



ENGLISH ECCENTRICS

AUDIENCE RESOURCE

BY TIM RYAN

Victorian Opera respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the unceded land on which we work and live: the people of the Eastern Kulin Nation. We acknowledge these original owners and custodians of the lands and waterways and their enduring cultural practices of caring for Country.

We pay respect to their Elders past and present.

ABOUT US

Victorian Opera is the state opera company of Victoria. Your state company. We make creative, accessible and relevant work for everyone while acknowledging the traditions and evolving our artform.

Recognised for our unique contribution to the country's operatic landscape, Victorian Opera joined the National Performing Arts Partnership Framework in 2021. Alongside other companies, Victorian Opera holds its rightful position in the national performing arts arena.

Commitment to the development and presentation of new Australian opera and musical theatre is forefront to our mission. We identify relative and topical material, commission and workshop new scores and librettos, and ultimately produce new productions. Victorian Opera premieres at least one new Australian opera or music theatre work each year, and have commissioned 36 new works since the company's formation.

The next generation of talent is developed from the ground up through our Emerging Artists Programs – The Victorian Opera Youth Chorus Ensemble (VOYCE), our VO Emerges project and our Emerging Artists Opera Prize scholarship. Creating future pathways for artists, artisans and technicians has become a driving focus for our organisation. We employ hundreds of people across the creative industries, recruit some of the finest local and national singers, and collaborate with Australia's leading companies, venues and learning institutions.

We embrace the new normal and continue to perform in exceptional theatres and concert halls to give you the best and safest experience. Join us to experience the human voice, the indefinable power of music and storytelling at its finest.

And please, come as you are.

ec·cen·tric

from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary

ADJECTIVE

a: deviating from conventional or accepted usage or conduct especially in odd or whimsical ways

b: deviating from an established or usual pattern or style

NOUN

A person who behaves in odd or unusual ways:
an eccentric person

SYNONYMS

Bizarre
Crazy
Curious
Erratic
Funny
Kookie
Odd
Off-kilter
Outlandish
Whacky
Weird

ANTONYMS

Normal
Usual
Typical
Average
Ordinary
Predictable
Standard

VO EMERGES

VO Emerges was inaugurated in 2022, with the purpose of offering opportunities to emerging singers, composers, designers, directors, and technical workers. The program provides participants the opportunity to work on one of Victorian Opera's mainstage productions. Through this opportunity, they will work with industry experts who will provide learning pathways through mentoring, training, and development.

So far, VO Emerges has presented critically acclaimed productions of *Il Mago di Oz* at the Palais Theatre in 2022, *Melbourne, Cheremushki* at the Playhouse in 2023, and it will present as part of Artistic Director Stuart Maunder's debut 2024 Season *English Eccentrics* at the Union Theatre. Each production has shone a light on future performing arts professionals, while allowing them the chance to hone their craft.

The program has no prerequisites to apply, and is open to all aspiring singers, creatives, and technical workers who have less than 10 years of professional experience. Expressions of interest are sought for singers who audition, creatives who submit design concepts, and technical workers who are identified and mentored.

Through this program, Victorian Opera is developing the next generation of opera and musical theatre professionals, ensuring the industry has a bright future.



2022

Il Mago di Oz



2023

Melbourne Cheremushki



2024

English Eccentrics

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MEET THE CREATIVES

To learn more about our Creative Team, take a look at our [electronic program](#)



SUSAN COLLINS

Conductor



STUART MAUNDER

Director



LOUISA FITZGERALD

Set & Costume Designer



HARRIE HOGAN

Lighting Designer

MEET THE CAST

To learn more about our Cast, take a look at our [electronic program](#)



MICHAELA CADWGAN*

Lady Lewson
Sarah Whitehead
Mrs Worrall
First Nun



ALISTAIR COOPER-GOLEC

The Rev. Mr Jones
Robert 'Romeo' Coates
Dr. Graham
Dr. Wilkinson



EAMON DOOLEY

Major Peter Labellière
Lord Rothschild
Dr. Dalmahoy
Etienne



GENEVIEVE DROPERT

The Countess of Desmond
Mrs. Birch
Lady Jersey
Second Nun

MEET THE CAST

To learn more about our Cast, take a look at our [electronic program](#)



