



Judith Weir



# THE VANISHING BRIDEGROOM

Ailish Tynan *soprano* • Anna Stéphany *soprano* • Andrew Tortise *tenor* • Owen Gilhooly *baritone*  
Jonathan Lemalu *bass baritone* • BBC Singers • BBC Symphony Orchestra • Martyn Brabbins *conductor*



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## THE VANISHING BRIDEGROOM

Bride / Wife / Mother    **Ailish Tynan** *soprano*  
 Daughter    **Anna Stéphany** *soprano*  
 Lover / Friend / Preacher    **Andrew Tortise** *tenor*  
 Bridegroom / Husband / Father    **Owen Gilhooly** *baritone*  
 Doctor / Policeman / Stranger    **Jonathan Lemalu** *bass baritone*

Narrator    **Stephen Jeffes** \*  
 Dying Man    **Andrew Murgatroyd** \*  
 Youngest Son    **Christopher Bowen** \*  
 Middle Son    **Edward Goater** \*  
 Eldest Son    **Edward Price** \*  
 Bride's Father    **Simon Birchall** \*  
 Good Robber    **Paul Haas Curievici** #  
 Bad Robber 1    **Nicolas Simeha** #  
 Bad Robber 2    **Jonathan Saunders** #  
 Woman 1    **Olivia Robinson** \*  
 Woman 2    **Sién Menna** \*  
 Woman 3    **Lynette Alcantara** \*

\* From BBC Singers

# From Guildhall School of Music and Drama



Stephen Betteridge *chorus master* • Anthony Legge *repetiteur* • Alexandra Jones *Gaelic coach*

BBC Singers • BBC Symphony Orchestra • Martyn Brabbins *conductor*

### Disc 1

#### I The Inheritance

1	<b>The Deathbed</b> Narrator: 'There was a man'	0'41
2	Chorus: 'Cold, icy rain'	1'18
3	The Dying Man sits up	1'54
4	The Dying Man dies	0'33
5	Chorus: 'Gone!'	1'22
6	Doctor: 'I knew your father'	0'47
7	<b>The Passion</b> The Bride and her Lover	2'31
8	The Bride's Father materialises	2'41
9	<b>The Wedding</b>	2'09
10	Bride: 'I would sleep wherever his bed might be'	1'13
11	Doctor: 'He ended the wedding'	1'52
12	<b>At the Lover's House</b> The Lover appears with a light	1'41
13	A Priest appears	1'57
14	<b>The Wood</b> The Lover vanishes	3'03
15	The Bride: 'Let me go!'	1'41
16	The Bride and the Good Robber vanish into the distance	0'37
17	<b>The Reckoning</b> Doctor: 'Now. Which of these people'	1'40
18	Chorus: 'Shame!'	1'16
19	<b>Conclusion</b>	1'43

30'39

#### II The Disappearance

20	<b>The Hill</b>	2'52
21	<b>At Home</b> Ladies: 'I pray Peter'	3'50
22	<b>Towards the Hill</b> The Husband and the Friend set out	2'23
23	Husband: 'The endless expense'	4'44
24	<b>At Home</b>	1'55
25	Policeman: 'People just disappear'	1'04

30'44

26	The Friend enters, distraught	1'21
27	Policeman: 'People don't just disappear'	1'34
28	The Policeman and Friend leave in the direction of the Hill.	0'32
29	<b>The Hill (i)</b>	1'29
30	Women: 'He's gone, he's gone' (i)	0'39
31	<b>The Hill (ii)</b>	1'33
32	Women: 'He's gone, he's gone' (ii)	0'36
33	<b>The Hill (iii)</b> The men, still watching	3'49
34	<b>Towards Home</b>	2'23
	CD 1 total	61'44

## Disc 2

### III The Stranger

1	The Daughter, alone on a hillside	1'31
2	Daughter: 'And she was to lie'	1'13
3	Stranger: 'You are whiter than the swan'	1'36
4	The Stranger performs a miracle	1'54
5	Stranger: 'Come away with me'	1'30
6	Mother / Father: 'What a charming young man'	1'38
7	Preacher: 'Hooves!'	1'46
8	The Priest marks a circle	2'45
9	The Daughter: 'No fire shall burn me'	3'00
10	The Stranger assaults the circle	1'02
11	The Stranger appears transformed	1'56
12	Chorus: 'Hosts of angels on thy side'	1'32
	CD 2 total	21'30

21'30

# SYNOPSIS

## I The Inheritance

A man dies, but his legacy is missing: one of his three sons must have stolen it, but which one? The Doctor investigates by telling the sons a tale of a woman, forbidden to marry her lover, and married off to a richer man.

## II The Disappearance

On the birth of the Bride and Bridegroom's daughter, the husband leaves to fetch the Priest who will christen her, but on the way is lured into a brightly lit hillside – the 'Land of the Young'. His friend is accused of murder.

