BRITTEN
Curlew River
A Parable for Church Performance

Madwoman  Peter Pears
Ferryman   John Shirley-Quirk
Abbot      Harold Blackburn
Traveller  Bryan Drake
Voice of the Spirit  Bruce Webb

English Opera Group
Benjamin Britten

Total timing 69.15
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1 'Te lucis ante terminum' (Abbot, Monks)  7.19
2 'I am the ferryman' (Ferryman)  3.09
3 'I come from the Westland' (Traveller)  4.36
4 'But first may I ask you what is that strange noise?' (Ferryman)  2.42
5 'Clear as a sky without a cloud' (Madwoman)  2.22
6 'Near the Black Mountains there I dwelt' (Madwoman)  2.19
7 'A thousand leagues may sunder a mother and her son' (Abbot, Pilgrims)  3.20
8 'Ignorant man! You refuse a passage to me...' (Madwoman)  2.11
9 'I beg your pardon' (Ferryman)  4.52
10 'Curlew River, smoothly flowing...' (Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims)  2.14
11 'Today is an important day' (Ferryman)  5.32
12 'Look! While you were listening to my story...,' (Ferryman)  2.44
13 'Ferryman, tell me, when did it happen?' (Madwoman)  6.22
14 'Hoping, I wandered on' (Madwoman)  3.30
15 'He whose life was full of promise' (Abbot)  2.22
16 'The moon has risen' (Abbot, Pilgrims)  5.55
17 'Go your way in peace, mother' (Spirit)  2.30
18 'Good souls; we have shown you...' (Abbot)  5.14

Total timing 69.15
Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Curlew River
A Parable for Church Performance
Libretto based on the Medieval Japanese No-play Sumidagawa of Juro Montomasa by William Plomer

The monks and acolytes

Madwoman........................................Peter Pears
Ferryman...........................................John Shirley-Quirk
Abbot................................................Harold Blackburn
Traveller...........................................Bryan Drake
Voice of the Spirit................................Bruce Webb

The Pilgrims
Edmund Bohan, Edgar Boniface, Patrick Healy,
Michael Kehoe, Peter Leeming, William McKinney,
David Reed, Gerald Stern, Robert Tasman

The Players
Richard Adeney, flute • Neill Sanders, horn
Cecil Aronowitz, viola • Stuart Knussen, double-bass
Osian Ellis, harp • James Blades, percussion
Philip Ledger, organ

Music under the direction of:
Benjamin Britten and Viola Tunnard

1. 'Te lucis ante terminum' (Abbot, Monks) (7.19)
2. 'I am the ferryman' (Ferryman) (3.09)
3. 'I come from the Westland' (Traveller) (4.36)
4. 'But first may I ask you what is that strange noise?' (Ferryman) (2.42)
5. 'Clear as a sky without a cloud' (Madwoman) (2.22)
6. 'Near the Black Mountains there I dwelt' (Madwoman) (2.19)
7. 'A thousand leagues may sunder a mother and her son' (Abbot, Pilgrims) (3.20)
8. 'Ignorant man! You refuse a passage to me...' (Madwoman) (2.11)
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15. 'He whose life was full of promise' (Abbot) (2.22)
16. 'The moon has risen' (Abbot, Pilgrims) (5.55)
17. 'Go your way in peace, mother' (Spirit) (2.30)
18. 'Good souls, we have shown you...' (Abbot) (5.14)

Producer: John Culshaw
Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson
Recording location: Orford Parish Church, June 1965
A note by the composer

It was in Tokyo in January 1956 that I saw a No-drama for the first time; and I was lucky enough during my brief stay there to see two different performances of the same play — Sumidagawa. The whole occasion made a tremendous impression upon me: the simple, touching story, the economy of style, the intense slowness of the action, the marvellous skill and control of the performers, the beautiful costumes, the mixture of chanting, speech, singing which, with the three instruments, made up the strange music — it all offered a totally new 'operatic' experience.

There was no conductor — the instrumentalists sat on the stage, as did the chorus, and the chief characters made their entrance down a long ramp. The lighting was strictly non-theatrical. The cast was all-male, the one female character wearing an exquisite mask which made no attempt to hide the male jowl beneath it.

