

THE BRIDGE

New Opera

Music: Edward Wright

Libretto: Marian Bryfdir



University
of Exeter



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru
Arts Council of Wales

ARIENNIR GAN
Y LOTERI
LOTTERY FUNDED





SYNOPSIS

‘The Bridge’ follows a man’s progress through early diagnosis and the experience of living with Alzheimer’s. It is part fantasy, part fractured memory, and the meeting of research and real life as we gain insight into the existence of the main character and the world that unfolds around him.

From initial confusion with his wife over something as trivial as a cup of tea, we follow his course through frustration and fear with occasional twinges of humour as it becomes apparent that there is something amiss. As members of the audience, we catch intermittent glimpses into his life, seeing snippets of the world as he perceives it, rather than what may be regarded as an empirically ‘true’ timeline of events.

Moving on from diagnosis through well-meaning but occasionally misguided help, the world of our protagonist becomes increasingly internalised and disconnected from the environment, while simultaneously remaining no less vibrant and emotionally meaningful.

As time continues to pass, we notice clarity and solace in occasional memories. A photograph, a song, the warmth of love. We see that these things may be ephemeral, as the present, memory, and fantasy envelop the mind like separate planes of origami being folded in, constantly shifting in aspect, but nonetheless maintaining their own intangible consistency.

In short, this is an opera about grief and love. It is easy to see how any artistic output dealing with the core subject matter could be laden with grief. That is an understandable and well-trodden path. It is as much about fear and loss as it is about retained memory, care for others, hope, and the ability to empathise with a reality at times jarringly different to one’s own. It is about acceptance, and finding a way to exist in the present, not only for the person with the diagnosis but for those around them. To square that circle of what has been, may have been, and could still be yet to come.

As a creative rather than medical endeavour this work cannot cure anything, but perhaps we can provide a little more understanding for some, solace to others and inspiration to a few.

Edward Wright
Penmaenmawr 23/2/23

Welcome to tonight’s performance of ‘The Bridge’.

This new one-act opera about the experience of living with dementia is part of a project funded by the Arts Council of Wales: ‘Living with dementia: An operatic exploration to promote understanding and reduce stigma’.

We have also held community workshops and run a photography project with people living with dementia and carers. The exhibition of ‘Relationships’ was shown at the Ucheldre Centre, Holyhead.

This project comes from the IDEAL dementia research programme based at the University of Exeter. To find out more about their work, visit www.idealproject.org.uk.

Dementia is more than a headline or a statistic. We hope that ‘The Bridge’ helps you think about the people, the conversations and the relationships which help to shape each individual life.

CHARACTER LIST

The Man – Kiefer Jones

The Wife – Karen Jones

The Doctor – Deborah Lea

The Massage Therapist – Julie Bulman

The Junior Therapist – Megan Roberts

The Activities Volunteer – Deborah Lea

IDEAL: IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE OF DEMENTIA AND ENHANCING ACTIVE LIFE



THE TEAM

Marian Bryfdir

LIBRETTIST AND DIRECTOR



Born in Gwynedd, North Wales, Marian studied at the Royal Academy of Music with Bruce Boyce, where she was awarded a Countess of Munster Scholarship and received both LRAM and ARCM diplomas. She was a Chorister and understudy with the Glyndebourne Festival

and Touring Opera, and later a Chorister, understudy and soloist at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, performing in several productions. Marian also devised and presented various projects for the ROH's opera-in-education department.

Marian has taught singing all over the world: at the University of Houston, Texas; Centro de Arte Lirico, Granada; and she was Director of Opera at University College of North Wales (now Bangor University). A seasoned director, Marian founded Arena Opera (a touring opera company of young professional singers) and Opera Gogledd Cymru when she moved back to Wales. She has staged and toured countless opera productions, and continues to teach including through vocal workshops at the Ucheldre Centre, Holyhead.

