



Preview Script

RING OF WHITE ROSES

a one-act light opera

Music by Les Emmans

Words by Pat Mugridge

Ring Of White Roses

by Les Emmans and Pat Mugridge

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NOTE : This is a preview version, and does not contain the full script.

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RING OF WHITE ROSES

Synopsis

This intriguing one act opera tells the true, but tragic love story of two young people caught up in the horror of the 17th Century 'plague village' of Eyam (pronounced 'Eem') in Derbyshire, England.

It is 1665, and is the time in the year of the Eyam Summer Wakes, a happy festive time. Visitors are welcomed by the villagers who themselves eagerly await the forthcoming pleasures. Two of the village girls, Emmott and Ruth, have further cause for rejoicing - they are betrothed and plan to look at material bought from London from which they will make their wedding dresses. Herein are the seeds of tragedy, but, for the moment, joy prevails with a folk song and dance by the four principals - Rowland and Emmott, Steb and Ruth.

A month later, the village is broken by bubonic plague, carried from London in the bales of cloth. There is talk of fleeing the village, to escape the ravages of the plague, but apart from the imperious Mrs Bradshaw, the Squire's lady, all decide to stay. The prayer of the chorus - urgent and beseeching - emphasises the mood. The last meeting of Rowland and Emmott is the emotional heart of the work. It personalises the conflict, between the hysteria which clamours for deliverance through flight, and the desperate dedication to duty which requires acceptance and denial.

Marshall Howe is introduced to us as another grim aspect of devotion to duty. He is a villager who has lost both his wife and his only child, and now takes the role of village undertaker. A task which earns him no gratitude however because he takes, as pay for his labour in burying the dead, anything he desires from their now empty homes

As often happens in a crisis, a figure emerges to buck up the spirits. In a moment of light relief, Steb Mortin with Ruth at his side, cheers up the village children with some simple words and gestures. When they leave, Steb re-states his undying love for Ruth.

Emmott returns home to her mother from a meeting held by The Rector in the Cucklet Delph, a small valley that formed a natural open-air church close-by. Mrs Sydall, whose puritanical nature disapproved of the fun activities during the Summer Wakes, is now a broken woman. Having lost her husband and all her children, she clings desperately to her remaining daughter. Emmott describes to her Mother the meeting at which the Rector eloquently pleaded for everyone to remain in the village so that the plague might be contained.

Some time later, as the church bells ring out to declare the village free from pestilence, Rowland hurries through the village asking for Emmott. No words are needed in answer. A cottage door opens and Mrs Sydall appears, holding a traditional Derbyshire funeral garland - a ring of white roses with a pair of white paper gloves attached.

The opera ends in the style of 'Dido and Aeneas' - with a lament over a ground bass, and the chorus chanting words of St Paul, which takes us beyond the grief of the moment, to the hope of eternal joy and peace.



Derby Opera Workshop premiered the work and some of the cast are seen here in the garden of the cottage where Emmott and the Sydall family once lived.

This show is called "Ring Of White Roses" because the death of a young girl was marked by a wreath of white paper roses placed over her seat in church. The children's jingle "Ring-a-ring-a-roses", which permeates the music, is also about the signs of the plague.

This funeral garland is once said to have hung in Matlock Parish Church. Emmott's garland would have had this.



Parish Church. Emmott's garland white paper gloves and roses similar to

Characters

Principals

Emmott Sydall - a young girl (*Soprano*)
Ruth Hadfield - serving maid at The Rectory (*Mezzo*)
Rowland Torre - a miller's son from Stony Middleton (*Baritone*)
Steb Mortin - the local Carrier (*Light Tenor*)

Support

Mrs Sydall - Emmott's mother (*Contralto*)
Mrs Bradshaw - The Squire's widow (*Mezzo*)
Marshall Howe - the village Sexton (*Bass*)
Chorus of villagers. (Some small singing parts are provided for chorus members - 'Joan', 'Boy', 'Grace', Alice' and 'Elizabeth').
Two or three other children (non-singing) for Scene 5.