## III The Stranger

A handsome prosperous stranger arrives to woo the daughter, now a young woman. The girl is suspicious, and a passing preacher tells her he is obviously the Devil: she retires to a holy spot and the Devil is unable to harm her.

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# NOTE BY JUDITH WEIR

When I first read J F Campbell's anthology *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (1860-2) I was struck most strongly by what the book was not. It is unusual to read old stories from the Scottish countryside which are not romantic, historical, anthropological, folksy and full of hard times, magnificent scenery and severe weather conditions. Instead the Highlanders of J F Campbell's collection spoke about the things we really think about in everyday life; death, money, sex, love, marriage and so on. Their language has a severity and bareness which seems utterly truthful and documentary. But the events of the stories are quite the opposite; supernatural and fantastic. The magic of the book lies in the tension between extraordinary stories, and the ordinary people who tell them.

The opera is made out of three separate stories. All three feature vanishing bridegrooms; seen together, they form a continuous narrative about one particular marriage.

## I The Inheritance

This story, told by a cottar named Donald MacIntyre, was noted down by J F Campbell in an inn overlooking the Sound of Benbecula on 6 September 1859. Translated out of Gaelic into English, the language and themes have a formality and severity that recall the least religious parts of the Old Testament. A man dies, his legacy is missing, and in order to unmask the thief, a parable is told about a woman betrothed to a secret

lover, who is married off to someone else in a more financially advantageous arrangement. The themes of the story seem to be highly moral – the sinfulness of greed and deceit – but the plight of the Bride (shuttled between husband and lover, punished by her father, and set upon on a dark night in a wood by robbers) appears to worry no-one in the story unduly.

She is the only woman character in the first act of the opera (apart from fleeting appearances by the female chorus, who represent the Thick Wood) and the prevailing sound of the music is of the many male voices surrounding her, especially the stern and judgemental male voice choir who open and close the act; and the Three Sons who voyeuristically follow her, in close harmony, through the events of the story.

Traditionally at Scottish funerals, it was only the men who attended the graveside part of the ceremony; the massed male voices of the chorus may also recall the staggered entries and slowly moving tones of the 'long psalms' sung by Gaelic congregations in the Western Isles. Structurally, the whole twenty-five minute parable might be regarded as a particularly extended musical embellishment between two lines of the 'psalm' sung by the chorus at the beginning and end of the act.

A final detail which places the subject matter firmly in Scotland: just like the heroine of *Lucia di Lammermoor*, what really worries the Bride is the thought that, having declared her everlasting commitment to her lover, the marriage arranged for her by her parents will be a bigamous union. Right up to 1939, the formal declaration by a couple that they were man and wife constituted a valid marriage under Scots law.

## II The Disappearance

The fairies surround this story. Who are they? Not, I think, the delicate pre-Raphaelite creatures of English middle class children's stories. All the Celtic stories mention the malevolence of the fairies, who are apt to kidnap children and even grown men. Being taken away by the fairies seems to be a metaphor for dying or undergoing a serious illness. The fairies of Scottish mythology are, in effect, the living dead.

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers* gives you a much better idea of them than Peter Pan.

The husband who emerges from twenty years in a magical region quite untouched by the passing of time, whilst all around him are ravaged with age, is, of course, a familiar figure in folklore. Musical theatre, with its completely 'unrealistic' musical timescale, is the perfect mode of expression for such a story. Paradoxically, the husband who deludes himself that he has only spent a few minutes in the company of the fairies is, in terms of real time, quite right; it is those waiting for him who, thanks to the miracle of musical time, have hallucinated the passing of twenty years in about ten minutes.

Musically, the balance in the opera between male and female voices is redressed in this act by a group of three women who, together with the deserted wife, track the events of the story in a progressively developing refrain which motivates the musical development of the act. Their music consists of successive elaborations of a simple pedal or drone chord in the act's home key of G. The idea of a developing refrain was strongly influenced by the structural processes of the 'waulking songs' traditionally sung by women preparing cloth in the Western Isles. Like that music, this piece calls for a skein of strong independent voices, rather than a suave blend.

The fairies are the only people in the opera who are heard to speak in Gaelic. As a newcomer to the language, I was struck by its endlessly interesting vowels and its self-effacing consonants. What language could be more appropriate for the rapt, motionless music the fairies sing?

## III The Stranger

*Caim, cam*: a loop, a curve, a circle, a sanctuary, an imaginary circle described with the hand round himself by a person in fear, danger or distress

*Carmina Gadelica* Vol 2

The passing Preacher who aids the young heroine of this story is a fire-and-brimstone enthusiast; while his expertise with holy charms and magic circles brings a squadron of angels out of the sky at the end of the opera. Throughout these stories, religion appears as a supernatural force rather than as a considered spiritual philosophy.

By contrast, the regular appearances in Scottish literature (e.g. *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*; *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*) of characters who combine the extremes of good and evil suggest that this is a nation that tries hard to spot the difference between the two. The Stranger may appear to be a charming operatic hero, but he cannot fool the orchestra, who give him a phosphorescent accompaniment whenever he sings.