The memory of this play has seldom left my mind in the years since. Was there not something — many things — to be learnt from it? The solemn dedication and skill of the performers were a lesson to any singer or actor of any country and any language. Was it not possible to use just such a story — the simple one of a demented mother seeking her lost child — with an English background (for there was no question in any case of a pastiche from the ancient Japanese)?

Surely the medieval religious drama in England would have had a comparable setting — an all-male cast of ecclesiastics — a simple austere staging in a church — a very limited instrumental accompaniment — a moral story? And so we came from Sumidagawa to Curlew River and a Church in the Fens, but with the same story and similar characters; and whereas in Tokyo the music was the ancient Japanese music jealously preserved by successive generations, here I have started the work with that wonderful plainsong hymn 'Te lucis ante terminum', and from it the whole piece may be said to have grown. There is nothing specifically Japanese left in the Parable that William Plomer and I have written, but if stage and audience can achieve half the intensity and concentration of that original drama I shall be well satisfied.

Benjamin Britten (1965)

The convention of Curlew River

The very nature of Curlew River eschews any kind of 'theatrical' presentation or surroundings, both in its convention and its religious basis. The sophisticated ambience of a theatre would be foreign to the nature of such a work and both music and libretto are conceived for church performance. Mr Britten has in fact most successfully exploited the resonant acoustic and atmosphere of a church in both the vocal and the instrumental writing, as can be heard magnificently in this recording.

The simple setting — basically a raised and raked circle, some sixteen feet in diameter, approached from two directions by a spiralling ramp following the curve of the circle — is accordingly placed at one end of a church, the church to which the Abbot and his monks come to perform their mystery. At the foot of the ramp, to one side of the stage, sit the instrumentalists — lay-brothers. There is no conductor, but at every point in the score an instrument or voice leads the rest of the ensemble in chamber-music style. The lead comes sometimes in a straightforward musical fashion, sometimes from a particular movement or gesture from the stage. This kind of movement must of course be charged with intensity if it is not to become merely static, but, unlike naturalistic acting, the emotion should never be expressed with the face or eyes but always by a rehearsed ritualistic movement of the hands, head, or body. To help with this, and to place the
protagonists at a further remove from naturalism, masks were worn by the Madwoman, the Ferryman, and the Traveller. The art of acting in masks is hard to assimilate but with every tilt or angle of the head a well-designed mask can take on an almost magical life of its own. The mask also assists the performance of the Madwoman: there must never be any question here of female impersonation: one should always be aware that monks are representing the characters, just as their movements should represent and be symbolic of their emotions.

In spite of the work and its slow-moving though intense nature, once the spectator becomes geared to this convention his emotions become subtly and passionately involved. Such involvement can be destroyed by a single misplaced, unnecessary or uncontrolled gesture. Every movement of head or hand, like every note and word in the score, must be essential and, although formalised, must be designed and executed with intention and the utmost intensity. This requires enormous concentration on the part of the actor—an almost Yoga-like muscular and mental control. The parallel for this can be found in so many branches of Japanese art: the single twig or flower in a flower arrangement, the devastating effect in a film when an eternally still figure suddenly moves an eye or a finger, even if only for the fraction of an inch. From this discipline comes strength, from this simplicity, beauty and from all these the power of Curlew River.

Colin Graham
Director of the original production

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CURLEW RIVER

The scene is set in a church by a Fenland river in early medieval times.

A company of Monks, Acolytes and Lay Brethren with their Abbot walk in procession to the acting area.

**Abbot, Monks**

Te lucis ante terminum, rerum Creator, poscimus, ut pro tua clementia, sis præsal et custodia. 

Procul recedant somnia, et noctium phantasmata: hostemque nostrum comprime, ne polluantur corpora. 

Praesta, pater piissime, patrique compar unice, cum Spiritu Paraclito, regnans per omne saeculum. Amen...

(The Lay Brethren go to their instruments, and the Abbot comes forward to address the congregation.)

**Abbot**

Good souls, I would have you know the brothers have come today to show you a mystery: how in sad mischance a sign was given of God’s grace.

**Monks**

A sign of God’s grace.

**Abbot**

Not far away where, in our reedy Fens, the Curlew River runs, not long ago amid souls akin to you, a sign was given of God’s grace.