The Music

NOTE : Apart from an occasional spoken item all the words are set to music.

The Overture

Scene 1) Eyam Summer Wake (Mrs Sydall, Emmott, Ruth, Rowland & Steb & Chorus)
Scene 2) An Eyam Street (Mrs Bradshaw, Ruth & Chorus)
Scene 3) The Cucklet Delph (Emmott & Rowland)
Scene 4) An Eyam Street (Marshall Howe & Chorus)
Scene 5) An Eyam Street (Steb, Ruth & Children)
Scene 6) The Sydall House (Emmott & Mrs Sydall)
Scene 7) An Eyam Street (Rowland & Chorus)

Costumes, Scenery and Lighting

This show was originally intended for touring and has been performed in churches, village halls, pubs, theatres and a folk club and as such, no specific scenery was found to be necessary. Lighting consisted of a simple circle of light to provide an acting area. Props and costumes effectively created the scenes, however, an inventive stage crew might wish to provide suitable scenery. Costumes are 17th century. The older characters were probably puritans, and would wear white and black. Others characters, aware of the “Restoration”, would be more ornately dressed.

For images of traditional Derbyshire funeral garlands, see ...

<http://www.wishful-thinking.org.uk/genuki/DBY/Ashford/PhotoGallery.html>
http://www.andrewspages.dial.pipex.com/matlock/church_gar.htm

For general information on the Bubonic Plague in Eyam, see ...

<http://www.warwick.ac.uk/statsdept/staff/WSK/Courses/ST333/eyam.html>
<http://www.survivors-mad-dog.org.uk/MDEyam01.html>
<http://www.beautifulbritain.co.uk/html/outandabout/eyam.htm>

Conventions Used

1) Text in upper case is shouted, and underlined text is spoken with emphasis.

2) Lines that are sung are shown thus ...

Emmott *Do not touch me.*
We must not meet here again.
We are all dying. (Sobs)

3) Lines that are spoken are shown thus ...

Emmott My father, little Sarah, and , this morning. My dearest brother John, died in my arms.
(Rowland attempts to touch her). No, do not touch me! I must not see you again.

RING OF WHITE ROSES

Overture

Scene 1

On the road into Eyam (pronounced "Eem"). Villagers enter chatting and laughing followed by visitors who overtake them.

Visitors *Good day, good people.
We've travelled far since yesterday.
Is this the road to Eyam Wakes?
We thought that we had gone astray.*

Villagers *Welcome, strangers.
Climb on, straight up the hill,
And, down there in the valley,
Upon the village green,
We hold the finest summer wakes
That you have ever seen.
Hawker's cries awake the morning skies
With strident sound
And summer smiles.*

A Villager *Go, eat and sup, then rest awhile.
The day is long in Eyam, my friends,
Though night may shroud the sky.*

The visitors move off and village girls come together.

Joan *'Tis said there'll be dancing on the green.
Is this so?*

Emmott *Yes, yes I hope to be dancing there myself
With Rowland, my betrothed.*

Mrs Sydall overhears the conversation.

Mrs Sydall *Emmott, I'm ashamed of you
You mar this Sabbath Day.
How could you think of dancing;
A girl who is betrothed?
This revelry and prancing
Befits the devil's way!*

Emmott *Mother, don't be angry on such a lovely day.
Come, watch me dance with Rowland,
You know you like him well.
Such simple pleasures do no harm,
They're not the path to Hell.*

Ruth runs up to Emmott.

Ruth *Emmott, Emmott, there you are!
Good day to you, Mrs Sydall,
And where is your good husband?
Not at the alehouse already?*

There is a stunned silence. Mrs Sydall is furious, and speaking over the music, she leaves in a huff.

Mrs Sydall *Young people of today have no regard for piety or respect for their elders!*

Emmott *Hush, dear Ruth. Be careful what you say.*

Ruth *Oh Emmott, I am so happy.
Steb Mortin wants to marry me.*

Emmott *Ruth! Oh Ruth!*

They swing each other round, laughing and happy.

