

## **FAIR ISLE – Opera Seria with Doggos**

*Original Music by Mary Bichner*

*Libretto by John J King*

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### **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

OH, THE *OF IT ALL* is a short ballet written as part of **THE MEMENTI MORI OF EDWARD GOREY**, a shuffle play inspired by the life and work of Edward St. John Gorey (1925-2000). There are thirteen vignettes, each of a different genre that Gorey loved: from opera and ballet to hand puppets and silent film.

Throughout the play, Gorey appears in various incarnations, each a nickname or pseudonym of Gorey's; in FAIR ISLE Gorey appears as "Ted." By casting nine actors as different versions of the artist, MEMENTI MORI explores the spectrum and fluidity of identity, artistry, and personhood, through a life. It is our intention that many different bodies play Gorey and other roles. While the casting breakdown below represents the reality of a biographical moment, actors of any gender expression, race, sexual orientation and age can be cast; any performer who can sing the vocal range of a character should be considered. The creators are also open to exploring creative ways to shift vocal ranges should producers have specific performers they wish to cast; such changes should be directed to the contact information above for discussion.

### **CHARACTERS**

TED 50-year-old Ted Gorey

TOM 28-year-old Tom Fitzgerald

PORTER A Porter.

TEDDOGGO A Dog.

TOMDOGGO Another dog.

Tenor, or any singer with range of D#3 – A4

Bass-baritone, or any singer with range of either E2 – E4 or A2 – E4 (with 5 optional F#2+E2 notes)

Mezzo-soprano or a singer with range of E#4 – D#5

No vocals.

No Vocals.

### **SCENE:**

The extreme northwest Coast of Scotland. Isolated island(s) in the far distant water.

To one side, a sign with marquee letters: "OVE ONE ANOTH" and several letters spread across the ground as though they've fallen off.

On the distant island, two small Doggos: TEDDOGGO and TOMDOGGO, eventually.

### **BACKGROUND**

August 28 – September 23, 1975 Ted Gorey and a friend named Tom took a monthlong trip to the Scottish Isles. They'd shared a close friendship, attending ballet together among other things, for 18 months. Ted has taken on a sort of mentorship role – he's 21 years older. He makes drawings for Tom and sending him notes with quotes – illustrated with matching dog-like critters wearing "T" sweaters.

Midway through the trip, heading out to the Outer Hebrides, Tom split, going back to England for a nurse. Ted went on, alone. Among other places, he saw the islands and the Loch Ness (but not the monster). The next year Gorey published [\*L'Heure Bleu\*](#) – featuring two dogs in "T" sweaters, the same creatures he'd drawn in letters to Tom.

*TED and TOM enter. They wear identical (but different colored) fur coats. Underneath, they wear identical collegiate letter sweaters, with "T" emblazoned on the chest.*

*TED charges towards the cliff, looking out at the ocean with awe. TOM hangs back.*

*A PORTER hauls on luggage – color coded to the men – and loads it onto the dinghy.*

*TOM has considerably fewer bags.  
Get it?*

TED

Here we have reached the west coast,  
Le Fin du Monde!  
And there, in distance, is Fair Isle.  
It could be ours!  
Only ours.

TOM

Ted, and Tom.  
Tom, and Ted.  
Find a meal –

TED

Then a bed.

TOM

You're finishing my sentences again.

TED

You always have your body on the brain.

We have travelled many miles,  
Watched ballet and played some chess,  
Through the air and countryside,  
To the sloped shores of Loch Ness.

TOM

We did not see the monster!

TED

No, we did not see the monster after all!  
“But everything we come across is to the point.”

TOM

Who was that?

TED

John Cage.

TOM

Lighten up.

TED

Act your age.

TOM

Look at us: Quite a pair.  
Our patchéd sweaters,  
Matching furs,  
And we complete each other’s hair.

TED

And here we are –  
Le Fin du Monde.  
With Nothing in front of us but Fair Isle.  
You and I together on the Fair Isle.

TOM

It looks so small against the sea.

TED

But big enough for you and me.  
The vastness of the ocean makes it small.  
I’m certain it could stand up in a squall.

TED

It looks so small against the sea,  
But it’s big enough for two,  
Yes, big enough  
For you and Me!