**Monks**

A sign of God’s grace.

**Abbot**

As candle shine in a dismal place, a freshet spilt in a desert waste, as innocence outshineth guilt, a sign was given of God’s good grace.
Abbot, Monks
O pray for the souls of all that fall by the wayside, all alone.
O praise our God that lifteth up the fallen, the lost, the least.

Beloved, attend to our mystery. (The Monks who are to play the Madwoman, the Traveller and the Ferryman are ceremonially prepared. While the Madwoman and the Traveller leave the acting area with the Acolytes, the Abbot and the Chorus, representing the Pilgrims in the boat, withdraw to their seats, and reveal the Ferryman.)

Ferryman
[2] I am the ferryman. I row the ferry-boat over the Curlew, our wide and reedy Fenland river. In every season, every weather, I row the ferry-boat.

Abbot, Pilgrims
Between two kingdoms the river flows; on this side, the Land of the West, on the other, the Eastern Fens.

Ferryman
Today is an important day, many people need the ferry to reach the other bank. There the folk are gathering to pray before a grave, as if it were a shrine. A year ago today there was a burial; the river folk believe some special grace is there to heal the sick in body and soul. Today is an important day, mark this well, all of you! Mark this well!

(He sits in the boat. The Traveller approaches.)

Traveller
[3] I come from the Westland, from the Westland, on a journey. Far, far northward I must go; weary days of travel lie before me.

Abbot, Pilgrims
Far, far, northward he must go; weary days of travel lie before him.

Traveller
Behind me, under clouds and mist, heaths and pastures I have crossed; woods and moorlands I have passed, many a peril I have faced; may God preserve wayfaring men! (arriving at the ferry)
Here is the bank of the Curlew River, and now I have reached the ferry. (The Ferryman is about to cast off.) I see the ferry-boat about to leave.

Madwoman
{heard in the distance} You mock me, you ask me whither I go, whither I go.

Ferryman
May I ask, did you see who it is that is singing?

Madwoman
You mock me! You ask me! How should I know, how should I know?

Traveller
Yes, the people were watching a woman in the road who seems to be crazy. They say she comes from the Black Mountains.

Madwoman
Where the nest of the curlew is not filled with snow, where the eyes of the lamb are untorn by the crow, the carrion crow.

Traveller
The people were amused
when they heard her singing; they all began laughing.

**Madwoman**
There let me, there let me go!

**Traveller (as the Madwoman comes into view)**
She is coming this way.

**Ferryman**
I will delay the ferry-boat. I will wait for the madwoman.

**Madwoman**
Let me in! Let me out! How can you, how can you say...

**Ferryman, Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims**
We will delay the ferry-boat. We wish to see her.

**Madwoman**
... why the point of an arrow divideth the day? Why to live is to warm an image of clay dark as the day?

**Ferryman, Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims**
We wish to hear her singing. We will laugh at her crazily singing.

**Madwoman**
Let me in! Let me out! I turn me, I turn me away! Turn me, I turn me away!

**Ferryman, Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims**
She wanders raving, raving, and all alone.

**Madwoman**
Clear as a sky without a cloud may be a mother's mind, but darker than a starless night with not one gleam, not one, no gleam to show the way. All is clear but unclear too, love for my child confuses me; where is my darling now? Where? Where? Where? Shall I ask these travellers?

**Abbot, Pilgrims**
Or will they also laugh at her as she wanders raving, and all alone?

**Madwoman**
Does he know his mother's grief?

**Abbot, Pilgrims**
Dew on the grass... It's here; it's gone!

**Madwoman**
Dew on the grass... It's here; it's gone!

**Abbot**
Is she to pass her days complaining of their bitter taste?

**Pilgrims**
Dew on the grass... It's here; it's gone!

**Abbot**
Is she to pass her days complaining of their bitter taste?

**Pilgrims**
Dew on the grass... It's here; it's gone!

**Madwoman**
Near the Black Mountains there I dwelt, there I dwelt far, far in the West, there I was living with my child, there with my only child. One day alas he vanished: one day he vanished: with silence every room was full, full of his absence, roaring like the sea! My only child was lost, seized as a slave by a stranger, a foreigner.
They told me he was taken eastward, eastward, along the drovers’ track east, east, east! Clear and unclear in my mind eastward I wander on, on, in longing for my son. (she weeps)

Abbot, Pilgrims
A thousand leagues may sunder a mother and her son, but that would not diminish her yearning for her child.