Ruth *The wife of a carter and a carrier I'll be.
I expect I shall be lonely, when he's away.*

Emmott *Don't think sad thoughts
On such a lovely day.
I'm sure you'll be happy
So cast sad thoughts away.

And today we must look at the wares
Of Mr Vicars, the tailor.
Mother says he has new patterns and clothes
Come all the way from London.

We can choose some for our wedding gowns.*

Ruth *It's all very well for you
As the wife of a miller. (Now slow and sad)
My Steb could not even afford
To buy a betrothal ring.
Let me see yours again. (She looks at Emmott's ring).
Ah well, as long as Steb loves me.*

Boy *(Mocking) As long as he loves her.
Elizabeth, will you marry me?
Or maybe Grace or Joan?
I'll wed all three!*

Grace & Joan *(Dancing round the boy) Don't be silly.*

Elizabeth & Alice *(Joining in) Don't be silly.
Who would want to marry you?*

Elizabeth *What will you offer?*

Grace, Joan & Alice *What will you offer?*

Elizabeth *Your mother says you shirk
When there's talk of hard work.
You're just a silly boy.*

All *Go away! Go away!*

They chase him away and return to their conversation.

Grace *I wish Rowland Torre belonged to me.*

Elizabeth *But he doesn't, dear Grace.
He loves only Emmott.
We shall go to the Wakes,
And find a fortune teller.
So be of good cheer,
And say a small prayer,
That we'll find a rich husband,
Waiting down there.*

They depart as Rowland and Steb join Emmott and Ruth. Rowland takes Emmott's hands. Ruth and Steb watch.

Rowland *I remember the day I first saw you smile,
Open and sweet without any guile.
I loved you then. I love you now,
Cherished here within my heart. (They dance to one side).*

Steb takes Ruth's hand as Rowland and Emmott watch.

Steb *I remember the way that you danced on the green,
The prettiest girl that I'd ever seen.
I loved you then. I love you now.
My heart is ever yours. (They all dance round).*

Rowland *I remember the day
I first saw you smile,
Open and sweet
without any guile.
I loved you then.
I love you now,
Cherished here within my heart.*

Steb *I remember the way
That you danced on the green,
The prettiest girl
that I'd ever seen.
I loved you then.
I love you now.
My heart is ever yours.*

Emmott takes Rowland's hands.

Emmott *And soon we shall wed, my true love and I.
No need to part or whisper goodbye.
I pledge my love for evermore.
My life is yours forever.*

Ruth takes Steb's hands.

Ruth *These happy days will live on in my heart,
And I pray to the Lord that we never may part.
I pledge my love for evermore.
My life is yours forever. (They all dance together)*

Emmott *And soon we shall wed,
My true love and I.
No need to part or
whisper goodbye.
I pledge my love
for evermore.
My life is yours forever.*

Ruth *These happy days
Will live on in my heart,
And I pray to the Lord
That we never may part.
I pledge my love
For evermore.
My life is yours forever.*

Emmott, Rowland, Ruth & Steb *[The two duets above sung as a quartet].*

Grace *(Calling to them) Hurry up, hurry up,
We shall miss all the fun.*

Emmott, Rowland, Ruth & Steb *(Calling to her) Yes, we're coming!*

They all run off. The stage darkens and the music slows.

Scene 2

An Eyam Street.

Man *Is it but a month since the wakes?
From joy to horror in such a short time.
This plague, brought in bales of cloth to the tailor,
Has brought us to the brink of Hell.*

Chorus *The bell tolls each day away,
And hope is gone.
How can we go on?
How can we go on?*

Men & Women *(Spoken) We must leave. We must leave.*

Man *We cannot, We cannot.
How could we leave our loved ones dying?*

1st Woman *Some do! Mrs Bradshaw from the Hall,
She's leaving today.*

2nd Woman *Oh God, help us.
The last of the Talbot family died this morning.
Who next may I ask? Who next?*

The Chorus cry for deliverance; all fall to their knees.

