



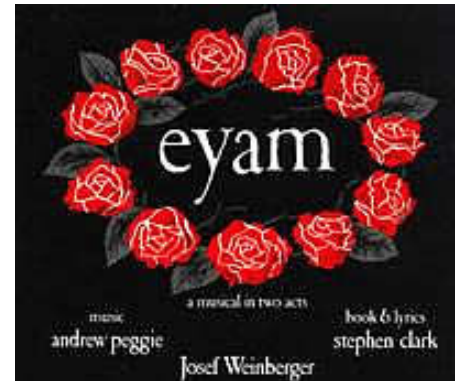
# The Guide to Musical Theatre

## EYAM

Music by Andrew Peggie: Book & Lyrics by Stephen Clark

### INTRODUCTION

In 1990 Stephen Sondheim became the first visiting Professor in Contemporary Theatre at Oxford University, We were two of thirteen people invited to participate in the resulting series of master-classes and they began work on Eyam. Under Sondheim's guidance the piece quickly grew and at the end of the year Cameron Mackintosh invited us to present the finished show at his new theatre, The Old Fire Station. The work received much acclaim and we would like to take this opportunity to thank every one involved in its journey: Cameron Mackintosh, our fellow students, the original cast and, of course, Stephen Sondheim. However, as always with any piece of theatre, our most important ally was the story itself. The story of Eyam is all the more poignant because it is true. The events, the people, their relationships are portrayed as they actually happened . . .



In 1665 the plague was rife in London. Thousands of people were dying but the plague was largely restricted to the capital. Only occasionally were there outbreaks outside London, but it soon became clear that when it did strike a small and isolated community, the effects could be devastating.

Eyam was a small and ordinary lead-mining village of 350 people in the peak district of Derbyshire. Our story starts in the Autumn of 1665, soon after the arrival of a new rector, William Mompesson. Mompesson was a young man, fresh from his studies at Cambridge, and accompanied by his wife Katherine. Although Eyam would not have been his first choice for his first post as a rector, he resolved to do well, and despite the suspicion and wariness of his new parishioners, he learnt quickly.

However, in September of that year George Buckland also arrived, as he did every year. He was a travelling tailor who moved from village to village making clothes for whoever needed them. When he arrived in Eyam he measured his customers and then sent for their cloth from London. However, unbeknown to George, when the cloth arrived it was infested with plague carrying fleas. Two days later the tailor was dead.

The plague began to spread throughout Eyam and it soon became clear that the villagers were facing a crisis. Mompesson realised that if the plague were to spread outside the boundaries of the village then the whole of Derbyshire, and perhaps all of the Midlands, would suffer the same fate as London. Despite being new to the village, and not yet having gained the trust of all the people, he managed to persuade the villagers of Eyam to stay. They were supported by the surrounding villages with food and supplies during their self-imposed quarantine but over the next 13 months, 267 of the 350 people of Eyam died.

Within this extraordinary story of sacrifice and bravery there are many individual stories of how people coped with the fear of the disease. We have taken 11 of these people to tell the story of Eyam, each of whom reacted and coped very differently throughout the 13 months. Although the circumstances must have been appalling, there is much that is life-affirming about the story, and much that is relevant today.

*Stephen Clark*

## THE STORY

### Act One

Cambridge. We meet William Mompesson practising a sermon to welcome a new congregation, He has just heard that he is to take up his first position at a parish Church and is delighted, although he is finding it difficult to get the tone of his sermon right. He tells his wife, Katherine, the good news and she is also delighted. Until she discovers where the new Parish is . . .

We meet the villagers of Eyam (In Eyam). They are all working together on a Well Dressing - an annual thanksgiving ceremony to celebrate the village well. They are busy pressing petals into clay (spread thinly over a large board) to create a mosaic. The picture is of Christ in the Wilderness (Dressing the Wells). During the work a travelling tailor, George Buckland, arrives and begins to measure everyone up to make them clothes. Emmot is particularly pleased to see him as she wants a wedding dress for her forthcoming marriage to Rowland, a miller's son from the neighbouring village, Stoney Middleton. William and Katherine Mompesson arrive and, although unfamiliar with the tradition, offer to help with the Well Dressing. The villagers are suspicious and hostile. William wonders what it will take for him to be accepted by the village. When the Well Dressing is finished it looks magnificent. Rowland arrives at the last minute, is less than enthusiastic about the results of their work and, much to Emmot's alarm, is thrown in the village pond.