CHLOE JAMES

Miss Beswick
Miss Fitzhenry
Second Nun



RACHAEL JOYCE[^]

Mrs Dards
Duchess of Devonshire (alternating)
Princess Caraboo (alternating)
First Nun



DOUGLAS KELLY^{**}

John Ward
Bank clerk
Beau Brummell



BAILEY MONTGOMERIE

Lord Rokeby
Alderman Birch
Dr. Katterfelto
Mr. Worrall



JOSHUA MORTON-GALEA

Lord Petersham
Young Whitehead
The Vicar of Almondsbury



ALESSIA PINTABONA[^]

Miss Tylney Long
Duchess of Devonshire (alternating)
Princess Caraboo (alternating)
First Nun



HENRY SHAW

Thomas Parr
A Governor of the Bank of England
Captain Philip Thicknesse
Parish Constable

**The appearance of Michaela Cadwgan is generously supported by Mary Davidson and the family of the late Frederick R Davidson AM.*

***The appearance of Douglas Kelly is generously supported by the Dr Michael Stubbs & Malcolm Roberts Opera Prize.*

[^] The appearances of Rachael Joyce and Alessia Pintabona are generously supported by Joy Selby-Smith.

MEET THE NONET (CHORUS OF 9)

Christopher-Jack Andrew
Jack Jordan
Agnieshka Markwell
Nicholas Matters
Jessica Prinzi
Nicholas Sheppard
Anushka Tiwari
Angelique Tot
Michael Zuccala

MEET THE ORCHESTRA

Violin
Cameron Jamieson

Cello
Josephine Vains

Clarinet - Eb / Bb
Jes Broeren

Bassoon
Lyndon Watts*

Trumpet
Tristan Rebein

Piano
Tom Griffiths

Percussion
Arwen Johnston

*Lyndon Watts appears courtesy of the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music,
University of Melbourne

MEET THE PRODUCTION TEAM

To learn more about the many people who make these production possible, take a look at our [electronic program](#)

Calling Stage Manager
Rain Iyahan

Assistant Stage Manager
Claudia Howarth

Head Electrician
Jamie Turner

Lighting Programmer
Jack Willis-Hall

Wardrobe Supervisor
Tim Corne

Dressers
Xander Reichard
Olivia Peters

Hair and Makeup
Natalie Corteling

Costume Maintenance
Carla Noto



MALCOLM WILLIAMSON, AO CBE



Born: 21 November 1931

Died: 2 March 2003

Unknown Photographer

Collection: National Portrait Gallery (Gift of Diane Williamson and Marion Foote 2013)

Malcolm Benjamin Graham Christopher Williamson, AO CBE, was born in Sydney and at an early age displayed a strong talent for music. After completing his secondary education, he attended the Sydney Conservatorium where he studied piano with Alexander Sverjensky, French horn and composition with Alexander Burnard and Eugene Goossens respectively.

Without graduating with a degree, he moved to London in 1950 where he continued to study and compose music under the direction of Elisabeth Lutyens, who had a significant impact on the young Australian composer. During this time, he took on an array of work to support himself, ranging from being a choirmaster, a church organist, to playing piano in nightclubs. This versatility in career pathways was also evident in his composition work, with a broad swathe of influences channelling into his growing portfolio of work. Williamson gained such success with his compositions that by the late 1950's he was able to compose full-time and attracted many commissions.

His first opera, *Our Man in Havana* premiered in 1963 to critical acclaim as did his second opera *English Eccentrics* which was performed at the Aldeburgh festival in 1964. However, his work was not without controversy, in particular *Cassations*, a series of small music theatre pieces promoting audience participation, were lambasted as overly simplistic. This aside, Williamson was billed as the most commissioned composer of his time and this led him to being appointed as the first non-Briton in the role of Master of the Queen's Music in October 1975, a position he held up until his death.

