

The Boatswain's Mate

Words & Music by Ethel Smyth • Based on the story by W.W. Jacobs



MINACK THEATRE
Concert Performance
10th & 12th September 2024

Presented by Tête  **têt**

The Boatswain's Mate

Part 1
40 minutes

Interval
20 minutes

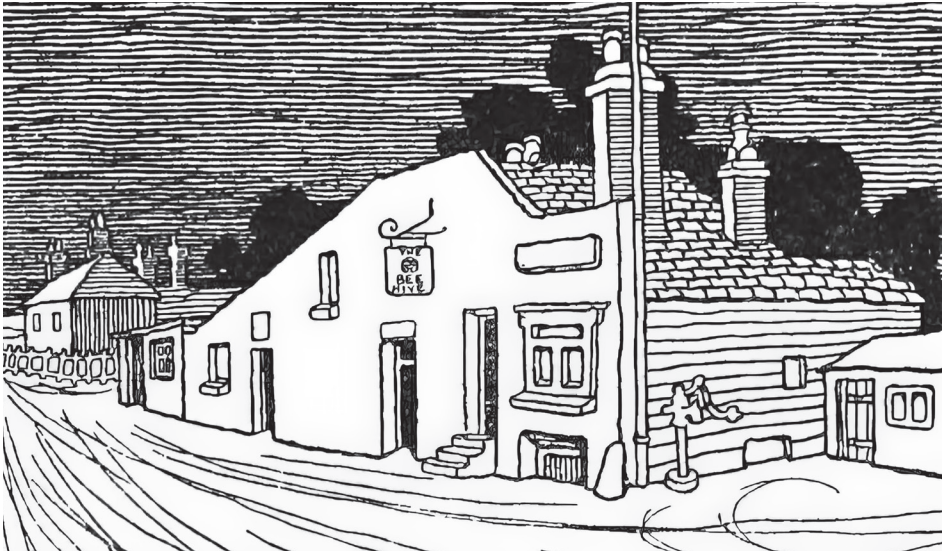
Part 2
40 minutes

Music & Words	Ethel Smyth
Original Story	W.W. Jacobs
Mary Ann	Rebecca Louise Dale
Mrs Walters	Rachel Nicholls
Harry Benn	Mark Wilde
Ned Travers	Thomas Humphreys
Policeman	Simon Wilding
Conductor	Patrick Bailey
Rehearsal Pianist	Ute Weickenmeier
Director	Bill Bankes-Jones
Flute	Karen Green
Oboe	Tamsin Robinson
Clarinet	Jacob Perry
Bassoon	Sally Bartholomew
Horn	Jacqueline Kershaw
Percussion	James Robinson
Violin	Philip Montgomery Smith
Violin	Katy Rowe
Viola	Ricarda Schmidt
Cello	Seb Poznansky
Double Bass	Zoë Curnow
Company Manager	Louise Kemp

The Boatswain's Mate was first performed at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London on 28th January 1916.

Edition by Valerie Langfield, from original score.

The Story



Mrs Waters is a widow with no intention of marrying again, happily running her country pub, the Beehive Inn. One of her regulars, Harry Benn, has proposed to her five times and always been rejected. She goes to the post office, leaving him in charge briefly. During her absence, Ned Travers arrives, mistaking Harry for the landlord. Once his mistake is explained, Harry dreams up a scheme to persuade the landlady to accept him. In return for hard cash, Travers will pretend to burgle the pub that night, Harry will come to the rescue, problem solved. He gives Travers a note explaining the plot in case he should have trouble with the police.

That night the scheme is put into effect, but Ned makes too much noise going upstairs. Mrs Waters emerges from her bedroom with a lamp and shotgun. Ned hides in a cupboard, and she locks him in. He begs to be released, explaining the plot, and when she lets him out she is able to read Harry's note. She and Ned now get their revenge. She discharges her gun, and when Harry runs in to the rescue she announces calmly that there was a burglar and she has shot him dead. She orders Harry to go and dig a grave. Harry is appalled, and goes to give himself up to the police. Once Mrs Waters convinces the constable that no-one is dead, she is left to come to a mutually satisfactory arrangement with Ned.

