

THE MATA HARI SUITE

The Mata Hari Suite, for solo piano, is a set of six pieces that were written to provide background music during the opening run of **One Last Night With Mata Hari**. This one-woman show, with a male pianist also taking on a number of roles, was composed by John Burge with Craig Walker providing the book and lyrics. During the final preparations for the January 2017 opening of this cabaret style show, John Burge decided that it would be ideal to have some prerecorded solo piano music playing while the audience waited for each of the two acts to begin. As often happens in composing music for the stage, John Burge found that he had cut quite a bit of music from earlier drafts of the show that could be easily adapted into solo piano pieces. For example, the opening movement of this suite ("Overture: The tale of Mata Hari") begins with a different version of the opening number from the show. In most cases though, John Burge came up with new musical ideas composed in the style of parlour piano music from the same period of Mata's life and then combined these with reworked versions of tunes from the actual show. The end result is a set of six contrasting movements all having a strong element of nostalgia.

ONE LAST NIGHT WITH MATA HARI

Mata Hari (1876-1917) was renowned as an exotic dancer and courtesan throughout Europe in the early 20th century. Her conviction and execution by France on charges of spying for Germany during World War I is one of the many aspects of her life that add to her ongoing notoriety. This show is best described as a kind of cabaret in which Mata Hari recounts her life in story and song on the evening of October 14th, 1917, the night before she faces the firing squad. The setting is a room within the Saint Lazare Prison in Paris, where prisoners, the Sisters of Marie-Joseph and other prison staff are gathered. The pianist, acting the role of the prison's physician, Dr. Bizard, comes out, sits down at the keyboard and prepares the audience for the upcoming performance. Mata Hari, dressed conservatively, eventually enters and through song and narrative, tells her side of the story. The first act covers Mata's schooling in Holland, unhappy marriage to Dutch Colonial Army Captain Rudolph McLeod, her time and sickness in Indonesia, the death of her son and the abandonment of her husband as she makes a new life for herself in Paris by creating the persona of Mata Hari. Act Two begins with a recreation of one of Mata's dances (using a pre-filmed shadow dance), the unraveling of Europe during the First World War, her recruitment to spy for France, her love of Vadime, and the eventual arrest, interrogation, trial, imprisonment and execution. The ending though, leaves the audience questioning the validity of the crimes and sentence.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHOW

John Burge and Craig Walker, colleagues at Queen's University in the Dan School of Drama and Music, began discussing this project in 2012. Craig Walker was drawn to the material in large part because of new information that had become available about Mata Hari through the release of previously classified files. With the support of a grant from the Queen's University Fund for Support of Artistic Projects, they held a two-day workshop of Act One at Queen's University in December 2014 with soprano, Patricia O'Callaghan and John Burge at the keyboard. A project grant from the City of Kingston Arts Fund supported a second workshop at Queen's in August 2015 with Patricia O'Callaghan and John Burge still at the piano. This workshop culminated in a public reading of the complete work. A final workshop took place in July 2016 with pianist Gregory Oh joining Patricia in preparation of the January 2017 premiere at Kingston's Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts.



John Burge, Gregory Oh, Patricia O'Callaghan, Craig Walker