Whilst he resided in the United Kingdom for the majority of his life, his connection to Australia never waned and transcended into his compositions which can be seen in the tongue-in-cheek approach and brashness of *English Eccentrics*.

He was made Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1976 and was named an Officer of the Order of Australia in 1987.

EDITH SITWELL, DBE



Poet, Dame Edith Louisa Sitwell was born in Scarborough, North Riding of Yorkshire. The harsh, yet stunning geography of her childhood, combined with negligent parents and loyal siblings would go on to inform and influence a once in a generation poet. She went to war against the Georgian poets to create a new and dramatic style in the art form.

It was not until her mid 20's that Sitwell discovered the power of the pen when she began writing poetry that favoured the darker side of life. This unique focus, combined with the use of music and over the top costumes to present her works, bemused audiences and firmly classified her as a practitioner in the avant garde. This assessment was clearly witnessed in the presentation of her piece *Façade* in 1922 which was performed behind a curtain-backed portrait; the words being recited through a cut-out hole in the mouth of the painting with the aid of a megaphone.

The financial privilege of her upbringing and her predilection for the golden era of the aristocracy often placed her at odds with the general public and provided ammunition for her critics. She was not one to shy away from a sparring match with her critics and her natural confidence combined with her elevated dress sense, provided the armour required to successfully defend her ambitions in a male dominated world.

She was elevated to Dame of the British Empire in 1954.

Born: 7 September 1887

Died: 9 December 1964

Portrait of Edith Sitwell, by Roger Fry, 1918

SUPPORT YOUR EXPERIENCE

BEFORE YOU ARRIVE

Take some time to get familiar with the opera by reading through the overview and scene synopses. Copies of the programme will be available on the night, but save some trees and access a [digital copy](#) through our production page.

DON'T BE LATE

It's best to get to the theatre around 15 minutes early so you can find your seat and get settled into the atmosphere.

Being early also gives you time to get to the candy bar and the toilet.

If you've got bags or large coats that you don't want to wear in the theatre, allow time to attend the cloak room. If you're late, you'll miss the orchestra playing the overture as well as the first scene.

There is no middle aisle, so if you have seats in the middle try to get in first.

DO YOU REALLY NEED YOUR PHONE?

By all means take selfies in the foyer and of course the mandatory pre-show social media post of the set or front curtain. Don't forget to tag us #victorianopera @victorianopera #voeducation @voeducation

Allow yourself, and those around you, to be immersed into the magical world of theatre by turning off your phones, and notifications to your digital watches.

SHOW YOUR RESPECT

Be aisle kind and show appreciation to the people who make room for you as you find your seats.

