created costumes and textile art for organizations in Boston and beyond. She is Enigma Chamber Opera's resident costume designer, and designed both *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Impresario*.

KIRSTEN Z CAIRNS ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

When not busy with Enigma Chamber Opera, which she founded at the end of 2019, Kirsten Z Cairns freelances in the US and the UK. Her directing projects include work for The Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam, UMKC's



Conservatory, Longy School of Music, Dartmouth University's Glee Club, Opera del West, Opera North, Trinity Church Boston, the Episcopal Chaplaincy at Harvard, Nonsense Room Productions, and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She is currently working with a team developing a new, off Broadway show.

As Resident Stage Director for *Intermezzo: The New England Chamber Opera Series*, Cairns' productions included three world premieres. Her work has been described in the press as 'so good you want to see it again, right away' and 'astounding, phenomenal, superb'.

Before going freelance, Cairns was Director of Opera Studies at The Boston Conservatory, where her many productions included *Albert Herring*, *The Rape of Lucretia*, *L'Elisir d'amore*, *La Rondine*, *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, and *The Mikado*.

With degrees from the University of Durham, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, and New England Conservatory, Cairns is a qualified instructor of drama and literature, and a trained singer. She has lectured for groups such as the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Duke University, MIT, and Boston Lyric Opera. She also performs for the Council for Music in Hospitals and Care, Scotland, specializing in giving concerts for dementia sufferers.

MATTHEW DIBATTISTA THE MADWOMAN

Described as “brilliant” by Opera News, tenor Matthew DiBattista is continually in demand on some of the world’s most prestigious stages, having performed throughout the United States and Europe.



He has sung with such conductors as Charles Dutoit, Seiji Ozawa, James Conlon, Sir Andrew Davis and Robert Shaw. Mr. DiBattista has performed over 60 different roles to date, spanning the operatic repertoire. He has been on the roster of the Metropolitan Opera and performed several seasons with Lyric Opera of Chicago.

Due to the pandemic, his debut at San Francisco Opera, a Carnegie Hall debut and recording with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and roles with Santa Fe Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, and Odyssey Opera were all cancelled. His 2021-2022 season includes the roles of Monostatos in *Die Zauberflöte* and Beppe in *I Pagliacci* with Palm Beach Opera, and Monsieur Triquet in *Eugene Onegin* with Santa Fe Opera.

Other successes include work with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Glimmerglass Opera, Florida Grand Opera ("Matthew DiBattista was splendid in the multiple character-tenor turns, with a beautifully produced voice at his command." - Opera News), Cincinnati May Festival, Boston Pops, New Orleans Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Opera Omaha, Tulsa Opera, Virginia Opera, Opera Colorado, Tanglewood, Boston Lyric Opera, Long Beach Opera, and almost nine straight seasons as principle artist with Opera Theatre of Saint Louis ("As the villain Bégearss, the mega-talented Matthew DiBattista was appropriately showy..." - Opera News).

AARON ENGBRETH THE FERRYMAN

Aaron Engebretth enjoys a varied solo career in opera, oratorio, and recital. His recent New York City Opera debut as monodrama soloist in Argento's *A Waterbird Talk*, performed at



Carnegie Hall, compelled the *New York Classical Review* critic to write: "Engbreth is a marvelous actor, capable of holding his character's many facets and motivations in tension." Mr. Engebretth garnered two Grammy Award nominations for Best Operatic Recording for his work with the Boston Early Music Festival and Radio Bremen. He has been a soloist at the Kennedy Center and Boston's Symphony Hall, as well as international appearances from Sapporo Japan's Kitara Hall to Le Theatre de la Ville in Paris and the AmBul festival in Bulgaria. Additionally, Mr. Engebretth has been a guest of the Tanglewood, Ravinia, Rockport and Monadnock Music Festivals, and with symphony orchestras including Portland, Virginia, San Diego, Charlotte and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Other appearances include: with the Boston Modern Orchestra Project; Lexington, Bangor and Boston Landmarks' Symphony Orchestras; Vancouver International Song Institute; St. Louis Art Museum and the Firebird Ensemble; Boston Symphony Orchestra; Le Central de Lyon; Concert de l'Hostel Dieu; Écully Musical; Odyssey Opera; Boston Camerata; and recitals in Lyon, Paris and San Francisco.