Traveller
Will her search be at an end here, at the Curlew River, now she has reached the Curlew River?

Abbot, Pilgrims
The river flowing between two realms, on this side, the land of the West, on the other, the Eastern Fens.

Madwoman (rising)
Ferryman, let me get into your boat!

Ferryman
How can I take you in my ferry-boat, unless you tell me where you have come from, and where you are going?

Madwoman
I come from the Black Mountains! Searching for, searching for someone... someone...

Ferryman
So you come from the Black Mountains! I tell you, Black Mountain woman, any fool can see your feet are wandering, your thoughts are wandering too.

Madwoman
Let me get into your boat!

Ferryman
I will not take you across the Curlew... unless you entertain us with your singing...

Madwoman
... unless you entertain us with your singing. We want to hear your singing...

Entertain us with your singing... Make us laugh with your singing... Madwoman, crazily singing... Show us what you can do! Madwoman, sing!

Madwoman
Ignorant man! You refuse a passage to me, a noblewoman! It ill becomes you, Curlew ferryman, such incivility.

Ferryman
This Black Mountain woman uses a high-flown way of talking!

Madwoman
Let me remind you of the famous traveller who once made a riddle in this very place: 'Birds of the Fenland, though you float or fly, wild birds, I cannot understand your cry. Tell me, does the one I love in this world still live?'

Ferryman
I beg your pardon. Living in this famous place I should have known to call them curlews of the Fenland.

Madwoman
Instead of gulls.

Traveller
A traveller at this very place cried... Thinking of his lady love...

She turns, watching the flight of the birds.) Ferryman, there the wild birds float! I see the wild birds fly! What are those birds?

Ferryman
Those? They’re only common gulls.

Madwoman
Gulls you may call them! Here, by the Curlew River, call them, I beg of you, curlews of the Fenland.

Ferryman
I beg your pardon. Living in this famous place I should have known to call them curlews of the Fenland.

Madwoman
Instead of gulls.

Traveller
A traveller at this very place cried...
Madwoman
"Tell me does the one I love
in this world still live?"
(The Madwoman makes as if she would follow
the birds.)
Ferryman
She, too, is seeking someone lost.
Searching for a son.
Ferryman, Traveller
Both derive from longing,
both from love.
‘Birds of the Fenland’, she will ask,
but answer they will not.
‘Birds of the Fenland, thou float or fly,
wild birds, I cannot understand your cry’
Abbot, Pilgrims
Birds of the Fenland, she will ask you too,
‘Is the child I love
still living?’
She will ask,
but answer they will not.
‘Tell me, does the one I love
in this world still live? Ah!’
Birds of the Fenland, she has heard you
crying there in the West, in the
mountains, in her home.
How far, how very far,
birds of the Fenland, comes this
wandering soul.
(Coming forward, the Madwoman goes up to the
Ferryman and joins her hands in supplication.)
Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Ferryman, she begs of you
to let her come aboard;
she sees the boat is crowded,
but let her come aboard!
Ferryman
This madwoman seems,
though her mind may be wandering,
to know what she seeks.
Lady, be quick and come aboard!
And you too, Traveller.
Come aboard! Come aboard!
To navigate the ferry-boat is not easy.
The river is glassy,
but the devil himself
with strong-flowing currents
can drag the boat aside,
and carry away
all who are in her.
Be careful and sit still.
God have mercy upon us!
Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
God have mercy upon us!
Ferryman
Hoist the sail!
(The Madwoman boards the boat. The Traveller
sits sideways behind her. The Acolytes hoist the
sail. The Ferryman stands at the back and plies
his pole.)
Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Curlew River, smoothly flowing
between the Lands of East and West,
dividing person from person!
Ah, Ferryman,
row your ferry-boat,
bring nearer, nearer,
person to person,
by chance or misfortune,
time, death or misfortune
divided asunder!
Bring nearer persons
by time, death or misfortune
divided asunder!
Traveller
What are all those people
crowded on the other bank
near that yew tree?
Abbot, Pilgrims
Bring nearer, nearer,
persons divided.
Ferryman (stopping poling)
Today is an important day,
the people are assembling
in memory of a sad event.
I will tell you the story.
It happened on this very day a year ago.
There was a stranger in my boat, a
Northman, a foreigner,
a big man armed with a sword and a
cudgel. He was on his way to take ship to
the North-Land.
(poles once)
And not alone. There was a boy with
him, a gentle boy, twelve years old
maybe, and a Christian. The Heathen
said he’d bought him as a slave. The boy
said nothing. I could see he was
ill - unused to travelling rough.
(poles once)
Poor child. When we had crossed the
river, he said he was too weak to walk,
and down he lay on the grass near the chapel.