Welcome

It is such a pleasure to bring *Tête à Tête* back to the Minack Theatre after the fun we had with *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* in 2022; doubly so to be returning with such a very different piece.



Ethel Smyth in 1903

The more one delves into the life of composer Ethel Smyth (1858 – 1944), the deeper one wants to go. In spite of every kind of obstacle, she bulldozed her way through Europe first to study, then to perform and have her music performed, while hurtling headlong in and out of a series of passionate affairs with women along the way. Lovers included The Empress Eugenie, Virginia Woolf, Emmeline Pankhurst, a brief and unconsummated engagement to Oscar Wilde's brother and her one real affair with a man, Henry Brewster,

sometimes her librettist. Ethel was also a passionate suffragette, leading to two months in Holloway Prison, fiercely anti-war and yet a staunch Tory and, really shockingly, a white supremacist.

Happily, there's really no dark side to *The Boatswain's Mate*. It was her fourth opera, and after a lot of huge ambition and earnest vision in her first three, *Fantasio* 1898, *Der Wald* 1902 and *The Wreckers* 1906, it's as if Ethel took her foot off the accelerator and did a handbrake turn into lighthearted fun.

Written in Egypt, 1913-14, Smyth's *The Boatswain's Mate* was first performed in the Shaftesbury Theatre - so slap bang in the commercial West End of London - in January 1916, a moment in time when everyone was very likely in great need of cheering up. True to form, Ethel managed to oust the conductor Eugene Goossens on the day of the premiere, "much to my annoyance, as I had taken all the preliminary orchestral rehearsals. At the last moment she took over the baton, thinking herself the Heaven-sent conductor she was not."

Despite this inauspicious start, the infectious fun of the piece made it popular, and it made it to the Royal Opera House for performances right into the 1920s until Smyth went out of fashion and was forgotten for over 50 years.

Musically, the overture ends with arguably her greatest hit, *The March of the Women* - the march-type music you first hear on the clarinet. From then on, we enter a world of numbers inspired by or even quoting folk songs, interspersed with recitative - chatty, conversational singing, very different from the epic Wagnerian scale of *The Wreckers*.

The text is adapted from a short story by WW Jacobs, a popular working-class-made-good writer best known for comic tales of sailors on dry land. Published in 1909, of course in an age before TV, you might say this is as if Smyth adapted *Only Fools and Horses* or *This Country*.

While the short story, certainly to begin with, is about a couple of blokes, in Smyth's hands the opera's focus from the outset is the really sassy, strong woman Mrs Waters. Nowadays, when the constant abuse of vulnerable women in opera is looking increasingly distasteful, it's a real joy to celebrate the kickass female character Mrs Waters and to enjoy her getting the upper hand over the stupid men.

We're so happy to bring it to life once again in concert performance, and through the festival of the sea in celebration of 200 years of the RNLI. The dedication of the performers has been really inspiring, we have to thank them all, and would love the resources to give this joyous, mischievous piece a full production.

If you would like to sponsor this, do get in touch...!

Bill Bankes-Jones

Biographies

Patrick Bailey *Conductor*

Patrick has conducted concerts with the Philharmonia Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta and many others. In Cornwall, where he has lived since 2014, he has conducted *Orfeo, Firework Maker's Daughter, Soldier's Tale & Glassworks* at the Minack and leads the contemporary music ensemble Kevos, the big band, Leskyn Kernow and is Music Director for the upcoming Christmas Orchestra tour across the south west.

Bill Bankes-Jones BEM *Stage Director*

After work for NT, ENO, RSC, and ROH, Bill founded Tête à Tête to create a genuinely inclusive fringe for opera. Two decades later, he was awarded the BEM in the Queen's Birthday Honours 2020 'for services to opera and diversity.' He lives below Trencom with legendary cairn terriers Ding and Dong.