George Buckland is making the clothes for everyone (Moth Song). The cloth has been sent from London and he is marking, tacking, cutting and sewing. Emmot arrives and is thrilled by her wedding dress. Joan Howe and her son Billy arrive to see their cloth. Joan is pleased with hers but Billy is awkward and sulky. Sarah and Katherine then arrive. Katherine has ordered velvet, much to the envy and disapproval of the other women. The proceedings are constantly interrupted by the presence of a moth that has arrived in the trunk of material. George is very embarrassed by this and everyone else is unimpressed. They all leave telling him to kill it. Alone at last George carries on with his work. However, he is becoming very tired. He begins to shake. He becomes weaker. He is racked with pain. We watch him die. His body is discovered by Billy. Mompesson examines the body and tells the village that George has died of the plague. The village is stunned (Plague). Marshall, despite Joan's protestations, volunteers to help Mompesson bury the body.

We learn that several more people have died in the few days since George's death (Tired of Waiting). Rowland arrives from Stoney Middleton to see Emmot. He has heard about the plague and is very worried about her. She tells him that he should not have come and adds that until it is over he must not come to Eyam again. But he refuses and in the end they agree to meet every Sunday on the moor between Eyam and Stoney Middleton (Promise Me).

Some of the villagers are quietly drinking at the inn. Marshall arrives and people move away from him because they know that he is burying the corpses and are afraid of catching the plague. Marshall is angry and a fight begins. However, Woodman intervenes and tells them they are fighting the wrong man. He says that it is Mompesson that has brought the plague to Eyam and that if they are to survive they should all leave (There's a Man). The people are very torn about whether to go or stay. The community is beginning to fragment. Joan is very anxious to get Billy out of danger but Marshall, much as he despises Mompesson, is reluctant to go.

Mompesson is in the Church, trying to prepare a sermon. Emmot arrives and tells him that she has told Rowland that everything will be alright, but she wants to know if it really will (Did I Tell a Lie?). Mompesson is unable to reassure her and she leaves. Mompesson breaks down, fighting to understand why God has allowed this to happen (What Do You Want of Me?). Katherine enters to find him sobbing. She comforts him by saying that if they leave straight away then they and their children will be safe. Mompesson is amazed by her suggestion and refuses to turn his back on Eyam (Leaving?). Katherine is appalled by his determination to stay and says, for the children's sake, that she is going. Meanwhile, Joan and Billy are packing. They are planning to leave straight after the Church service the following morning.

The Church service. Mompesson delivers his sermon saying that the village has a moral responsibility to stay within its boundaries, otherwise they will spread the plague throughout Derbyshire. The congregation are very divided. Woodman tries to leave and there is a furious argument (Why Should I Stay?). During the row Billy says that he saw Katherine leaving that morning with her children. Eventually Matthew suggests that they vote and the congregation split (Something in the Air). However, at the height of the confusion Katherine arrives at the church door. She tells them that she got as far as the neighbouring village - "I could hear their bells. I could see the people going to Church. I couldn't do it. I couldn't give them another Eyam."

## Act Two

By now there are many freshly dug graves and the children of Eyam are playing amongst the piles of earth. They carry out a mock burial using Humphrey, the youngest, as a corpse. Mompesson arrives and tells them to get away from the graves (Have You No Pity?). They run off. As Mompesson comforts Humphrey he finds hope in the child's bravery (Look at That Smile).

Rowland is waiting for Emmot up on the moor. But she is not there. We see her in her cottage with Sarah. Emmot is desperate to go to Rowland but she has a high fever and is in a lot of pain. She is dying. Sarah tries to comfort her but there is nothing she can do. Finally Rowland arrives at the cottage but it is too late. Emmot is dead. Despite Sarah's pleas, he holds Emmot in his arms (Emmot's Death). He will now have to stay in the village himself.