Chorus *Oh Lord, We are bereft of hope,
And bowed beneath our grief.
Oh save us from black despair,
And pain beyond belief.
Amen. Amen. Amen.*

Mrs Bradshaw *Ruth, Ruth Hadfield.
I need to talk with you*

Ruth *Yes, Mrs Bradshaw.*

Mrs Bradshaw *Ruth, I need a maid, and you, my dear,
Have gained the right experience,
Working at the Rectory.
Will you come with me? Now?*

Ruth *I thank you for your offer,
No doubt it was well meant.
I suppose most girls would grasp the chance,
Of such a gift from Heaven sent.*

*But I could never leave our Rector now.
It would be a wicked thing, I feel somehow.
Besides who would there be to look after his house,
And who would there be to wash his clothes?*

When he last slept, the Lord only knows.

*I would quite like to be your serving maid,
But not at the moment, I'm afraid.*

*Besides there is Steb Mortin,
And he's not running away,
So while he is around,
I shall surely stay.*

Mrs Bradshaw *It's all very well for these
simple village folk.
They're either
wailing or praying,
It's all they seem to do.*

*After all, they could leave
if they really
wanted to.*

*I myself have
made up my mind
I'd be a
fool and a martyr to
stay behind.*

*I do not intend
to take such a risk*

Chorus *Oh
Lord,
We are bereft of hope,
And
bowed beneath
our grief.
Oh, save us
from black despair,
and pain
beyond belief.*

*Oh
Lord,
We are bereft of hope,*

*And bowed beneath
our grief.*

*It's not just a question
of running
away*

*Oh, save us
from black despair,
And pain*

Mrs Bradshaw *After all,
what could I
do if I stayed here?*

Chorus
*beyond
belief.*

*I have a
duty to myself to which
I shall adhere,
To leave this
Godforsaken place,
And go far away
from here.*

*Oh Lord,
We are bereft of
hope,*

*Sometimes it is
imperative
to further ones
own interests.*

*And bowed beneath
our grief.*

*Oh, save us from
black despair,*

*and pain
beyond
belief.*

*It's all very well for
these simple
village
folk*

*Amen.
Amen. Amen.*

Scene 3

The Cucklet Delph. Rowland is pacing up and down; impatient and worried. Emmott enters.

Rowland *Emmott, you are late for our meeting.
I feared that you would not come.*

Emmott *Do not touch me.
We must not meet here again.
We are all dying. (Sobs)*

Emmott *My father, little Sarah, and , this morning. My dearest brother John, died in my arms. (Rowland attempts to touch her). No, do not touch me! I must not see you again.*

Rowland *(Pleading) No, Emmott, no! Do not say such things. Come away with me. There is nothing else to be done. Save yourself.*

Rowland *Come away with me, my love. Come away.
Come away from this sad place.

I cannot bear to see the pain reflected in your face.
Come away with me, my love.
Come away, come away.*

Emmott *Oh, do not weaken my resolve,
With soft and tempting words.
My spirit is so low, my love,
Oh, do not tempt me so.*

Rowland *Come away with me, my love, come away.*

Emmott *My sisters and my mother so sorely need me now,
To them I owe my loyalty,
To duty I must bow.
And yet I need you by my side,
Each sad and sorrowing day.*

Rowland *Come away with me my love,
Come away from this sad place.
Come away, come away, come away.*

Emmott *I stood there in the summer grass,
And watched a white cloud slowly pass.
No hint of grief and pain to come,
No storm clouds hid the fiery sun.*

*I looked upon the soft green hills,
Familiar and secure,
And listened as a skylark
Thrilled the golden day with song so pure.*

*A gentle breeze caressed my cheek,
And stirred the fragrance of the air.
Yet deep within, my heart grew cold
And pulsed so slow and weak.*

*And then I knelt and touched a flower,
So perfect and so fair.
I mourned those lost, sweet care-free days,
My innocent and careless ways.
Melancholy thoughts, grey ghosts of my despair,
Did drift across my conscious mind,
And succoured grief and care.
Then bitter rage consumed my heart
And tore my angry soul apart.
My tears fell on the thirsty earth
And laid my spirit bare.*

*My soul serene and calm once more,
I found that I could pray,
I felt the meaning of the Cross,
And knew that I must stay.*

Scene 4

An Eyam street.