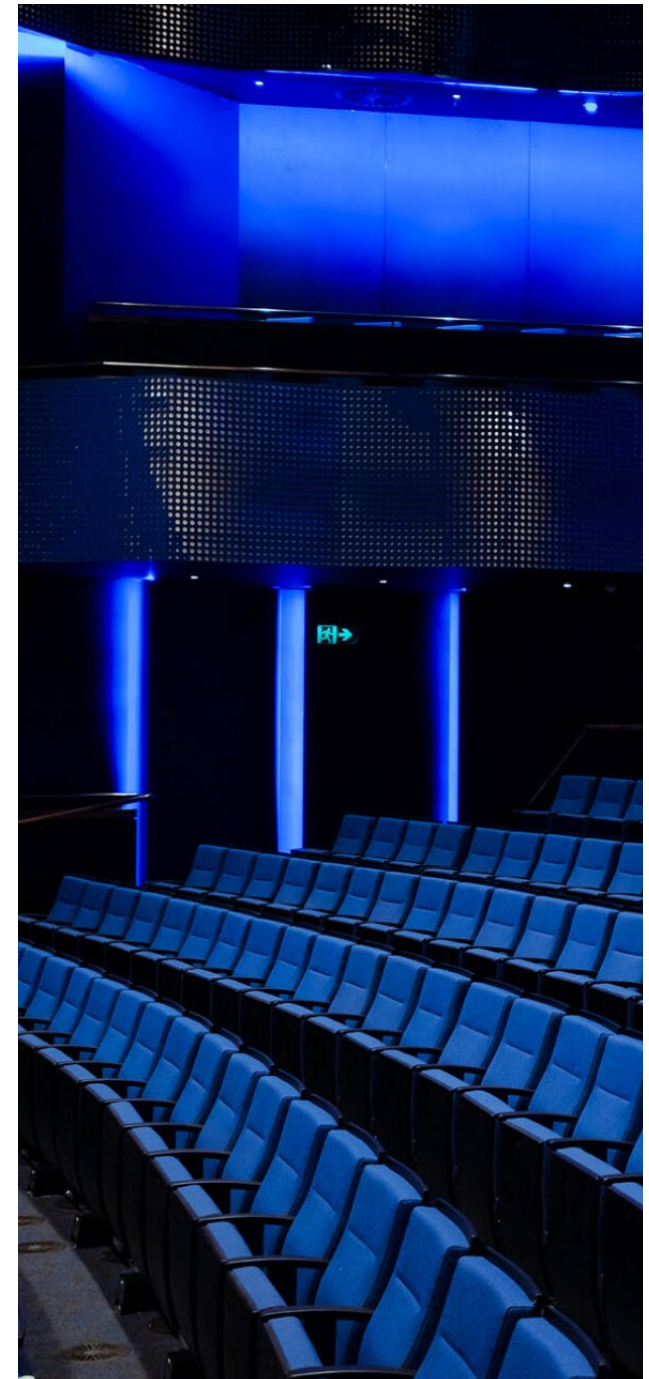
Eat before you attend the theatre, that includes those noisy lolly and chip wrappers.

Save your thoughts about the show for the foyer, no talking or calling-out during the show please.

Feel free to express your feelings as the performers display their talents and be sure to clap loudly when you are impressed.

CONTENT WARNING

This production contains mature content around intimacy, grief and mental health. Parental guidance is recommended.



OVERVIEW & SCENE SYNOPSSES

Where English wit and Australian larrikinism converge, *English Eccentrics* offers a whimsical glimpse into a gallery of thirty-nine eccentric characters from English society. Edith Sitwell could easily have counted herself among these famous eccentrics, and there's an unmistakable touch of eccentricity in Malcolm Williamson as well. Revel in the joyous, moving and zany world crafted by this great Australian composer whose music brims with pastiche, ranging from Mozart to Gershwin, and even with a twist of rumba.

English Eccentrics is a chamber opera through its use of a small cast and orchestra. However, it also fulfils the prerequisites of sketch comedy with a series of small unrelated stories which requires cast members to play multiple characters. In this instance, the stories and some of the characters are threaded together with the theme of eccentricity providing a snapshot into how this virtue is ingrained into the fabric of English society. Beyond this, there is no connection between the stories, and each musical movement should be enjoyed as a non-linear, unique moment: a gem of insight - not unlike Lord Petersham's many different snuff boxes!



ACT 1, SCENE 1 - GOOSE-WEATHER

SYNOPSIS

If this scene were a piece of music it would be described as having polyphonic texture, in other words we are introduced into the world of English eccentricity through numerous isolated stories that flow, one after the other, like pictures in a gallery. Lord Petersham drones on about the many snuff boxes he owns while Miss Tylney Long discusses the extraordinary height of her new bonnet. Thomas Parr conveys his incredible age and wins the attention of The Countess of Desmond. They both implore The Reverend Mr Jones, who wears the hat of a scarecrow, to marry them. The ghost of Miss Beswick may still be in denial of her demise, Lord Rockeby and Lady Lewson debate the merits of bathing, all while John Ward of Hackney lists the many properties he owns. Finally, Mrs Dards explains to Major Peter Labellière how she has created a splendid bunch of fake flowers out of fishbones, his response is to state he wishes to be buried upside down so that he can experience the world the right way up! How can anyone feel melancholy amongst such stories?

“Shall I find it here, my cure for melancholy?”