(poles once)
The Heathen threatened him, swore at him, struck him. He was a man without a heart, and we feared he would kill the boy, but he left the boy where he was, and went on his way.

(poles twice)
Abandoned by his master, the boy lay alone. The river people pitied him, took care of him. But he grew weaker and weaker. We asked him who he was, where he was born. 'I was born', he said, 'in the Western Marches; from my pillow, when I first opened my eyes, I could see the Black Mountains. I am the only child of a nobleman. My father is dead, I have lived alone with my mother. Then, walking alone in our own fields, I was seized by that stranger. He threatened to kill me... But there was no need: I know I am dying... Please bury me here, by the path to this chapel. Then, if travellers from my dear country pass this way, their shadows will fall on my grave. And plant a yew tree in memory of me.'

He spoke these words calmly, like a man. Then he said a prayer: Kyrie eleison!

Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Kyrie eleison!

Ferryman
And then he died.

(The Madwoman weeps)

Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison!

Ferryman
The river folk believe the boy was a saint. They take earth from his grave to heal their sickness. They report many cures. The river folk believe his spirit has been seen.

Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Kyrie eleison, Kyrie eleison!

Ferryman (steering his boat towards the land)
There may be some people from the West in this boat. Let them offer prayers that the soul of that boy may rest in peace.

Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Kyrie eleison!

Ferryman
12 Look! While you were listening to my story, we have reached the bank. Lower the sail! (The sail is lowered and the tomb can be seen.) Make haste there, all of you! Come, get ashore!

(The Traveller, Abbot and Pilgrims leave the boat and approach the tomb, singing as they go. The Madwoman remains in the boat.)

Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Curlew River, smoothly flowing between the Lands of East and West, dividing person from person!

Ah, Ferryman, row your ferry-boat, bring nearer, nearer, person to person, by chance or misfortune, time, death or misfortune divided asunder!

(The Traveller turns and addresses the Ferryman.)

Traveller
I'll remain here today. I cannot journey on today. Though I never knew the boy I'll offer up a prayer for him.

Abbot, Pilgrims
Though he never knew the boy he'll offer up a prayer for him.

(Ferryman turns and looks at the weeping Madwoman.)

Ferryman
Come along there, you crazy soul! It's time to land, so get out of the boat. Come along there, get out of the boat! You must be soft-hearted to weep at my story, to weep so bitterly. Make haste there, step ashore!

Madwoman
13 Ferryman, tell me, when did it happen, this story you have told us?
Last year, at this time, on this very day, a year ago.

Madwoman
Ferryman, how old was the boy?

Ferryman
I told you, he was twelve, he was twelve.

Madwoman
What was his name?

Ferryman
But I told you all about him! I told you what he was, and how he came here.

Madwoman
And since then have neither, neither of his parents been here?

Ferryman
No one of his family.

Madwoman
Not even his mother?

Ferryman
Not even his mother!

Madwoman
No wonder no one came here to look for him! He was the child sought by this madwoman.

Ferryman
Oh, how should I know?

Flis father was a nobleman from the Black Mountains.

Madwoman
And since then have neither, neither of his parents been here?

Ferryman
No one of his family.

Madwoman
Not even his mother?

Ferryman
Not even his mother!

Madwoman
No wonder no one came here to look for him! He was the child sought by this madwoman.

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it? The boy who died here!

Traveller
The boy was her child...

Pilgrims
He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
O Curlew River, cruel Curlew, where all my hope is swept away!