Structurally, the act can once again be seen as a musical interpolation within a traditional form, this time the Scottish ballad with which the Daughter opens the act.

The ballad has a complex design, consisting of two sets of questions and answers: the bulk of the action takes place between the second set of questions she asks the stranger at the beginning, and the answers she gives the Devil at the end.

In conventional operatic terms, the concluding scene is unusual. The romantic lead proposes marriage to the heroine, who decides this would not be in her best interests and leaves the stage content and in control – it is the male singer who ends up tormented and perhaps dead. In the circumstances, it is an optimistic ending.

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# THE VANISHING BRIDEGROOM

## Disc 1

### I THE INHERITANCE

#### 1 The Deathbed

##### **NARRATOR** (*male voice*)

There was a man, and he had three sons;  
When he was on the bed of death, he called for them:

*The music of the following scene enters suddenly with a big sweep – the effect of a page turning or a curtain drawn back. A dying man on his deathbed surrounded by his three sons – a doctor is also in attendance.*

#### 2 MALE CHORUS

Cold icy rain  
His ship departs  
Farewell to him, ship on the sea  
The long night and the cold day  
The long night and the cold...

#### 3 *The DYING MAN suddenly sits up.*

##### **DYING MAN**

Sons, my sons  
Hear my last words!

##### **SONS**

Hosanna! Revival!

##### **DYING MAN**

Hear my last words,  
Hear my last...

*He suddenly slumps.*

##### **MALE CHORUS**

Farewell to him, ship on the sea,  
The long night and the cold...

*The DYING MAN suddenly revives.*

##### **DYING MAN**

Sons, my sons!  
In a certain place –  
– in a certain place

##### **SONS**

**DYING MAN** In a chest of drawers –

##### **SONS**

– in a chest of drawers

##### **DYING MAN**

I left behind a sum of gold –

##### **SONS**

A sum of gold!

*From this point on the SONS' attention shifts gradually away from the father and towards the chest of drawers.*

##### **DYING MAN**

Divide it up amongst yourselves  
Work the farm and bide together  
Live in faith and charity  
Worship God and fear his...

- 4 *He suddenly slumps, now completely dead. The SONS are at first surreptitious, then increasingly cheerful.*

### YOUNGEST / MIDDLE SONS

A sum of gold! A sum of gold!

### ELDEST SON

Divide it up amongst yourselves

### SONS (*edging towards chest*)

In a certain place,  
In a chest of drawers,

5 Gone!

*The chest is found to be empty.*

*An elegiac trio follows (elegiac for the lost money rather than the father).*

### YOUNGEST SON

Who knows if there was ever any money at all?

### MIDDLE / ELDEST

Who knows?

Our father never told a lie – he never did

There was some money certainly

Where it is I cannot tell

### YOUNGEST SON

(Who knows if there was ever any money at all?)

### MIDDLE / ELDEST

Let us ask his friend

Who knew him well (*they indicate the DOCTOR*)

He was at school with him

He knew his matters well

Let us ask him!

6

### DOCTOR

I knew your father certainly

### SONS

( – he knew him)

### DOCTOR

He never told a lie –

### SONS

( – he never did)

### DOCTOR

There was some money surely there

Where it is I cannot tell –

### SONS

( – he cannot tell)

### DOCTOR

To understand the matter better

Hear my parable

### SONS

( – hear his parable... )

*Once again a new page or curtain is turned in the music, and there is another huge start as the opening scene of the DOCTOR's story is revealed: a beautiful woman in a passionate embrace with a young man.*

### 7 The Passion

*Throughout his story, the DOCTOR and SONS conceal themselves in the scenes of the parable, at times almost bumping into the parable characters.*

*The BRIDE and her LOVER are suddenly apparent. The DOCTOR and three SONS observe the action as if concealed in the BRIDE's bedroom, or wherever the action takes place.*

### BRIDE

Between your two arms till morning

If only you had me

I would sleep wherever your bed might be

At the top of a tower or the foot of a tree

In the grey sand on the bed of the sea

*The DOCTOR interpolates his commentary; the LOVER echoes the BRIDE rapturously, as the SONS enthusiastically echo the DOCTOR.*

### DOCTOR

There was a rich man's daughter

There was a poor man's son

There came the day, there came the hour

When love took them!

8 *The BRIDE'S FATHER materialises; a sinister figure, rigid with disapproval, who casts a chilly shadow over the BRIDE's pleasure.*

### DOCTOR

Her father discovered her love and forbid it

Saying 'You cannot get married, you cannot get married'

### FATHER

You cannot get married, you cannot get married,  
He hasn't the money, you cannot get married

*Bowing under the weight of parental disapproval, the LOVER prepares to leave; the BRIDE detains him; the music flares up.*

### BRIDE

Wait! I pledge myself, now I swear

I give you a solemn and binding pledge of  
my love

I swear on the book

*A book (possibly the Bible) miraculously appears, on which the BRIDE swears an oath.*

*The LOVER disappears into the distance, disconsolately.*

*A BRIDEGROOM is produced. The FATHER hands the BRIDEGROOM a dowry; this is the sum of money which the ROBBERS will eventually steal from the BRIDE.*

### DOCTOR

Her father produced a new suitor

Whose prospects were better

The day of their wedding dawned.