Characters

Lord Petersham
Miss Tylney Long
Thomas Parr
The Countess of Desmond
The Reverend Mr Jones
Dr Katterfelto
Miss Beswick
Lord Rockeby
Lady Lewson
John Ward of Hackney
Mrs Dards
Major Peter Labellière



ACT 1, SCENE 2 - AN AMATEUR OF FASHION

SYNOPSIS

Robert 'Romeo' Coates is a fanciful man who has inherited a large amount of money allowing him to indulge all of his whims and fancies. His work on the stage is not received well and the audience boo, the prompter tries to remove him but Coates' confidence prevails. He teaches us that he is the creation of God and cannot be held responsible for the person who he is, which in his eyes is a very useful creature who provides an income for tailors and coach makers.

“I consider myself a most useful character...”

Characters

Robert 'Romeo' Coates
Miss FitsHenry
The Prompter

Romeo Coates



ACT 1, SCENE 3 - THE GOD OF THIS WORLD

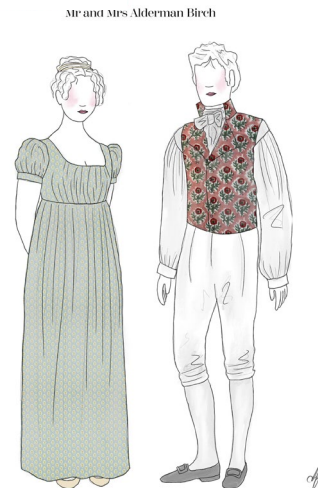
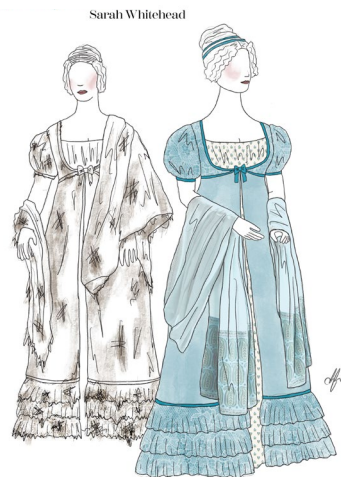
SYNOPSIS

The tragic story of Sarah Whitehead is recounted in this scene. Her brother, who works at the bank, is warned by his superior that he is living beyond his means. Young Whitehead's response is that his sister, whom he adores, must be kept in a life of luxury. Whitehead is eventually fired by the bank and resorts to criminal conduct to support his sister, who lives without knowledge of his actions. When he fails to return home one day, she is taken to live with Alderman Birch and even when she is told that he has been hanged for committing forgery, she refuses to admit that her brother is dead. Every day she goes to the bank to await the appearance of her brother and falls into a life of destitution, convinced the bank is behind a conspiracy of hiding immense sums of money that belong to her. She confronts Lord Rothschild who is able to read the sorry story, offering her half a crown today with the other half tomorrow, and thus appeasing her sad soul.

“He left the house at dawn before I was awake and left. No word for me? Where can he be? At the bank of course.”

Characters

A Governor of the Bank of England
Young Whitehead
Sarah Whitehead
Alderman Birch
Mrs Birch
Roberts the Forger
A Clerk at the Bank
Lord Rothschild



