

Hidden Lovers

A new chamber opera by Janet Oates, to a libretto by Simon Pettifar based on a memoir by Guy de Maupassant of his travels in Provence. Opening Tête-à-tête: The Opera Festival 2025, this show is a dark contemplation of tensions between privileged and sophisticated detachment, idealism and realism.

Running time c. 55 minutes

Creative and production team:

Libretto: Simon Pettifar

Music: Janet Oates

Stage Director: Alex Gotch

Music Director: Leslie Ann Lewis

Designer/stage management: V Hayward

Publicity: Rosalind O'Dowd

Lighting: Alfie Crews



Produced by Mayhem Opera

Cast:

- The Traveller: Adam Brown, baritone
- Old Lady: Rosalind O'Dowd, soprano
- Young lover / Amelie: Myrto Loulaki
- Young lover / the publican / Old Hussar: John Twitchen, tenor

Chorus:

- Fiona Clark
- Alison Cross
- Elizabeth Dobson
- Siri Livingstone
- Jessica Loeb
- Dawn Rolt

Musicians:

- Tina Bowles, violin
- Josh Salter, cello
- Geoff Irwin, viola
- John McLeod, percussion

**With grateful thanks to Bill Bankes-Jones and the whole Tête-à-Tête team;
the Cockpit Theatre and crew; Jon Crews for his invaluable support
and our funders The Marchus Trust and the Vaughan Williams Foundation.**

THE MARCHUS TRUST



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Tête-à-tête

Synopsis

The present

Traveller loses himself in a heightened response to the natural world around him and to an inner world of haunting and perplexing memory.

After lying down to sleep he wakes to birdsong and to a renewed determination to find again an idyllic farmyard scene of domestic bliss which he happened upon three years previously.

The memory

Having stumbled upon a hidden and isolated but bustling farmyard, the Traveller is made welcome by an Old Lady and her deaf husband, an Old Hussar.

On learning that he is of noble descent the Old Lady confides to the Traveller that she too is of noble birth and that many years ago she eloped with her husband, who deserted from her father's regiment of Hussars. Devoted to one another, they have lived a hidden life ever since; she has no regrets. "He has made me very happy!"

The present

Reflecting on how magical that first visit was, the Traveller hears sweet singing and, standing apart, watches two young lovers as they murmur their love for each other.

The Traveller continues on his way but finds himself in the midst of a forest of cork trees which have been stripped of their bark, leaving them resembling a mass of distorted and horrifying limbs, glistening red. He hears about him the spirits of the heavenly dead singing of how they loved and suffered in life.

Emerging shaken from the cork wood the Traveller seeks refuge in a tavern he knows from previous visits to the area, where Paul the Publican attempts to engage him in conversation. But no talk of hunting or of women can rouse the Traveller from his obsession with the farmstead and the troubling questions it poses about his own way of life.

Continuing on his way he suddenly recognises the right path; hesitating one last time, he is urged on by the spirits of the heavenly dead. Arriving at last at the farmyard, the Traveller finds that all has changed...

*"Colours quicken,
Sounds come sharpened, clear;
Things formerly far off
Now to the brightened eye seem near."*

*"See how my rose here thrives.
I planted her the month we came
And every year her scent and colour
Grow in richness, deepening!"
"What miracle have I happened upon?
He has been everything to her.
Everything one waits for, longs for,
He has been. And all she had to do
Was love!"*

*"And high above fly the hymning birds;
His heart goes beating in their wings.
And high above the skylark soars:
Her heart too flutters and sings!"
"Hear our hearts' singing now!
We loved and bore the cost
And our hearts sing by virtue of that love!
We would not it had been
Any other way!"*

*"The boar in the woods
Are thriving, sir, they are thriving!
We'll have good hunting this season, I warrant!"*

*"Speed on! Speed on!
Now's not the time to hesitate!"
"Then back and forth and back and forth
She ran until in her despair
She threw herself into the yawning air."*