Villager *The wind blows chill through mourning streets,
Death lurks darkly in each home.
No happy sound of children's laughter
Greets the loathsome day.*

*The only cry an anguished moan
From some poor grieving soul.*

1st Woman *No one to toll the funeral bell.
How can we go on? How can we go on ?*

2nd Woman

*Yet Marshall Howe,
with frenzied
madness,
toils each day
And buries our
beloved
dead.
No tear runs
down his stony face,

No fear of
God or death's embrace.*

Chorus *O Lord,
we are bereft of hope

And bowed
beneath
our grief.

Oh save us from
black
despair, and
pain beyond belief.
Amen.
Amen.
Amen.*

1st & 2nd Woman He takes his dues with icy calm,
Without remorse, without alarm.

On seeing Marshall Howe enter, they crowd together; then turn away, whispering.

Marshal Howe Look at me, I say to you,
Don't turn away from me;
To Hell with your condemnations,
I defy your accusations.
I have looked death in the face,
And I am the victor.
Since you say I am the devil's own,
Then to him I shall atone.
Look at me, I say to you,
Don't turn away from me.

There is nothing left now in my life
That I would fear to lose.
Make no mistake my friends,
I've paid my dues,
My wife and only son.
Yes, I've paid my dues.

I've done your dirty work.
You've used my broad and fearless back
To do the things you shirk.
Your dead show me more respect
As I lay them in the waiting earth
So tenderly, so tenderly.
And when, at last, you've joined them there,
And years have turned you into dust,
My name will be remembered
By just and honest men,
And they will not condemn
Marshall Howe.

Scene 5

The same street. Steb sits on a stone, and Ruth sits cross-legged at the side of him, looking at him. Children enter slowly and disinterestedly. Steb spots them as they walk past and behind him; he gestures towards them, but they drift wretchedly to the other side of the stage.

Steb Heh! What ails you?
Why do you creep like frightened mice?
Come here! Come here!

The children reluctantly turn and drag their feet towards him, and look at him blankly, without speaking. Steb, still seated, puts his hands on his knees which are placed widely apart. He sings with great expression, much bravado and gesturing.

Steb Why these doleful, woeful faces,
Sour enough to curdle milk?
Try a smile from ear to ear, or even just a skip or two,
Maybe raise a tiny cheer.
The sorry way you look today,
Would surely scare the crows away.

Just look at me.
I'll show you how to change those sorry looks.
Lift your head, and tilt your chin,
Shoulders back, and bellies in!

[On a snigger from one child, he exaggeratedly points at and then leans on the child during the next verse.]

*Good gracious me, I saw you smile.
The sight must make me rest awhile
The sorry way you look today,
Would surely scare the crows away.*

[Steb takes off his hat, and plonks it on the head of the child. He then stands behind the child, pulls his/her arms out to make him/her look like a scarecrow. The child collapses in a giggling heap.]

*Just keep it up, my merry band,
Go, play your games, and sing your songs.*

[The children laugh excitedly, and run off stage.]

*Though life may bring such crushing grief,
I hold within a strong belief,
That love and laughter reign supreme.*

[He turns briefly as one child rushes back laughing, and waiting.]

*The sorry way you look today,
Could even scare the crows away*

[The child runs off again, delightedly; Steb turns to Ruth.]

*And what of us my lovely,
What future lies in this grim place?
Yet as I search in vain for hope,
I see such strength within in your face.
Your eyes still burn with inner fire,
My dearest love, my heart's desire.*

... in this Preview Script, the remainder of the text has been deleted from here ...

If you would like to purchase the full script, please contact ...

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