God of This World

ACT 2, SCENE 1 - QUACKS AND A BEAU

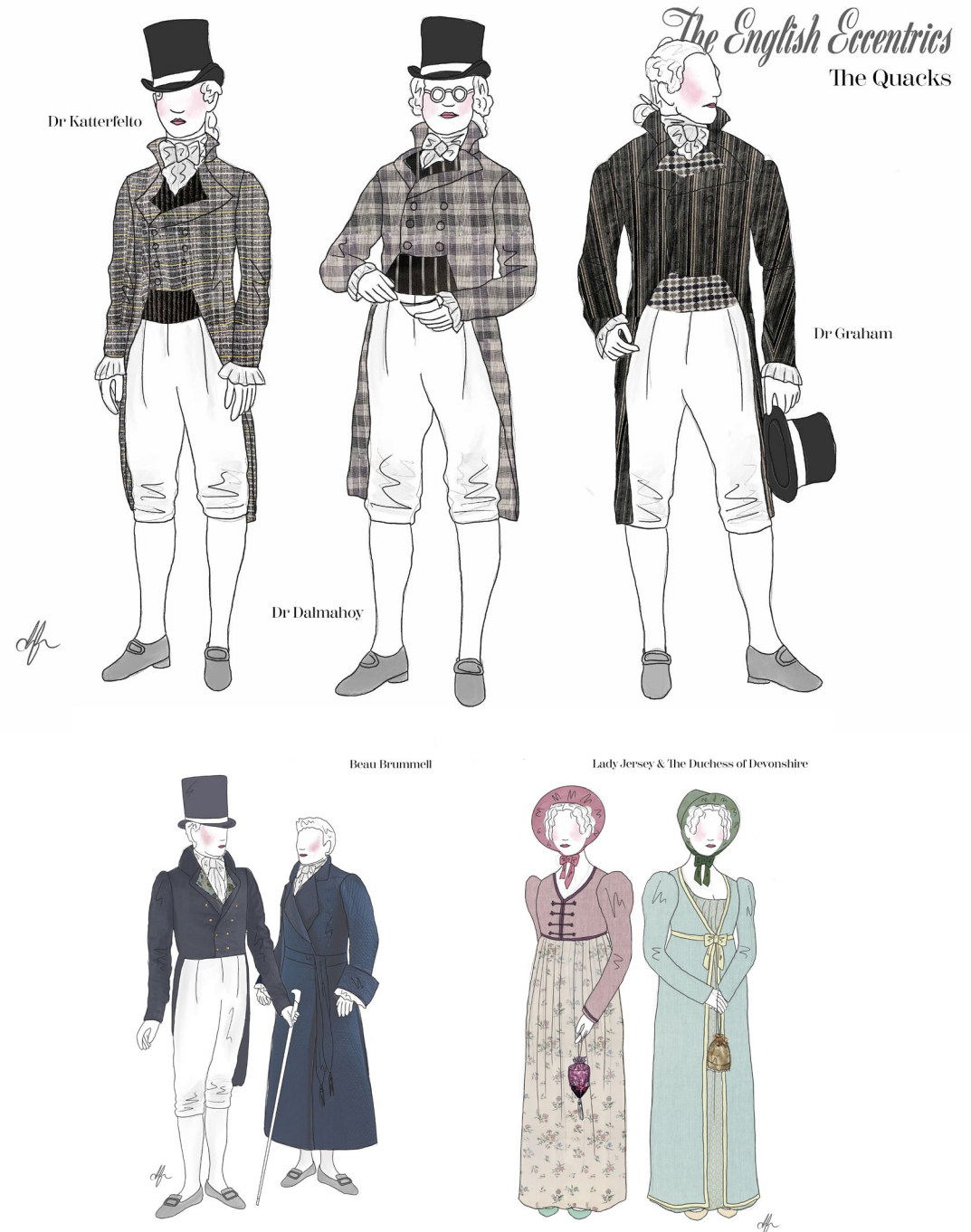
SYNOPSIS

We open Act 2 with a trio of doctors extolling the benefits of their wondrous inventions and services before we overhear gossip from the court. The Duchess of Devonshire and Lady Jersey hear from Beau Brummell the story of Robert 'Romeo' Coates attending the Prince Regent's Ball. He attended in an overly decorated outfit dripping in pearls and diamonds only to be thrown out on his ear. It seems his invitation was a forgery.

“And Mr Coates was politely shown the door, and went home with his diamonds in a Hackney carriage!”

Characters

Doctor Dalmahoy
Doctor Katterfelto
Lady Jersey
Doctor Graham
Sarah Whitehead
The Duchess of Devonshire
Beau Brummell



ACT 2, SCENE 2 - AN ORNAMENTAL HERMIT

SYNOPSIS

The sad and isolated Captain Thicknesse delivers an aria about cruel fate. Set on the historically significant Lansdowne Hill (the site of a significant civil war battle), Thicknesse overlooks the Avon River and recounts the disappointments in his life centred around the bitter relationship with Major Peter Labellière. With no love in his life, no fortune, and the land around his home being sold, Captain Thicknesse resolves that for the remainder of his life, he will live as a hermit.

