



THE BALLAD OF
MATTY GROVES
A SHORT OPERA

ADAPTED AND COMPOSED BY
Liam Berry

FEATURING
Nolan Kehler, Joanna Loepp Thiessen *and* Matthew Pauls

WITH
Hailey Witt *and* Mikael Vander Kooy



THE BALLAD OF MATTY GROVES

Adapted and Composed by Liam Berry

MAY 5, 2023, 7:00 PM

LAUDAMUS AUDITORIUM, CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

CAST

Matty Groves: Nolan Kehler

Lady Barnet: Joanna Loepp Thiessen

Lord Barnet: Matthew Pauls

The Lady's Maid: Hailey Witt

The Captain: Mikael Vander Kooy

Matty's Friend: Sam Perrott

Townsfolk: Hailey Witt, Katrina Lengsavath, Sarah McClay,
Sequoia Roberston, Ayla Berry, Aiden Penner,
Andres Proanos, Georg Neuhofer, Mikael Vander Kooy,
Sam Perrott

The Lord's Men: Aiden Penner, Andres Proanos,
Georg Neuhofer, Sam Perrott

INSTRUMENTALISTS

Percussion: Daniel De Ryck

Guitar: Cole Peters

Trumpet: Hudson Thiessen

Voices: Bethany Wiebe, Emma Bull, Jacob Kenny, Hudson Thiessen

Piano and Organ, Rehearsal Pianist: Anna Schwartz

Strings: Will Harder, Ava Campbell-Enns, Tim Rogalsky, Tayah Plett

TECH

Audio and Video Recording: Darryl Neustaedter Barg

Front of House: Dagen Perrott, Graeme Berry, John Manning

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Ayla Berry

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project was conceived of, written, and is now presented on Treaty 1 territory, the ancestral lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation and the Inuit community of Manitoba. We thank and honour them for the shepherding of these lands both for millennia and now, and commit ourselves to honouring the treaties which allow us to live and work within these lands.

SPECIAL THANKS

Neil Weisensel; Anna Schwartz; Daniel De Ryck; Mariam Bernstein; Ayla Berry; Kara Klassen & CMU Hosting; Verna Wiebe; Samantha Klassen & Rinella Printers; Matthew Pauls; Miranda Baran; Ross Brownlee; Victor Pankratz; Mel Braun; Judith Oatway; Julian Beutel; Mark Holmes À Court; Emma Lytle; Stephanie Penner; Anna Nekola; Elizabeth Goossen; Jim and Georgine Palmquist; the Berry/Firth family; and the Manning family.

SYNOPSIS

Scene 1

The mid-sixteenth century. Morning. Northern England, the town of Barnet. In the Churchyard.

Matty Groves (*Nolan Kehler*) arrives in Barnet during a festival. The Townsfolk go into church to sing and pray, while Matty meets Lady Barnet outside (*Joanna Loepp Thiessen*). Unbeknownst to them, her Handmaid (*Hailey Witt*) overhears them and vows to tell the Lady's husband of their affair.

Scene 2

Dusk. Southern England, in Lord Barnet's hunting camp.

Lord Barnet (*Matthew Pauls*) and his hunting party make merry. The Handmaid arrives, and the Captain (*Mikael Vander Kooy*) brings her to Lord Barnet. She tells him her dreadful news. The Lord is filled with wrath, and he and his men rush back to his castle to kill Matty Groves. Unbeknownst to them, Matty has a friend in their midst, who vows to warn Matty of their approach.

Scene 3

The little hours. Barnet Castle, in the Lord and Lady's bedchamber.

Matty and the Lady make love in her Lord's castle — but are interrupted by the sound of a horn from afar. The Lady convinces Matty to come back to bed. In the darkness, Lord Barnet enters the bedchambers and waits till Matty wakes. The Lord and Matty duel — and Matty is slain. The Lady avows her love for Matty, and in his fury the Lord kills her. Lord Barnet's men rush in: they came for vengeance upon Matty, not to murder the Lady. The Captain condemns Lord Barnet to hanging, but the Lord takes his own life rather than die by another's hands. Church bells ring, and Lord Barnet's men ready themselves to bury the dead.

The sun rises.

PROGRAM NOTES

Some time in the 1660s, a broadside was published in England titled “A Lamentable Ballad of Little Musgrove and the Lady Barnet, to an Excellent New Tune.” Its seventeen stanzas regale us of a fine young gentleman who becomes romantically entangled with the Lady Barnet — and incurs the wrath of her husband. A handwritten note on the back tells us these people “were alive in 1543,” and indeed some scholars connect the story to the close-by towns of Little Musgrave and Barnard Castle in the north of England.

Since then, the story of the Little Musgrove, or Matty Groves, has been sung throughout Britain and its colonies. For over four hundred years, the electric drama of Matty and the Lady’s illicit love have entrapped singers and listeners alike in a continuous, living tradition. In preparing to write this adaptation, I transcribed by hand some 80 variants — many fragmentary or incomplete — captured by ethnomusicologists and folklorists across England, Scotland, the Maritimes, and the United States from the 17th- through 20th-centuries. Perfectly in line with the folk tradition, few versions agree with each other as singers came to understand the fraught actions of Matty, the Lady, and her Lord in radically different ways.

Therefore, in the spirit of “traditional, but in radical disagreement,” I have prepared this telling to carry forth the genuinity of the characters and their context across oceans and centuries, allowing us to sympathise with them as if contemporaries — to bring them back to life that we might share in their joys, sorrows, loves, wrath, and unstoppable tragedy. We impossibly hope that events might unfold differently than we know they must; that they might somehow defy the struggles of class, gender, and sex that drive them to the extremes of love and violence, and bind them so unjustly to their fate. Alas, we are left only with catharsis for our balm.

While this is an opera in form and function, I hope it bears with it the spirit of that “lamentable ballad” and the many centuries of oral tradition that have made this story so resonant across times and lands: for it has been my only wish to tell the story as earnestly as I can, and to please. While I have certainly set it to more than a few “new tunes,” I leave it in your judgement whether or not it is “excellent.”

And so, for your eyes, ears, and hearts, I thank you.

— Liam Berry