Ferryman
Last year, at this time, on this very day, a year ago.

Madwoman
Ferryman, how old was the boy?

Ferryman
I told you, he was twelve, he was twelve.

Madwoman
What was his name?

Ferryman
But I told you all about him! I told you what he was, and how he came here.

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And since then have neither, neither of his parents been here?

Ferryman
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Madwoman
Not even his mother?

Ferryman
Not even his mother!

Madwoman
No wonder no one came here to look for him! He was the child sought by this madwoman.

Traveller
The boy was her child...

Pilgrims
He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
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Ferryman
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The boy was her child...

Pilgrims
He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
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Ferryman
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Madwoman
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Ferryman
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Traveller
The boy was her child...

Pilgrims
He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
O Curlew River, cruel Curlew, where all my hope is swept away!

Ferryman
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Madwoman
And since then have neither, neither of his parents been here?

Ferryman
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Madwoman
Not even his mother?

Ferryman
Not even his mother!

Madwoman
No wonder no one came here to look for him! He was the child sought by this madwoman.

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it? The boy who died here!

Traveller
The boy was her child...

Pilgrims
He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
O Curlew River, cruel Curlew, where all my hope is swept away!

Ferryman
Last year, at this time, on this very day, a year ago.

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Madwoman
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What was his name?

Ferryman
But I told you all about him! I told you what he was, and how he came here.

Madwoman
And since then have neither, neither of his parents been here?

Ferryman
No one of his family.

Madwoman
Not even his mother?

Ferryman
Not even his mother!

Madwoman
No wonder no one came here to look for him! He was the child sought by this madwoman.

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it? The boy who died here!

Traveller
The boy was her child...

Pilgrims
He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
O Curlew River, cruel Curlew, where all my hope is swept away!

Ferryman
Last year, at this time, on this very day, a year ago.

Madwoman
Ferryman, how old was the boy?

Ferryman
I told you, he was twelve, he was twelve.

Madwoman
What was his name?

Ferryman
But I told you all about him! I told you what he was, and how he came here.

Madwoman
And since then have neither, neither of his parents been here?

Ferryman
No one of his family.

Madwoman
Not even his mother?

Ferryman
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He was her child...

Ferryman
Who could have dreamt it?

Traveller
O Curlew River, cruel Curlew, where all my hope is swept away!

Ferryman
Last year, at this time, on this very day, a year ago.
Ferryman
Your sad search is ended! G
(The Ferryman puts by his pole. He and the Traveller move to help the Madwoman out of the boat.)

Ferryman
Now let me show you where the boy is buried.
Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Lady, let him guide you to the tomb, the place where your wandering steps have brought you. This is the grave of your young child. That his soul may rest in peace, we can all pray. May heaven receive it!
Ferryman
I beg you, please step this way. Lady, come with me. This is the grave of your young child. That his soul may rest in peace, we can all pray. May heaven receive it!

Madwoman (turning away from the tomb)
Hoping, I wandered on, hoping, hoping to find my son. I have come alone to the reedy land of Fens, where all is strange to me, only to learn in all this earth, no road leads to my living son. Hoping, hoping, I wandered on - I have come to a grave! Did I give birth to him to have him stolen and carried far, far away, here to the Eastern Fens to end as dust... dust... to end as dust by the road? O, good people, open up the tomb that I may see again the shape of my child, his face, his well-beloved face! (She claws hopelessly at the tomb, then sinks down weeping.)

Abbot
He whose life was full of promise...

Pilgrims
...promised and is gone.

Abbot
She who feels her life is passing...

Pilgrims
...she is left alone!

Abbot
Left alone and weeping!

Pilgrims
Weeping!

Abbot, Pilgrims
May her weeping cease! (An Acolyte tolls the bell.)

Ferryman
What is the use of tears? Whom can your weeping help? No, rather say a prayer that in the other world the soul of your child may rest in peace.

Madwoman
Cruel! Grief is too great. I cannot pray.

I am struck down. Here, on the ground, all I can do is weep.

Traveller
This is not right. Lady, remember, all of us here may pray for your child: but your prayer is best to rejoice his young soul.

Madwoman
What you say is true: I'll say a prayer for the soul of my lost child. Deafened by his silence, roaring like the sea. (She rises and faces the tomb.)