### SONS

DAWNED!

### 9 The Wedding

*Preparations for a wedding breakfast which will include a dance; fiddlers are tuning up. A listless and subdued atmosphere. The DOCTOR and the three SONS once again unobtrusively inhabit the scene (perhaps disguised as the fiddlers).*

*Musically, this scene is in the traditional Scottish fiddle form of slow air (as the BRIDE dresses), medium tempo strathspey (as the BRIDE and*

*BRIDEGROOM* dance), and fast reel (as they run away from the wedding). The musical mood moves from mournful to cheerful as the *BRIDE* begins to see her escape route.

The *BRIDE* slowly and sullenly dons her wedding attire; the *BRIDEGROOM* watches stonily. The *BRIDE* sings to herself abstractedly.

#### **BRIDE**

I said to him... He promised  
I declared my love... I said it out loud  
He heard me say:  
I swore on the book, he heard me say,  
I would sleep wherever his bed might be  
At the top of a tower or the foot of a tree.

*The BRIDEGROOM* responds, grave and serious

#### **BRIDEGROOM**

Ah, what ails thee?  
Ah, whatever ails thee?

*A slow dance strikes up. The BRIDE and BRIDEGROOM begin to dance with cold formality.*

#### **10 BRIDE**

I would sleep wherever his bed might be...

#### **BRIDEGROOM**

Ah, who is he?  
Ah, whoever is he?  
Ah, whatever ails thee?

#### **BRIDE**

I swore on the book!

*The BRIDE* suddenly 'extinguishes' the wedding. Sudden motion and agitations (as the wedding things are perhaps put away).

#### **11 DOCTOR**

He ended the wedding;  
He spoke to his Bride, and said:

#### **BRIDEGROOM**

Come, take thy father's money  
(*He is referring to the dowry*)  
And follow me!

*The BRIDE and the BRIDEGROOM start to run through the countryside (the DOCTOR and SONS surreptitiously in hot pursuit, perhaps still fiddling agitatedly.)*

#### **DOCTOR**

She ran beside him  
There in the darkness  
She in her wedding dress.  
To the house of the other man  
The man to whom she had promised...

*They arrive at the LOVER's house; the BRIDEGROOM strikes the door.*

#### **BRIDEGROOM**

Is there man within?

*No reply – the SONS try to help attract attention.*

#### **SONS**

Is there man within?

#### **12 At the Lover's House**

*At the same moment the LOVER appears with a light, and the BRIDEGROOM vanishes.*

*The BRIDE and the LOVER are alone, the LOVER now coldly formal.*

#### **LOVER** (*stiffly, uneasily*)

What brought thee here?

#### **BRIDE**

Such a man!  
(*Eagerly, expecting a warm response*)  
I married him today  
I told him of our promise  
He brought me here himself  
And left me...

#### **LOVER**

Sit thou there  
Art thou not married?  
Our pledge must be cancelled  
Someone must witness this.  
I will call for a priest.

**13** *A PRIEST emerges from a convenient location, writing a document of absolution, accompanied by a male voice quartet.*

#### **PRIESTLY QUARTET**

Gloria in excelsis!  
Hosanna deo!  
Te absolveo

*The PRIEST slowly exits; the document is handed to the BRIDE.*

#### **LOVER**

This line the Priest has written  
Releases you from your vow  
Now return to thy husband!

#### **14 The Wood**

*The LOVER vanishes. The BRIDE is left alone in the darkness; she runs agitatedly this way and that.*

#### **DOCTOR**

The Bride ran away  
in her wedding dress  
She had not gone far  
when she came to a Thick Wood  
Over the Thick Wood  
the moon was shining:

#### **THE THICK WOOD** (*Women's Chorus*)

The Moon was Shining!  
The Moon was Shining!

*The WOMEN'S CHORUS / THICK WOOD sings these words as a bright, electric slogan, almost like a musical neon sign.*

*The Thick Wood is revealed; a busy place with many people skulking around, including the DOCTOR and SONS; and, eventually, the three ROBBERS.*

**DOCTOR**

In the trees of the Thick Wood  
Three Robbers were hiding

*Three ROBBERS are revealed.*

**TWO BAD ROBBERS**

We have waited long  
and we have got nothing

**GOOD ROBBER** *(expansively)*

God forgive us!

**DOCTOR**

One of the Robbers  
was not as bad as the others

**GOOD ROBBER**

God forgive us!

**THICK WOOD**

God forgive us all!

*The BRIDE is seen approaching.*

**BAD ROBBERS**

Aha!  
We have waited long and  
We have got nothing but  
Now we have got the Bride herself!

