Browning: An Operetta in Four Acts

By Peter Tyrer

Royal College of Psychiatrists
Friday 14th November 2014
7.15pm
Welcome...

Welcome to the first operetta to be staged at the new address of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in East London, a performance which is also linked to the Jubilee meeting of the World Association of Social Psychiatry and the Rehabilitation Section of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

The philosophy underlying this operetta is not immediately apparent from the title. It is at one level the recapitulation of a well-known event, the romance of two poets, Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning in 1845, but at another it illustrates the concept of nidotherapy, a collaborative treatment designed not to treat persistent mental illness directly, but to change the environment, in all its forms, to make a better fit between person and setting. Elizabeth Barrett was a recluse with multiple psychopathologies in 1845; she hardly ever left the Barrett household in Wimpole Street and whilst she was a successful poet her personal life was a suffocating combination of over-concern and restrictions imposed by her father. In short, she was miserable and unfulfilled.

But this is not the time to spill the beans about what happens. We will let this unfold shortly. I only want to tell you about our charity, NIDUS-UK, the international charity supporting the promotion of nidotherapy (www.nidotherapy.com). We have training courses in Canada and Sweden and projects in Montenegro and India, that are making the world a better place for a group of people who generally find it an alien place at present. We have also performances of ‘Browning’ planned for forgotten communities in England, where by involving people (both children and adults) in our performances, we can show nidotherapy in action on the ground. Our next performance is at a mining village, Newstead in Nottinghamshire, in January. We plan for all our performances to be free of charge but are dependent on donations from well-wishers to fund these and hope we can count on your generosity tonight. You will find donation boxes in this theatre and at the exits so we hope you will be unerringly attracted to them during the short interval (sorry we have no refreshments) and when you leave.

Note: NIDUS-UK has donation boxes in the theatre.
Cheques can be made payable to NIDUS-UK or electronically to the Cooperative Bank at 089299, account number 65672745
Dramatis Personae

in order of appearance...

Charles Dickens                                      John Tallents
Our esteemed Narrator                                Philip Graham
Elizabeth Barrett                                    Joanne Davidson
Dorothy Wilson – personal maid to Elizabeth Barrett  Helen Tyrer
Joseph Barrett - Edward's son                        Peter Anthony
Alfred – another of Edward’s sons                    Richard Seivewright
Septimus – one of Edward’s nephews                   James Coughlin
Martha – one of Edward’s nieces                      Evie Francis
Joshua – another of Edward’s nephews                 Joshua Walker
Sophie – another of Edward’s nieces                  Sophia Clarke
Millie Mason – housemaid                             Sheena Thompson
Jemima Hardcastle – lady’s maid                      Louise Shelley
Prunella Blunt – scullery maid                       Sarah Carr
Meg Squeers – scullery maid                           Nicola Martin
Edward Moulton Barrett - head of the family         Peter Tyrer
Henrietta Barrett - Edward's daughter                Deborah Hart
Robert Browning - poet                               Jonathan Waite
Lucy Lane – a girl in Westbourne Grove              Hetty Leach
Amanda Alley – another girl in Westbourne Grove      Georgina Webb
Harriet Read - Wilson’s sister                       Helen Tyrer/Julia Burnside
Mary Manning - rail passenger on Oxford train        Maria Clarke
Beulah Wood – another rail passenger on Oxford train Joe Dickie
Porter on Paddington Station                         David Goldberg
Arthur Arbuckle – train guard                         Pippa Murdie
Sarah Graham-Clarke – Elizabeth’s aunt               Adam Hamilton
Bill Sickle – Sarah’s gardener                       Mike Wilson
Reverend Artemis Snodgrass – vicar of Marylebone    Kevin Connelly
John Kenyon – socialite and Edward’s distant cousin  

Music arranged by Colin Dudman                      Piano: Simon Procter
Conductor: Daniel Tomkins                            Scenery supervisor: Delroy Bentt
Historical advisor: Bernard Richards                 Stage Director: David Britton
Cast Director: Helen Tyrer                           Lighting advisor: Neil Bailey
Costumes: Nottingham Community Wardrobe             Costume Advisor: Louise Shelley
Other props and costumes from the cast               Filmcameraman: Derek Smith
Music from the Browning Ensemble
The Play

Music from the Browning Ensemble: Simon Procter (piano), Anna Maratos (cello), Cerrita Smith (flute), Barbara Barrett (violin)

Act 1. Scene 1. The breakfast room at 50 Wimpole Street, London in October 1845. In which Edward becomes concerned about his daughter, Elizabeth, and her social life.

Act 1. Scene 2. The same room at 50 Wimpole Street later in October, 1845. Edward becomes even more discomfited by his daughter.

Act 1. Scene 3. Outside 50 Wimpole Street, in which an unwelcome visitor, Robert Browning, an itinerant poet, arrives and is refused entry.

Act 1. Scene 4. Drawing room at 50 Wimpole Street, where Edward has an idea to improve Elizabeth's mental health derived from his good friend William Ley.

Act 2. Scene 1. Westbourne Grove, a sorry and neglected street close to Paddington Station, London, where Robert is in some difficulty finding his way.

Act 2. Scene 2. A first class train carriage on the Great Western Railway between London and Oxford, where Elizabeth receives an unexpected visitor and everything gets rather jolly.

Interlude of 9 minutes with Charles Dickens

Act 3. Scene 1. It is now April, 1846, and we are now in the delightful garden of Sarah Graham-Clark's residence in Ledbury, Herefordshire, where Sarah and Elizabeth are having an intimate conversation.

Act 3. Scene 2. The drawing room at 50 Wimpole Street in August 1846. It is late in the evening and most of the family have gone to bed, so Wilson and Elizabeth can speak their minds.

Act 4. Scene 1. On the morning of 12th September, 1846, at Marylebone Parish Church in London, where the Reverend Artemis Snodgrass is a little disturbed by the possibility of conducting an unusual wedding ceremony.

Act 4. Scene 2. The breakfast room at 50 Wimpole Street, later that same morning.

Act 4. Scene 3. Finale. Outside Marylebone Parish Church, where at last everything seems to be going extremely well.

Closing music from the Browning Ensemble.