Sally Bartholomew *Bassoon*

Sally is currently principal bassoon with the Bristol Ensemble. She has played with a range of orchestras in the UK including the CBSO, RLPO and Manchester Camerata. She is a keen chamber musician and performs regularly across the South West. Sally and her husband run Jopes Music: www.jopesmill.co.uk/jopes-music

Zoë Curnow *Double Bass*

Zoë works as a freelance double bass player across Cornwall and occasionally further afield. When not behind a bass she is a mum to two teenagers and is currently Head of Operations of St Michael's Mount, having had a career in theatre management running the Minack Theatre until earlier this year.

Rebecca Louise Dale *Mary Ann*

Cornish Soprano Rebecca is delighted to return to the Minack Theatre after her performance as narrator in Walton's *Façade* with the Cornish Sinfonia back in 2022. She graduated from Trinity College of Music and later specialised in opera at the Advanced Performers Studio, London.

Karen Green *Flute*

Karen was born and raised in Cornwall where she studied the flute with the late Jennet Campbell. She later studied flute, piccolo and piano at the Royal Welsh Conservatoire of Music and Drama before starting a teaching job with Leicestershire Schools Music. She played in several orchestras and ensembles across the East Midlands before returning to Cornwall where she now spends her time playing in various ensembles, teaching, and running a wellbeing singing community group.

Thomas Humphreys *Ned Travers*

Thomas' highlights include a series of Schubertiades alongside Maria João Pires at the Philharmonie de Paris and *Gulbenkian*, the Count *Le nozze di Figaro* and *Reverend Maybold Under the Greenwood Tree* for Dorset Opera. Upcoming highlights include Mozart's *Requiem* with the RPO and a recital at the Bechstein Hall.

William Wymark Jacobs *Original Story*

William (1863-1943) was an English author best known for his short stories, particularly horror and supernatural tales. Born in London, he grew up in a working-class family. His father worked as a dockhand and wharf manager. William draws heavily upon his father's experiences and his stories often feature the adventures of wayward seamen and mariners working themselves in and out of precarious predicaments. He worked variously as a humble clerk before great successes with his short stories.

Louise Kemp *Company Manager*

A theatre maker with over 25 years of experience in the Arts sector, Louise has enjoyed creating theatre and opera throughout the UK. She is currently Creative Producer for Cornwall theatre company Poppanoodle Theatre. She has also worked in Primary education, Early Years Settings and as Events Producer for Music Education.

Jacqueline Kershaw *Horn*

Jacqueline is a Cornish French Horn player performing professionally throughout the Southwest with Classical Orchestras, Chamber Groups and as a soloist. She is also currently touring with the Steampunk Orchestra and later in the year with The Christmas Orchestra. Jacqueline also teaches in person and online both privately and for the Cornwall Music Service Trust.

Philip Montgomery Smith *Violin*

Philip has lived in Cornwall for many years and is very much part of the musical fabric of the county. Philip studied at the Royal Northern College of Music. He has worked for many years in music education and recently has become a qualified driving instructor.

Rachel Nicholls *Mrs Walters*

Rachel is recognised as one of the UK's leading dramatic sopranos and has sung many of the major Wagner and Strauss roles throughout the world. She has also worked in concert with many prominent conductors in a wide repertoire and has an extensive discography from Bach to Tippett.

Jacob Perry *Clarinet*

Jacob began playing Clarinet with Cornwall Music Service Trust before undertaking Undergraduate and Postgraduate studies at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. Jacob won the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire Woodwind Prize in 2018 and now enjoys a varied freelance career working with a number of the leading orchestras and ensembles in the UK.

Seb Poznansky *Cello*

Seb is a Cornwall based cellist who studied at RWCMD and RCM. he works around the UK and internationally as a performer and as a music examiner for Trinity College London. Seb is father to two young children and inescapably, supports Blackburn Rovers.