**15 BRIDE**

Let me go! let me go!  
Let me go to my husband!  
The man I was pledged to has let me go!  
Take thou the money  
ten pounds in gold  
take thou the money  
  
*She proffers the dowry.*

**GOOD ROBBER** I will not take a penny!

**BAD ROBBERS** Give us the money!

*The BAD ROBBERS seize the money and rush off.*

**GOOD ROBBER** Thieves!

**THICK WOOD** Stop thieves!

**BRIDE** Thieves!

**16** *They vanish into the distance; the parable begins to fade out. The DOCTOR tells the end of the story, meanwhile moving the location back towards the DEAD MAN's bedside.*

**DOCTOR**

The Robber took her to her husband

**GOOD ROBBER**

I will take you home again myself...

**DOCTOR**

She showed him the line the priest had written  
and her husband was pleased.

**17 The Reckoning**

*Back at the DYING (now DEAD) MAN's bedside. The three SONS are confronted by the DOCTOR, who is joined, as at the beginning of The Inheritance, by the full male CHORUS including all the other male characters of the piece (probably, but not necessarily, excluding the DEAD MAN).*

**DOCTOR**

Now. Which of all these people  
Do you think did best?  
*(plus CHORUS)*

Who was the finest person?

**ELDEST SON** *(square, sure)*

I think the Bridegroom  
He that sent the woman back,  
He was the honest generous man,  
He did well.

**MIDDLE SON** *(firm)*

Yes! He did well  
But the man to whom she was pledged  
He did still better  
He sent her back to her husband.

**DOCTOR / CHORUS** *(to YOUNGEST SON)*

And you?  
What do you think?

**YOUNGEST SON** *(hesitant, non-committal – we expect him to choose the GOOD ROBBER)*  
Well, I don't know myself  
But perhaps the wisest of all  
Were the two robbers who ran away with the money...

*A shocked intake of breath, stern and judgemental. Everyone (including the two other BROTHERS) rounds on the YOUNGEST SON. During the course of the following chorus, the money of the stolen legacy is discovered on his person: perhaps it pours out of him.*

**18 DOCTOR / CHORUS / ELDEST & MIDDLE SONS**

Shame!  
The gold and the silver was his!  
*(indicating YOUNGEST SON)*  
We kept you here: we watched you well  
The gold and the silver was his,  
The money was got and divided.

**19 Conclusion**

*Everyone slowly begins to move away into the distance: perhaps as if to the funeral of the DEAD MAN. The YOUNGEST SON is possibly arrested and led away. There is a slow orchestral fade, out of which two solo voices emerge, singing a few fragmentary phrases of a psalm tune.*

**SOLO VOICES**

'... and in His house for evermore...'

## II THE DISAPPEARANCE

*Set in two locations, the Hill and the Home.  
Perhaps both are visible throughout.*

### 20 The Hill

*The Hill, faintly illuminated or glowing.*

### 21 At Home

*The WIFE has a newly-born daughter on whom her attention is completely focused. Three WOMEN (chorus roles – perhaps neighbours, friends, midwives) knit sternly. The HUSBAND and his FRIEND stare out into the distance, somewhat detached from the scene.*

#### WIFE / WOMEN

I pray Peter, I pray Paul  
I pray Saint Patrick and holy Columba  
To guard you from the monsters

#### HUSBAND / FRIEND

... from the monsters...

#### WIFE / WOMEN

From robbers, from betrayers

#### HUSBAND / FRIEND

... betrayers...

#### WIFE / WOMEN

From every evil wish and sorrow

#### HUSBAND / FRIEND

... evil wish... sorrow...

#### WIFE / WOMEN

From the beasts of the heights,  
From the snakes of the desert

#### HUSBAND / FRIEND

... the desert...

#### WIFE / WOMEN

From the birds of the air  
From the creatures of the brine.  
From marsh, from rock, from pit,  
From spite, from eye, from omen,  
From venom, from envy  
From the wiles of the wicked

#### HUSBAND / FRIEND

... the wicked...

#### WIFE / HUSBAND / FRIEND

*(HUSBAND / FRIEND with an increase of animation – they are about to set out)*

As Christ raised the fruit  
Over the tops of the bushes  
May he lift from you now  
Each spell, each curse, each blindness

### 22 Towards the Hill

*The HUSBAND and the FRIEND set out in the direction of the Hill (they are going to fetch the Priest for the christening.) They travel with difficulty over treacherous and menacing terrain.*

#### FRIEND

Ten miles to the Priest's house

#### HUSBAND

Ten miles back

#### FRIEND

A child on the island again,  
... a little girl

#### HUSBAND

A christening, another mouth to feed,  
... more expense...

#### HUSBAND

The roof of my byre is down, it fell in the wind  
I ploughed my field and it flooded out.

The peats blew over, I dug them for days.

My animals scattered,  
they fell in the burn, they swam out to sea,

The time it took, the aches and the pains,

23 ... the endless expense...

The FAIRIES (*who speak in Gaelic throughout*) –  
*their entry heard imperceptibly at first under the end of the previous words:*

A-nochd!