Dr Edward Wright

COMPOSER



Edward holds PhD in composition from Bangor University and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Edward's previous commissions include Botany a choral work for Llandudno Arts Festival, Space to Think for Electroacoustic-Wales, and Polarities for

symphony orchestra and electronics. Con-chords received an honourable mention in the Prix Bourges. His work has been performed in: Europe, Canada and the US, as well as being played on BBC Radio and Television and S4C. His eclectic approach has seen him collaborate with architects, sculptors, choreographers and animators. In addition to composing, Edward regularly performs both as a solo artist and as part of experimental trio Accretion Entropy. He also curates the Oscilloscope series of concerts/webcasts.

www.ewrightcomposer.com

Professor Linda Clare

CHIEF INVESTIGATOR, IDEAL PROGRAMME



Linda Clare is Professor of Clinical Psychology of Ageing and Dementia at the University of Exeter Medical School and leads the Centre for Research in Ageing and Cognitive Health (REACH). Her research aims to improve understanding and support for older people and

people with dementia through a focus on living well with dementia, developing rehabilitative approaches to optimise independence, and supporting family care. This includes the IDEAL research programme, an Alzheimer's Society Centre of Excellence, which investigates what helps people with dementia and family carers to live well with the condition. Linda has published over 300 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles. Trained as a clinical psychologist and neuropsychologist, she is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, British Psychological Society, and Gerontological Society of America.

Ian Smith

PROJECT PHOTOGRAPHER



Born in Manchester in 1948, Smith is a genuine activist with his camera, using his photographic expertise for the good of others. In 2018, he graduated from the University of Bolton with a BA (Hons) in Photography (Class 1). The cornerstone of his work was a

project entitled 'Prostate Cancer: Every Picture Tells a Story', where the narrative emphasised the benefits of early diagnosis. This work is now on extended loan to the cancer support group at Vine House in Preston. His second prostate cancer project, 'The Prostate Gap', tells the story of the knowledge gap and misinformation that circulates around prostate cancer. Smith focuses on the under-represented in society. He is currently studying for a Master's degree. Remember, it's not just about the camera!

www.iangsmithphoto.com

THE CAST

Kiefer Jones

THE MAN (PRINCIPAL ROLE)



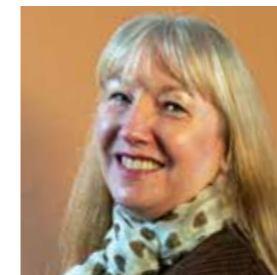
Kiefer graduated with a 1st class honours degree in music from Bangor University and a distinction in Vocal Studies from the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama (RWCMD). Kiefer attended the prestigious Glyndebourne academy and was nominated for the Gus Christie Award in 2017.

Kiefer currently teaches at Italia Conti, Wales Academy of Voice and Dramatic Art and Bangor University as well as being a freelance singer.

His operatic roles include Dr Malatesta in *Don Pasquale* and the title role in *Don Giovanni* (Opra Cymru), Aeneas in *Dido and Aeneas* (Mid Wales Opera), Uberto in *La Serva Padrona* (Pocket Opera), Father in *Hansel and Gretel* (Viva Opera) and the title role in *Sweeney Todd* (Ballyhoo Theatre Company).

Julie Bulman

THE MESSAGE THERAPIST



Julie is a classically trained soprano who has also trained as a community music tutor. She has performed with choirs and chamber choirs, as well as with community projects. She has sung with Pocket Opera, Pobol yr Opera and Bangor University Opera Group. Julie's previous

roles include Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* and The Princess in *Suor Angelica*. Julie is also a registered general nurse and qualified masseuse.

Karen Jones

THE WIFE



Karen is a well-respected visual artist, specialising in oil painting. The Bridge is her first foray into opera and she is very excited about sharing her love of artistic expression. She hopes that the compassion her character shows in the performance is understood and shared.

www.karenjonesartist.com

Deborah Lea

THE DOCTOR/THE ACTIVITIES VOLUNTEER



An experienced Mezzo Soprano, Deborah studied at the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) where she gained a GRNCM (Higher) Diploma. She also holds an MA in French Translation Studies from the University of Portsmouth and won the Miriam Licette

Scholarship to study French song. Deborah was Principal Mezzo-Soprano with Welsh National Opera for three years and has done freelance principal work with the Scottish Opera, Glyndebourne Opera and Touring Opera, City of Birmingham Touring Opera, De Nederlandse Opera (Amsterdam) and Bercy Arena Opera (Paris). She wrote *The Opera Singer's Lexicon* to help aspiring opera singers and she currently teaches French pronunciation at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London.

Megan Roberts

THE JUNIOR THERAPIST



Megan studied music at Bangor University, gaining her Bachelor of Arts in 2016 and a Master's degree in 2021. Megan is enjoying being in the company of experts and is finding being part of the opera a productive and insightful learning experience. The Bridge will be

Megan's first professional performance.