Abbot, Pilgrims
The moon has risen, the river breeze is blowing, the Curlew River is flowing to the sea. Now it is night and time to pray.
Madwoman
I pray with the others
under the white light
of the cloudless moon.
Ferryman
And her prayers
go straight to heaven.
Traveller
Her prayers go to heaven.

Ferryman, Traveller
And, O, to the numberless,
to the holy and glorious saints,
to the holy saints and martyrs,
all the company,
holiest and glorious,
there, there in the blessed
abode of eternal peacefulness,
in the abode of eternal happiness,
all angels pray for us.
Pray for us, all angels.
Christ have mercy upon us.

(kneeling, facing the tomb)
All angels, pray for us.
All martyrs, pray for us,
All saints, pray for us.

Abbot, Pilgrims
(kneeling, facing the tomb)
Custodes hominum psallimus
naturae fragili quos Pater addidit
caelestis comites, insidiabant
ne succumberet hostibus.
Nam quod corruerit proctor Angelus,
censis merito pulsus honoribus,
ardens invidia, pellere nititur
quos caelo Deus advocat.

Madwoman
(turning away from the tomb, and gazing into the
distance)
From the river
I hear voices,
like souls abandoned
curlews are calling.
‘Birds of the Fenland,
though you float or fly,
wild birds, I cannot understand your cry.
Tell me, does the one I love
in this world still live?’

Ferryman, Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Huc custos igitur pervigil advola,
avertens patria de tibi credita
tam morbos animi, quam requiescere
quidquid non sinit incolas.

All
Sanctae sit Triadi...

(At this moment the Spirit of the Child is heard,
echoing the chant from the tomb.)

Spirit of the Child
Sanctae sit Triadi...

Ferryman, Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims;
Spirit (echoing)
...laus pia jugiter...

Spirit
...laus pia jugiter...

Madwoman
I thought I heard the voice of my child.
Ferryman
I thought I heard him
praying in his grave.

Abbot, Pilgrims
Regnat gloria....

Spirit
Regnat gloria saecula.

Traveller
The voice of the child!

Abbot, Pilgrims;
Spirit (echoing)
...cujus in omnia...

Ferryman
We shall keep silent.

Traveller
Say your prayer alone, lady.

Ferryman
Say it alone.

Madwoman
O, but if only I might hear it,
hear his voice once again!

Abbot, Pilgrims
Regnat gloria....

Spirit
Regnat gloria saecula.
Madwoman
The voice of my son,
hear the voice of my son!
(She turns towards the tomb.)

Spirit
Amen.

Ferryman, Traveller, Abbot, Pilgrims
Hear, his voice!
See, there is his shape!
(The Spirit of the Boy appears in full view above the tomb.)

Madwoman
Is it you, my child?
(The Spirit circles slowly round the Madwoman, who appears transformed.)

Spirit
{returning to the tomb)
Go your way in peace, mother.
The dead shall rise again
and in that blessed day
we shall meet in heaven.

Abbot, Pilgrims
Amen! Amen!

Abbot
In hope, in peace, ends our mystery.

Libretto based on the medieval Japanese No-play 'Sumidagawa' of Juro Montomasa by William Plomer.
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Der Compact Disc Digital Audio System bietet die bestmögliche Klangeinwirkung — auf einem kleinen, handlichen Tonträger.


**DDD** Digitales Tonbandgerät bei der Aufnahme, bei Schnitt und/oder Abmischung und bei der Überspielung.

**ADD** Analoges Tonbandgerät bei der Aufnahme, das digitale Tonbandgerät bei Schnitt/Abmischung und bei der Überspielung.

**AAD** Analoges Tonbandgerät bei der Aufnahme und bei Schnitt und/oder Abmischung, digitales Tonbandgerät bei der Überspielung. Die Compact Disc sollte mit der gleichen Sorgfalt gelagert und behandelt werden wie das konservierte Langspielplatten.

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**DDD** Digital tape recorder used during session recording, mixing and/or editing, and mastering (transcription).

**ADD** Analogue tape recorder used during session recording, digital tape recorder used during subsequent mixing and/or editing and during mastering (transcription).

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