Mr. Engebretth's work with composer and conductor Lukas Foss cultivated a passion for premiering new works: he has since collaborated with many prestigious composers. Mr. Engebretth is featured on numerous recordings, among them Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* and Argento's *A Waterbird Talk*.

**EDWARD ELWYN JONES
MUSIC DIRECTOR,
ORGANIST**

Edward Elwyn Jones is the Gund University Organist & Choirmaster at Harvard University, a post he has held since 2003. Mr. Jones directs the music program in the Memorial Church in the midst of Harvard Yard, and leads the 180-year old Harvard University Choir in its daily choral services, broadcasts, tours, commissions, and recordings. He is also Music Director of the Harvard Radcliffe Chorus, the Lowell House Opera (New England's longest-running opera company), and is a frequent collaborator with Yale's Schola Cantorum. He has led opera productions with Iceland's Reykjavik Summer Opera Festival, New England's Intermezzo Opera, Lowell House Opera, and the Harvard Early Music Society. Mr. Jones has worked alongside William Christie, Christopher Hogwood, Nicholas McGegan, and Gil Rose, and has served as continuo player and Assistant Conductor to Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the English Baroque Soloists.



During his time at Harvard, Mr. Jones has overseen the publication of a new university hymnal, the installation of two new pipe organs in the Memorial Church, and has commissioned works from some of America's most prominent contemporary composers, including Daniel Pinkham, Alice Parker, and David Conte. A native of Wales, Mr. Jones studied music at Cambridge University, where he was Organ Scholar of Emmanuel College, and served as conductor of three university orchestras. He received his Master of Music degree in orchestral conducting from Mannes College of Music in New York City, where he was the recipient of the Felix Salzer Memorial Award.

DAVID McFERRIN THE TRAVELLER

Praised by *The Miami Herald* for his “commanding stage presence and a voice of seductive beauty,” baritone David McFerrin is a mainstay of the Boston opera scene, and has sung on many leading stages in the US and Europe. His numerous roles with



Boston Lyric Opera include Pallante in Handel's *Agrippina*, Junius in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, the Officer in Glass' *In the Penal Colony*, and Joseph McCarthy in BLO's East Coast premiere of Spears' *Fellow Travelers*. Further opera credits include Florida Grand Opera, Odyssey Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Seattle Opera, and the Rossini Festival in Wildbad, Germany.

Mr. McFerrin's solo concert engagements range from Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* at St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, to various engagements with the Boston Pops. He has sung with the Cleveland Orchestra, Israel Philharmonic, North Carolina Symphony, American Bach Soloists, Apollo's Fire, Arion Baroque Orchestra, Boston Early Music Festival, and the Handel & Haydn Society. He is a member of the renaissance vocal ensemble Blue Heron, a 2018 *Gramophone* award winner.

Last season, Mr. McFerrin was able to record virtual performances with Blue Heron, the Boston Pops, Handel & Haydn Society, and in Emmanuel Music's production of Handel's *La Resurrezione*. He is grateful for the assistance provided to artists during this period by various organizations and their patrons.

Mr. McFerrin recently moved from Boston to Natick, Massachusetts with his wife Erin, their two-year-old daughter Fiona, and black lab Holly.

THOMAS OESTERLING TRAVELLING PLAYER

Thomas Oesterling is heard frequently on the opera and concert stages of New England. The Boston Globe praised him for the 'sweetness, awe and clarity' of his singing of Uriel in Haydn's *Creation* under the baton of Robert Shaw. As Eisenstein in *Die Fledermaus* for Commonwealth Opera, he was acclaimed for having "played Eisenstein to the height of comic foppishness, bringing to bear a voice equally at home in the most serious and demanding repertoire." In addition to Eisenstein, roles include Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Count Almaviva in *The Barber of Seville*, Alfredo in *La Traviata*, and Acis in *Acis and Galatea*, which he recently performed with Ensemble Courant at UNC Chapel Hill.