THE ORCHESTRA

Ellie Prytherch

FLUTE



Ellie Prytherch won a scholarship to study at Birmingham Conservatoire with Jonathan Rimmer, Judith Hall and Karen Jones. She then went on to complete a Master's degree in performance at Bangor University, where she won the Concerto Prize. She

performs regularly as a soloist and chamber musician, and in orchestras across the UK. Ensembles she has performed with include Birmingham Opera Company Orchestra, OPRA Cymru, Ensemble Cymru, Liverpool Sinfonia and Manchester Concert Orchestra. She is Musical Director of the Isle of Anglesey Choral Society.

Nicola Pearce

CELLO



Nicola grew up in Bedford and Devon before studying at the Royal Academy of Music and at the Trinity College of Music London. She has won several awards including a scholarship to study at the Musical Academia Chigiana in Sienna, Italy. Having moved to north

Wales in 2003, Nicola is a freelance solo, chamber and orchestral performer and is principal cellist with the Welsh Chamber Orchestra, Mid Wales Opera and Ensemble Cymru. Recently, with Canolfan Gerdd William Mathias, she set up the Caernarfon Community Orchestra for adults.

Sioned Eleri Roberts

CLARINET

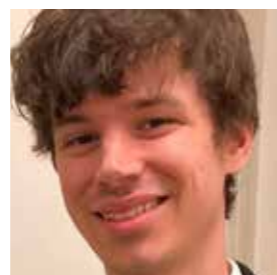


Clarinetist, composer and teacher Sioned Eleri Roberts was brought up in Bangor, North Wales, and studied at Bangor University and Trinity College of Music. She is a soloist and chamber musician and has performed in the UK and Europe. Sioned has worked and studied

with Tara Bouman and Marcus Stockhausen, and in recent years she toured and recorded with Dweezil Zappa and his band Zappa Plays Zappa. In 2016 Sioned was inducted into the Gorsedd of Bards as a result of winning the Musicians' Medal at the previous year's Festival.

Patrick Philip

DOUBLE BASS



Patrick studied Classical Double Bass at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, where he graduated in 2019. Since then he has performed with an impressive number of orchestras, including BBC Philharmonic, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal

Philharmonic, Paraorchestra, Les Misérables – UK Tour, Philomusica of Aberystwyth and Sinfonia Cambrensis.

Jo Sutton

FRENCH HORN



Jo is a brass multi-instrumentalist specialising in Horn. She has been playing for approximately 25 years in a variety of settings, including chamber ensembles, orchestras, military reserve bands, wind bands, and musical/show pit bands. The bilingual nature of

this project appeals to Jo, who studied linguistics at Bangor and specialised in bilingualism at postgraduate level.



Ross Craigmile

RÉPÉTITEUR



Ross is a Graduate of the Royal Schools of Music (GRSM) and undertook the performer's course in piano at Royal College of Music (RCM), London. A highly skilful musician, Ross worked as répétiteur and chorus master chiefly at the Teatro Massimo Bellini in Catania for

many years. Other opera houses where he has worked include La Fenice in Venice, El Liceu in Barcelona, El Municipal in Santiago de Chile and the Shanghai Opera House. Ross has accompanied famous opera singers in concert all over the world.

Andy Tuersley

STAGE MANAGER, APPRENTICE COMPOSER AND VIDEOGRAPHER



Andy has a BA in Sound Art and Design from University of the Arts London. Working across different media, he has interests in photography, composition, videography and sound art. Andy's work has been exhibited at the SeeMôr Festival, Holyhead, Sound & Vision, Peckham, and at the Marrakech Biennale. He finds the subject matter of 'The Bridge' particularly important and hopes the production can show a more human side to dementia.

Ian Jones – Lighting Designer

Luke Bevan – Production Advisor

Carole and Bob Singleton – Movement Co-ordinators



The above artwork was commissioned from Gail Gregory who herself lives with dementia. This is what the opera's themes meant to her.

We would like to thank the Arts Council of Wales for funding this project through their 'Create' scheme; Alzheimer's Society, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), and the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration South-West Peninsula (PenARC) for funding the research which made this possible; and our partners and collaborators on this project: Dementia Actif Gwynedd, Innovations in Dementia, Pontio and the Ucheldre Centre.

Thanks to Geoff Oatway and Anne Ellis of the Maen Alaw Centre, to David and Jane Austen for the use of their bridge, to Dewi Jones, to Arwel Gruffydd and to the Tuersleys.

Grateful thanks to Dr Catherine Charlwood and Emma Walter for all their hard work. Special thanks to the ALWAYSs group of people with dementia and carers, who gave so generously of their time and experience to help create a realistic portrayal.

To find out more about dementia, visit the Living with Dementia Toolkit at www.livingwithdementiatoolkit.org.uk