[Tonight!]

*An alluring glow from the direction of the Hill.*

*The HUSBAND, noticing it, is stopped in his tracks; the FRIEND does not notice it, or pretends not to notice... They resume their journey.*

#### FRIEND

Ten miles to the Priest's house

#### HUSBAND

Ten miles back

I saw sunlight on the hill just then

#### FRIEND

You saw nothing of the sort

#### HUSBAND

Sunlight, bright sunlight!

#### FRIEND

No sunlight in November

*FAIRIES (warm, seductive), sung quietly under the rest of the scene*

Fire, faire, ho-ro-ho

Gu de ni mi, nochd ri m'naire

[What will I do with you tonight, my darling?]

*The Hill once again glowing or illuminated.*

#### HUSBAND

Come over here!

*The HUSBAND is lured towards it. The FRIEND tries to ignore it, perhaps suppressing terror.*

#### FRIEND

Come back here!

#### HUSBAND

Warm breezes, bright welcoming lights

I see people, people I knew

I knew them well

#### FRIEND

There's no-one about for miles

**HUSBAND**

Go on, I'll catch you up

**FRIEND**

Come back!

*The HUSBAND disappears into the Hill; the FRIEND remains at a safe distance from it as the scene fades.*

**24 At Home**

*The WIFE and three WOMEN express their anxiety at the prolonged absence of the two men. A POLICEMAN has fortuitously appeared in their midst to investigate the disappearance.*

**WOMEN**

He just walked out...  
He'll never come back...  
He's gone, he's gone, he's gone...

**WIFE**

That night they made your wedding feast  
Ochoin, my God, it was your funeral  
Did they not put a linen shroud around you?  
Did they not shovel earth and soil upon you?  
When I thought you were on the hillside,  
You were dead, your soul departed.

**25 POLICEMAN**

People just disappear  
That's what they do  
They decide on the spur of the moment  
They just get up and leave

They don't say a word to a soul  
They just walk away in the distance  
They leave

**26** *The FRIEND enters alone, exhausted and dishevelled.*

**FRIEND**

I said, I told him  
Stay away from there  
Stay away from those...

We went to fetch the Priest  
to christen the baby  
We went by the hill,  
the Round hill

**POLICEMAN (echoes him)****FRIEND**

We saw lights, we heard sounds  
I said, I told him  
Stay away from the...  
Stay away from those places.  
He said – You go ahead  
I'll catch you up

**27** **POLICEMAN**  
People don't just disappear  
They don't do that

**FRIEND**

I didn't do it!  
It wasn't me!

**WOMEN**

He's gone

**FRIEND**

I didn't kill him

**POLICEMAN**

You decided on the spur of the moment  
You did him in

**FRIEND**

I didn't!

**POLICEMAN (an afterthought)**

Let's go back there  
We'll wait for him  
He'll soon come back

**FRIEND**

He will!

**WOMEN**

He won't!

**POLICEMAN**

We won't be long  
We'll see you

**FRIEND**

Soon

**28** *The POLICEMAN and the FRIEND leave, in the direction of the Hill.*

**29 The Hill**

*The Hill: mysterious and still, save perhaps for an occasional small movement – wind blowing the vegetation; a rabbit; the clouds moving.*

*Presently the FRIEND and POLICEMAN arrive; they watch the Hill, and wait.*

**CHORUS**

Siubhlainn leat ro na tri gleanntan  
[I'd go with you through the three glens]

**30 Home**

*Some time has passed. The WOMEN knit sternly, the baby is now a small child.*

**WOMEN**

He's gone, he's gone  
He'll nevermore come back

**31 The Hill**

*More time has elapsed. The MEN continue to watch the almost motionless hill, and wait. They are greyer, their beards are starting to sprout.*

*The music of this scene is a literal repeat of **29**, including the CHORUS.*

**32 Home**

*The child is now an older girl, the knitting is getting very long.*

*The music of this scene is almost a literal repeat of **30**, but with a slightly faster tempo.*

**33 The Hill**

*The MEN still watching, their hair white, their beards immensely long*

**POLICEMAN**

I think you told me a lie

**FRIEND**

I didn't

I said he went in the hill

**POLICEMAN**

You said he'd soon be back

**FRIEND**

And so he will

**POLICEMAN**

I don't believe you

You're under arrest

**FRIEND**

It's the truth!

*The HUSBAND emerges, radiantly youthful and energetic.*

**HUSBAND**

I went to the Land of the Living

Where there is neither death nor transgression

Where the young never die before the old

**CHORUS (in the background):**

Fois or 'o cheum

till a nios rium

[Halt your step

Come up back to me]

*The inhabitants of the hill are at last fully visible and illuminated.*

**HUSBAND**

Where the ridge of every moor is purple,

There comes at sunrise

A man who lights the lowlands

He sweeps the plains, he stirs the ocean

So that it falls as rain.