It is dusk in the graveyard and Marshall has arrived with another cartload of bodies. He is tired and has been drinking. He talks to the bodies, telling them they are too heavy for him (Sumonyers-Gorrageroff!) - a grim comedy number. At the end of the song he sneezes and starts to shiver.

Joan and Billy are at the boundaries of Eyam, on their way to Ashover. Billy asks why Marshall is not with them and Joan tells him that Marshall is ill. Billy is furious that she has left him to die alone.

Back in Eyam the Church bells suddenly begin to ring. It is Shrovetide. Sarah says that they should celebrate the day as they always do, that they cannot just spend their lives waiting to die. Mompesson arrives and supports her. The other villagers are amazed that they should be expected to sing and dance but then someone suggests The Tup. They all agree. Mompesson does not understand what is happening but is relieved that they seem to be following his suggestion. The Tup turns out to be a traditional Mummers Play that the villagers act out on the forecourt of the pub. The centre piece of the play is a ram's skull and the play is both celebratory and macabre. At the end of it they pull Mompesson into the middle of the action which becomes threatening and surreal. The villagers' motives become clear - they have performed the play not to please Mompesson but to frighten him. Suddenly Joan and Billy arrive. They are both injured and Billy collapses. Joan explains that they got as far as Stoney Middleton but they were recognised and beaten up. The people of Eyam are furious with her for betraying their agreement to stay but Mompesson intervenes and points out that she has suffered enough already. He also says that this proves that they no longer have a choice about whether to stay or not - the surrounding villages will clearly not let them leave. Finally Joan is left alone tending Billy and regretting her decision to leave (It Was My Choice).

The Church services are now being held outside to lessen the risk of infection. After Mompesson has read out a list of all those who have died during the previous week, the congregation disperses leaving only Matthew and Sarah. Sarah asks Matthew where his wife is. He tells her she is dead. Sarah tries to comfort him but Matthew says that Eyam is no place for caring (At Night). Sarah leaves and Matthew thinks about his wife. One by one Mompesson, Joan, Woodman, Rowland, Katherine and Sarah arrive and each reflect on what they have been through (Where Do You Turn?). Suddenly Billy interrupts them with the news that Marshall is alive and well and ready for a quart of ale.

Katherine is much cheered by Marshall's recovery and feels that perhaps the end of the plague is in sight. Mompesson is surprised at her optimism. But she tells him not to worry - "Marshall's alive, you're alive, the

children are safely tucked up, and it's a beautiful evening. The air smells so sweet . . ." We have learnt earlier that the air smelling sweet is the first symptom of the plague. Before they can take in the implications of what she has just said Marshall arrives carrying Joan's body. Marshall is devastated and lays the corpse at Mompesson's feet. He blames Mompesson for her death and begins to hit him, again and again. He finally leaves, telling Mompesson, "If you knew what it's like to lose your wife . . ." Katherine tends Mompesson's wounds and tries to come to terms with what will happen to her (Did I Tell a Lie? - reprise). She then leaves to see her children. Mompesson rages in his desperation. He cannot understand why God should take her life. He is losing his faith (In the Wilderness). Meanwhile, the people of Eyam are waiting for him. They need his leadership more than ever.

Rowland and Marshall find Mompesson, who by now is lost in grief. He has no sense of purpose and even questions whether he was right to persuade everyone to stay. Marshall is moved by Mompesson's pain and tells him how much the village needs him. He carries Mompesson into the street. The villagers have all gathered to present Mompesson with a makeshift cross for Katherine's grave. It is the first time they have offered Mompesson anything. He is deeply moved by their gesture and finds the strength to carry on. They all leave together to put the cross by Katherine's burial site.