James Robinson *Percussion*

James studied Timpani and Percussion at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, graduating in 1993. He has performed with English Chamber Orchestra, English National Ballet, Glyndebourne Touring Opera, London Concert Orchestra, Moscow City Ballet, Orchestra of St. John's, Smith Square, English Bach Festival Orchestra, London Brass Virtuosi, the West End production and UK / European tours of Deon Perry's *Tap Dogs* and was recently deputy drummer for the 2024 UK tour of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

Tamsin Robinson *Oboe*

Following her studies at the Royal College of Music, London with Christopher Cowie and Mike Winfield, Tamsin enjoyed a busy career as a freelance oboist in London before returning to her Cornish roots to raise her family. Here she continues as an orchestral oboist, chamber musician and soloist, performing throughout the South West as well as enjoying teaching woodwind and piano to students of all ages.

Katy Rowe *Violin*

As a seasoned chamber, orchestral & session musician and a soloist, Katy has also sung, played bass guitar, percussion, used loop pedals and shared the stage with puppets! Her passion and commitment towards outreach work has seen Katy lead many arts projects engaging vulnerable young people with music-making and performance.

Ricarda Schmidt *Viola*

Ricarda studied at the academies in Weimar, Leipzig and Trossingen where she won prizes for chamber music in several ensembles. Ricarda worked as a violist in various opera orchestras in Augsburg, Meiningen, Eisenach, Erfurt and Nuremberg and in the SWR Symphony Orchestra. In 2018 she moved to Cornwall, where she founded the "Duo Lamorniana" with pianist Ute Weickenmeier in order to be able to devote more time to chamber music again.

Ethel Smyth DBE *Music & Words*

While Ethel (1858-1944) was studying at the Leipzig Conservatory, Tchaikovsky described her as having ‘the potential to become a very serious and gifted composer’. Works include *Der Wald*, 1903, for more than a century, the only opera by a woman composer ever produced at New York’s Metropolitan Opera. *The Wreckers*, set in an imaginary Cornwall and enjoying great popularity today, was premiered in Leipzig, 1906. As a suffragette, she wrote militant hymns, served two months in prison and included Emmeline Pankhurst among her long list of lovers.

Ute Weickenmeier *Rehearsal Pianist*

Ute studied with Prof. Hans-Christian Steinhöfel to become a répétiteur at “Franz Liszt” University of Music in Weimar. Her positions as a solo répétiteur [rehearsal pianist] include Südthüringisches Staatstheater Meiningen, Staatstheater Nürnberg, Theater Osnabrück, Oper Halle/Saale et al. In 2018, Ute moved to Cornwall and founded Duo Lamorniana with violist Ricarda Schmidt.

Mark Wilde *Harry Benn*

Mark is a singer, conductor, and teacher. As a performer, Mark has sung at all of the UK’s major opera companies and concert halls. He conducts choirs, teaches at the Royal Academy of Music, and runs a schools singing programme for primary school children in Grimsby.

Simon Wilding *Policeman*

Simon was born in Leigh, Lancashire and studied at the Royal Northern College of Music. He performs throughout the UK and internationally. In recent seasons he has performed at the Royal Ballet & Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria, Komische Oper, Teatro Real, Royal Danish Opera and Opera Holland Park.



Tête à Tête

Tête à Tête is the UK's leading pioneer of new, innovative, accessible, inclusive and really enjoyable opera. Founded in 1998, regularly funded by Arts Council England we are now based in Cornwall.

With a playful yet pathfinding approach, our sights are set far into the future, scanning the vast unexplored possibilities of what opera could be. Artists and audiences embark on adventures with us that can touch them forever in a way they'll never forget. As we travel together, we always listen and observe, taking the greatest care of each other.

Though our work often happens under the radar, it's now hard to find artists working in new opera who haven't grown, at least a little, under our wing. Each one, of course now carries something of Tête à Tête with them.

We've commissioned, produced and premiered well over 100 operas, giving work to many hundreds of opera makers. We've also hosted, mentored, and empowered others to make almost 600 new operas in our annual *Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival*.

We make work in Cornwall, North Tyneside, London and online, where we've reached over a million people in 64 nations.

This week we are also hosting *Madame Chandelier's Opera Party for Kids* in St Merryn and Helston. For three weeks after that we are hosting two dozen new operas in *Tête à Tête: The Opera Festival*, London and online, where you'll be able to watch every performance just a few days after each event.

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