TOM

This ocean,  
This thund’ring ocean...Ah yes this  
Thund’ring, Thund’ring  
Thund’ring, Thund’ring Ocean!

TOM

What is this – some sort of word game?

*(He runs to the marquee sign and plays with the letters, trying different combinations.)*

TED *(aside)*

I am very much in love with It, indeed.  
This third mind,  
Combined  
Of his and mine.

I want to journey with him out into the sea.  
To our Fair Isle.  
Set up a little cottage.  
Maybe a little frottage.

Yet the human heart is an invisible  
And dreadful being.  
Tossed on the waves,  
My heart runs, fleeing.

TOM *(at sign, confused)*

Well, I can't suss it.  
It should say "Love One Another,"  
But cuss it.  
There's no "L."  
Nothing to spell.

*(Two Dogs – TEDDOGGO and TOMDOGGO – appear out on the island)*

Oh, look – look, can you see?  
Two little pups, like you and me.

TED

Listen, Tom.

TOM

I'm listening.  
*(he isn't)*  
What's wrong.

TED

Oh nothing.

TED

Just a thing I want to share with you.

*(aside)*

A Creature from the sea.

TOM

I should tell you something, too.

Porter – scram. Come back in three.

*(PORTER has loaded all of TED's bags, but none of TOM's.)*

PORTER

But the ship's about to sail!

TOM

We only need one moment.

TED *(aside)*

One moment: The universe.

The ocean in a drop!

TOM

Well let us make a clean breast of it.

Shall I go first?

TED

You could go first

TOM

You should go first.

TED

Let us say it together.

*(On the Island, the DOGGOs sniff each other warily.)*

TOM & TED

I think that I'm in love!

TED *(aside)*

Bunty! I can't believe it!

TOM

I've met a lovely nurse.

*(On the island, TOMDOGGO bites and attacks TEDDOGGO.)*

TED

A nurse?

TOM

I'm staying on the mainland for a while.  
And you shall be the king of your Fair Isle.

TED *(aside)*

He met a lovely nurse?  
I offered him my universe.

TOM

Fair Isle is only big enough for one.

TED

Yes, only one. Always one.

TOM

You have so many bags – there isn't room for both of us.  
Not in this boat, not on the isle, not in this life.

TED

You say you've met a nurse?

TOM

A very pretty nurse.  
And you?

TED

And Me?

TOM

You said you are in love!  
With who?

TED

Dear me.

TOM

With whom are you in love?

TED

The Island.

My fairest island.

They say that no man is and island,

But a man may find his heart on Fair Isle.

I have so many many bags.

There just is not the room,

For two upon this Birlinn,

Fair Isle will surely swirl into the sea,

If you should make landfall with me.

TOM

Then it's done.

*(They Shake hands.)*

Enjoy Fair Isle!

TED

Enjoy your nurse.

I hope she's fun.

*(TOM grabs his bags and exits.*

*On the Island, TOMDOGGO disappears.*

*TEDDOGGO rolls, recovers, howling at the sky.*

TED

He met a lovely nurse?

I offered him my universe.

*(PORTER enters.)*

PORTER

Just you, sir?

TED

Only me.  
Only me.  
Yes, Only me.

PORTER

Enjoying Scotland, sir?

TED

Such lovely storms,  
Such lovely storming waves,  
That rise like walls,  
Separating, separating.

PORTER

Did you make it to Loch Ness?

TED

Aye, I did.  
I did not see the monster,  
No, I did not see the monster, after all.  
The greatest disappointment of all my life.

*(He goes to the sign.)*

TED

It is all a game of words,  
Nothing more and Nothing better.  
But you just cannot spell "Love,"  
If you do not have the letters.

*TED finds an "M," and "E," and "R." He places them:  
"MOVE ONE ANOTHER.")*

PORTER

Hop aboard, sir.

Fair Isle?

TED

Fair Isle.

Fair Isle.

There's only room for one.

No, wait. Tell me.

Is there an island further out?

An isle that's impossible to reach –

Separated, Separated by the sea?

PORTER

Aye, there's one.

TED

That's me.

*(aside)*

No!

I'm not an island.

I am a universe.

And in this universe...

There is an island,

Swarmed by the sea.

*(PORTER rows TED out into the ocean.)*

**END.**