Billy, alone, reflects on how everything has changed - some things for the better (Day Went By). Mompesson, Rowland, Woodman, Sarah and Matthew join him and we see that as the weeks pass there are no deaths. At the end of the song Mompesson announces that the plague is over. As everyone begins to celebrate, Matthew suggests that they begin work on a new Well Dressing, the first for two years. While the Well Dressing board is being prepared, Matthew and Sarah think of Emmot and what she would have said about the day. Their conversation becomes more intimate and they finally embrace (You Wait). It is indeed a time for new beginnings. Marshall interrupts them and they all get on with the new Well Dressing (The Story of the Plague). However, because so many of the village have died there are not enough people to do the work. So Matthew invites the children to help and teaches them how to do the different jobs (Child's Play). As the children become more confident the adults stand back and watch the children, the future of Eyam, carry on the village's oldest tradition: dressing the wells.

## INSTRUMENTATION

Flute db. Piccolo db. Soprano Saxophone  
Trumpet db. Flugel Horn  
Horn  
Percussion (1 player):  
Drum Kit, Glockenspiel, Vibraphone, Tam Tam, Tubular Bells, Latin Percussion  
Piano db. Synthesiser  
Classical Guitar db. Electric Guitar  
Violin  
Viola  
Double Bass db. Bass Guitar

## CHARACTERS

- WILLIAM MOMPESSEON The Rector of Eyam. late 20s. Heroic tenor (to top C).
- KATHERINE MOMPESSEON Mompesson's wife. Mid 20s. Dramatic soprano.
- MATTHEW MORTIN A village leader. Mid 30s. Lyric baritone.
- SARAH HALKSWORTH A weaver. Late 20s. Character mezzo.
- MARSHALL HOWE A miner. Early 40s. Bass-baritone (to low F).
- JOAN HOWE Marshall's wife. Late 30s. Rock alto (to top E).
- BILLY HOWE Son of Joan and Marshall. 10/13. Treble, breaking voice.
- EMMOT SYDALL Engaged to Rowland. Late teens. Soubrette.
- ROWLAND TORRE Engaged to Emmot. Early 20s. Lyric (rock) tenor.

- WOODMAN An itinerant wheeler-dealer. Rock tenor (to top A).
- GEORGE BUCKLAND A travelling tailor. Buffo baritone.
- THE CHORUS Villagers of Eyam. Eight named (Angela, Mary, Christine, Jenny, Peter, Thomas, James and Stuart). SATB.

THE CHILDREN Children of Eyam. Seven named (Joseph, Alice, Anne, Ben and Humphrey - who's the youngest - are from Eyam. Ruth and Adam are the children of William and Katherine Mompesson). Non-singing.

## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### Act One

1. IN EYAM - Company
2. DRESSING THE WELLS - Matthew, Emmot, Mompesson, Marshall, Woodman, Company
3. MOTH SONG - George, Emmot, Joan, Katherine, Sarah, Billy
4. PLAGUE - Company
5. TIRED OF WAITING - Marshall, Emmot, Sarah
6. PROMISE ME - Emmot, Rowland
7. THERE'S A MAN - Woodman, Company
8. DID I TELL A LIE? - Emmot
9. WHAT DO YOU WANT OF ME? - Mompesson
10. LEAVING? - Katherine, Mompesson
11. WHY SHOULD I STAY? - Woodman, Mompesson, Joan, Marshall, Sarah, Matthew
12. SOMETHING IN THE AIR - Company

### Act Two

13. INTRODUCTION - Instrumental
- 14a. HAVE YOU NO PITY? - Mompesson
- 14b. LOOK AT THAT SMILE - Mompesson
15. EMMOT'S DEATH - Rowland, Emmot, Sarah
16. SUMONYERSGORRAGERROFF! - Marshall
17. THE DISCOVERY - Instrumental
18. IT WAS MY CHOICE - Joan
19. AT NIGHT - Sarah, Matthew
20. WHERE DO YOU TURN? - Matthew, Mompesson, Joan, Woodman, Rowland, Katherine, Sarah
21. DID I TELL A LIE? (Reprise) - Katherine
22. IN THE WILDERNESS - Mompesson, Company
23. DAY WENT BY - Billy, Company
24. YOU WAIT - Sarah, Matthew
25. THE STORY OF THE PLAGUE - Marshall, Company
26. CHILD'S PLAY - Matthew, Billy, Sarah, Company