White is the earth there, blue the waters

Every hill the colour of foxglove

I passed the hill, I heard a voice say:

Rise up from your bed of rest,

adventure will rule you now.

*The FRIEND gently pulls the HUSBAND away from the hill, or simply lays a hand on him (in the original story 'he caught him by the sleeve'). The light and radiant energy begin to fade; the CHORUS begin to disappear.*

**34 Towards Home**

*The POLICEMAN fades out of the scene; the HUSBAND and FRIEND are left alone in the darkness.*

**HUSBAND**

Could you not let me be for an instant?

**FRIEND**

An instant? See my face! See my grey hair!

Years have passed.

**HUSBAND**

I was away but a moment

We set out to fetch the priest

to christen the baby

*The DAUGHTER is visible, now 'grown up' and seen as she will appear at the beginning of the next story.*

**HUSBAND**

It's time we went and found him...

*The FRIEND leads the HUSBAND away in the direction of home; compassionately, as one would lead a child.*

*Just as the HUSBAND and WIFE seem about to be reunited, the scene ends.*

**WIFE / WOMEN**

Young man, return!

**Disc 2****III THE STRANGER**

**1** *The DAUGHTER, alone on a hillside, performing an agricultural task, and singing a folksong.*

**DAUGHTER**

There was a knight riding frae the east

**CHORUS**

Sing the cather banks, the bonny brume

**DAUGHTER**

He'd been wooing at mony a place

**CHORUS**

You may be meeting a stranger soon

**DAUGHTER**

He came unto a widow's door

And speired where her three dochters were

The auldest's to the washing gane

**CHORUS**

Sing the cather banks, the bonny brume

**DAUGHTER**

The second's to a bakin' gane

**CHORUS**

You may be meeting your lover soon

**DAUGHTER**

The youngest's to a wedding gane

And it'll be nicht ere she comes hame

He set him doon upon a stane

**CHORUS**

Sing the cather banks, the bonny brume

**DAUGHTER**

Till a' three lasses cam' trippin' hame

**CHORUS**

You may be meeting your bridegroom soon

**DAUGHTER**

The auldest's to the bed makkin'

The second's to the sheet spreddin'

The youngest one was bold and bricht...

*The STRANGER enters unobtrusively. The DAUGHTER does not see him at first, although she is immediately aware of the darkening atmosphere. As the song progresses she becomes more and more aware of, and anxious about, his presence.*

**2 DAUGHTER**

And she was to lie with this unknown knight

Gin ye will answer me questions ten

This morn ye shall be made my ain

What is higher than the tree?

**STRANGER**

Sing the cather banks, the bonny brume

**DAUGHTER**

What is deeper than the sea?

**STRANGER**

You may be meeting a stranger soon

**DAUGHTER**

What is heavier than lead?

What is better than the breid?

Or what is whiter than the milk?

**STRANGER**

Sing the cather banks, the bonny brume

**DAUGHTER**

What is softer than the silk

**STRANGER**

You may be meeting your lover soon

**DAUGHTER**

Or what is sharper than the thorn

Or what is louder than the horn?

Or what gleams brighter than the brass

And what is the worst that ever was?

**3 STRANGER (as if changing the subject)**

You are whiter than the swan on the

swampy lake

**DAUGHTER**

Your head is somewhat pointed

**STRANGER**

You are whiter than the seagull of the stream

**DAUGHTER**

Your feet are strangely rounded

**STRANGER**

You are whiter than the snow on the peak of

the mountains

**DAUGHTER**

Is that seaweed behind your ear?

Are those water reeds in your hair?

**STRANGER**

You are whiter than the souls of all the angels

in heaven.

See what I will do for you:

- 4** *He lifts a handful of sheep droppings, or possibly earth, up from the ground, and it immediately turns to small pellets of gold.*

**CHORUS**

Lo! Spheres of shining gold

Glitter in the sun

Like the fireflies of the night

**5 STRANGER**

Come away with me

Be my wife

I'll be here at sunset

Answer me then

Answer me

*The Stranger disappears. Presently, the MOTHER and FATHER (who have overheard the previous scene, possibly hovering in the background) appear.*

**6 MOTHER / FATHER**

What a charming young man

What a friendly and easy manner

What a catch he would be

You would never be disappointed.

They say he has land in the east

They say he has money to burn

**DAUGHTER**

His brow seems to come to a point

As if he had horns on his head

**MOTHER / FATHER (carrying on regardless)**

What a charming young man, etc

*The conversation attracts the attention of a passing PREACHER.*

**PREACHER**

Did I hear you say he has horns?

**DAUGHTER**

Yes, and he seems to have hooves where his feet should be.

**7 PREACHER**

Hooves!

**MOTHER / FATHER**

What a charming young man, etc

**PREACHER**

He surely came from Hell –

*(in a devout frenzy)*

... That place of flame and filth  
that place of stench and lamentation  
in streams of everlasting fire  
in seas of endless tears, of death and torment  
of dismal torture  
a place of maggots, of swarming locusts,  
of raging tigers and roaring lions  
bleak treeless plains, vertiginous ravines  
dark lonely forests,  
continuously falling fire and brimstone  
a place of everlasting woe and grief  
a place of everlasting shame  
and sorrow unending  
the man you spoke to was from Hell!  
I think it was the Devil Himself...