Mr. Oesterling is a proponent of new music, having participated in the New England premieres or revivals of many new works, including Charles Wuorinen's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* with Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Lee Hoiby's *The Scarf* and James Yannatos' *The Rockets' Red Blare* with Intermezzo Opera, Leonard Bernstein's *A quiet place*, Robert Sirota's *Cabaret Songs*, and the world premiere of *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Phillip Glass at the American Repertory Theatre.

**LINUS SCHAFER
GOULTHORPE
THE SPIRIT OF THE
BOY**

Twelve-year-old Linus Schafer Goulthorpe is excited to be returning to the stage with Enigma Chamber Opera. He has played the role of Miles in *The Turn of the Screw* three times, twice with the Boston Conservatory's Master of Opera Program, and once with Enigma Chamber Opera.



His debut performance was as the Prince in NEMPAC Opera Project's production of Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince*. He sings with the Boston Symphony Orchestra Children's Chorus and the National Children's Chorus.

Linus studies voice with Carley DeFranco. In his spare time, Linus also plays piano and enjoys soccer, chess, sailing, reading, and visiting his grandparents in New Orleans and England.

PAUL SOPER
THE LEADER OF THE
TROUPE (The Abbot)

Baritone Paul Soper is delighted to make his debut with Enigma Chamber Opera. He made his operatic debut with Houston Grand Opera as the Innkeeper in *Manon*, and has sung principal and comprimario roles with Boston Lyric Opera, Brooklyn Academy of Music, Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Naples (FL) and the National Touring Company of New York City Opera. Known for his wide range of repertoire, recent seasons include the title role of Rachmaninoff's *Aleko* with Commonwealth Lyric Theater, the Verdi *Requiem* with the Paul Madore Chorale, Bach's *St. John Passion* with the Pioneer Valley Symphony and *St. Matthew Passion* with Gulfshore Opera.



Theater credits include Judge Turpin in *Sweeney Todd* with Lyric Stage Company, Emile DeBecque in *South Pacific* with Seacoast Repertory Theater, and Signor Naccarrelli in *The Light in the Piazza* with Nextdoor Theater. Mr. Soper has also been a frequent guest with the Chamber Orchestra of Boston, Charleston Chamber Opera, Falmouth Chorale, Cape Cod Opera, Opera Providence, Connecticut Early Music Festival, Intermezzo Opera and the Seaglass Theater Company. Paul is also an alumni of Boston's former educational outreach, improvisational Opera-to-Go Company. Twice a Fellow at the Tanglewood Music Center, Mr. Soper currently is a Choral Fellow at the historic Old South Church.

PETER A TORPEY
LIGHTING, SET &
MEDIA DESIGN

Enigma Chamber Opera's resident designer, Peter Torpey combines light, image, music, interactivity, and



storytelling. As the founder and principal creative at The *n*th Art, he collaborates with theater-makers, orchestras, museums, festivals, educational institutions, and other artists, to create experiences that connect audiences and participants with stories and each other. By incorporating new technologies and techniques as part of his artistic palette, he explores novel modes of representing expression (*Death and the Powers*, 2010; *Lilith*, 2015; *Fensadense*, 2015) and presence in live performance (Remote Theatrical Immersion: *Sleep No More*, 2012; *Powers Live*, 2014; *Ipomoea*, 2017).

Recent works include projection design for the world premiere opera productions *Schoenberg in Hollywood* (Boston Lyric Opera, 2018) and *If I Were You* (Merola Opera, 2019). His media, lighting, and interactive works have also appeared worldwide, including: Chicago Opera Theater, Dallas Opera, Virginia Opera, Opéra de Monte-Carlo, 7 Stages Theater, Curious Encounters Festival, FLUX Projects Atlanta, Google, Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Lucerne Festival, MIT Media Lab, CalIT2 IDEAS San Diego, and The Boston Camerata. For Enigma he designed *The Turn of the Screw* and *The Impresario*.

OUR SUPPORTERS

**Huge thanks to all our donors in 2021,
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The Schafer Goulthorpe family
Liz and Nigel Wright

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SPECIAL THANKS

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Robert Henderson
Roger Lovejoy and all at the Cathedral Church
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