“The duplicity of mankind has moved me to retire from the world and live as a hermit.”

Characters

Captain Phillip Thicknesse

Captain Phillip Thicknesse

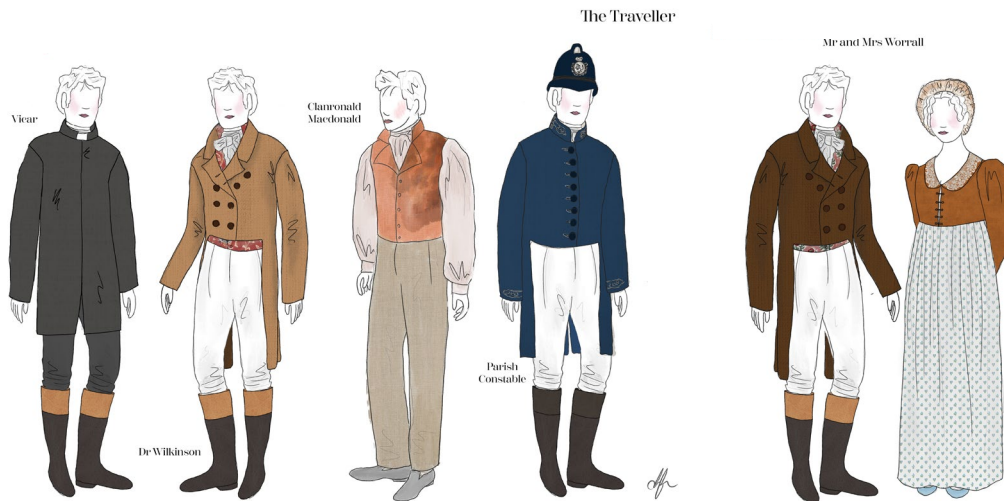


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ACT 2, SCENE 3 - A TRAVELLER

SYNOPSIS

In this scene we are introduced to the indelible tale of Princess Caraboo or Mary Baker (nee Willcock's) as she was known in real-life. The young woman, dressed in exotic silks and speaking an incomprehensible language, appears on the doorstep of the Worrall's seeking refuge. The next morning, a retinue of curious onlookers descend on the Worrall's home to investigate the exotic visitor. The Vicar of Almondsbury introduces the linguist Doctor Wilkinson who declares that Caraboo is indeed a Princess from Jarvasu. He discovers that her appearance in Gloucestershire has been brought about after being deserted by pirates who kidnapped her from her native lands. Mrs Worrall sees through the guise and threatens to report her to the authorities causing Caraboo to flee to London. As the so-called Princess is being presented to the dandy Beau Brummell, the authorities catch-up and the deceit is foiled.



“Alright, alright, nonsense!”

Characters

Princess Caraboo
Mr Worrall
Mrs Worrall
The Vicar of Almondsbury
Doctor Wilkinson
Mr Clanronald Macdonald
The Parish Constable

Princess Caraboo

ACT 2, SCENE 4 - THE BEAU AGAIN

SYNOPSIS

Our opera ends with the demise of the great dandy and keeper of the secrets from the Royal Court, Beau Brummell. Through his mind's-eye he is visited by some of his former great friends to play the card game, Whist - a game that led him into debt and seeking asylum in France. He is tormented by the thought of debt collectors in his final hours.

**“Come along, they welcome you.
These two kind sisters will take you.”**

Characters

Beau Brummell

Etienne

First Nun

Second Nun



The Beau Again



“Eccentricity is not, as dull people would have us believe, a form of madness. It is often a kind of innocent pride, and the man of genius and the aristocrat are frequently regarded as eccentrics because genius and aristocrat are entirely unafraid of and uninfluenced by the opinions and vagaries of the crowd.”

EDITH SITWELL

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SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

Let us know what you thought of *English Eccentrics*
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