- 8 *He has a holy inspiration; he marks a circle round the spot where the DAUGHTER is standing, and blesses the ground she stands on.*

**PREACHER**

I will take my Book,  
I will make this place a sanctuary  
I will throw a circle of peace  
around the spot on which you stand  
I will wave my hand  
and the Devil and all his lures  
will never come near you:  
'In the name of the sacred three  
and the sanctified saints, and the sinless angels'

**CHORUS**

Ave! Amen!

*The PREACHER, the MOTHER and the FATHER leave.*

- 9 **DAUGHTER** *(standing firmly on her patch of ground)*

No fire shall burn me  
No river shall drown me  
No creature will bite me  
No fairy will steal me

*The STRANGER appears; at first seductive and alluring.*

**DAUGHTER** No sword shall wound me

**STRANGER** Answer me!

**DAUGHTER** No arrow shall rend me

**STRANGER** Answer me!

*The STRANGER attempts to approach the DAUGHTER, but cannot get through the invisible wall which surrounds the sanctified circle of ground on which she stands.*

**DAUGHTER**

Thunder and lightning will never strike me

**STRANGER**

By the winds and the rain  
Answer me!

*The STRANGER assaults the sanctified circle with rain and winds – to no avail. The STRANGER gradually loses his composure: the DAUGHTER gradually gains hers.*

**STRANGER**

By the creatures of the air  
Answer me!

- 10 *The STRANGER assaults the sanctified circle with 'the creatures of the air' – perhaps birds of prey, bats, or giant insects – to no avail.*

**STRANGER**

By the Devil and all his works  
Answer me!

- 11 *Finally angered beyond endurance, the STRANGER appears transformed, so that he now clearly resembles the Devil. The DAUGHTER sings the answers posed in her opening song.*

**DAUGHTER**

What is higher than the tree?  
What is deeper than the sea?

**STRANGER**

Answer me!

**DAUGHTER**

The roof of Heaven is higher than the tree  
The gates of Hell are deeper than the sea

**STRANGER**

Answer me! Answer me!

**DAUGHTER**

Sin is heavier than lead  
Blessing's better than bread

**STRANGER**

Answer me! Answer me!

**DAUGHTER**

Snow is whiter than milk  
Down is softer than silk  
Hunger is sharper than thorns  
Shame is louder than horns

**STRANGER**

Answer me, answer me

**DAUGHTER**

Evil gleams brighter than brass  
The worst that ever was  
is the Devil...

*The STRANGER is beaten; he disappears, explodes or slumps dead to the ground.*

- 12 **CHORUS**

Hosts of angels on thy side  
The shield of Michael on thy shoulder  
The cloak of Christ himself about thee  
A crown of gold upon thy head...

*The sanctified circle becomes a beautiful place; perhaps burgeoning with vegetation, or overhung by angels.*

## JUDITH WEIR

Judith Weir was born into a Scottish family in 1954, but grew up near London. She was an oboe player, performing with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, and had a few composition lessons with John Tavener during her schooldays. She attended Cambridge University, where her composition teacher was Robin Holloway; and in 1975 went to summer school in Tanglewood, where she studied with Gunther Schuller. After this she spent several years working in schools and adult education in rural southern England; followed by a period based in Scotland, teaching at Glasgow University and RSAMD.

During this time she began to write a series of operas - including *King Harald's Saga*, *The Black Spider*, *The Vanishing Bridegroom*, *A Night at the Chinese Opera*, and *Blond Eckbert* (the last two released on NMC) - which have subsequently received many performances in the UK, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium and the USA. The most recent opera is *Miss Fortune*, premiered at Bregenz in 2011, and then staged at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden in 2012.

As resident composer with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra in the 1990s, she wrote several works for orchestra and chorus, including *Forest*, *Storm* and *We are Shadows*, which were premiered by the orchestra's then principal conductor, Simon Rattle. She has been commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra (*Music Untangled* and *Natural History*), the Minnesota Orchestra (*The Welcome Arrival of Rain*, recorded on NMC D137) and the London Sinfonietta (*Tiger under the Table*); and has written concert works for some notable singers, including Jane Manning, Dawn Upshaw, Jessye Norman and Alice Coote.

She now lives in London, where she has been artistic director of Spitalfields Festival; and in recent years has taught as a visiting professor at Princeton, Harvard and Cardiff universities. Honours for her work include the Critics' Circle, South Bank Show and Elise L Stoeger awards, a CBE and the Queen's Medal for Music.



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NMC Recordings Ltd,  
Somerset House  
Third Floor, South Wing,  
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Tel. +44 (0)20 7759 1827/8

Fax. +44 (0)20 7759 1829

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