

# *The Fire and The Thistle* – first performed 2009

*(the Scottish Witch Trials of 1592)*

*Hogmanay: Celebration in the Seaton Household, Tranent: the great hall is decked for celebration; there are many candles and garlands. A few chairs and benches are placed at the walls. The assembled crowd comprises members of the household, neighbouring landowners and their families, along with servants, who are joining in the celebrations. The company sings “Ring the Bells” to bid farewell to the Old Year: 1590.*

*One of the servants teases Seaton that he has, perhaps, been taking too much of an interest in one of his serving girls. Seaton claims it is not what appears and that he wants to know where the girl, Gillie Duncan, goes in the evenings when her work is finished. Gillie seems also to be a cause for strife between Seaton and his wife although, for the occasion, Lilian Seaton is putting a brave face on. She leads the company in singing, “A Thousand Roads” to welcome in the New Year: 1591.*

*In the early hours of the next morning – long after all the guests have left, Seaton confronts Gillie when she returns to the household. She turns on him, telling him that she knows she is being watched: “The Hunger in Your Eyes.” When Seaton presses her further, she admits to having been out to visit a friend in a nearby town whose son is sickly. Their voices have attracted Lilian’s attention and she comes to investigate. She accuses Gillie of trying to take her husband from her. Together they sing “I’m Aware”. When Angus, the servant, reports where Gillie has been, Seaton accuses her of witchcraft. She is beaten and locked up.*

*At Holyrood Palace, The Earl of Bothwell rides roughshod over the King’s servants and offends his closest advisor. James I and Bothwell seem very close and the King tolerates Bothwell’s unruly behaviour. James takes the affairs of state very seriously and is unwilling to be distracted by Bothwell’s schemes. A letter is delivered from the Queen, who will return soon from Dunfermline. Bothwell makes cruel remarks*

about Anne and teases James still further. Bothwell claims that between them they could turn the world on its head were it not for the duties they both have: "Some Otherwhere."

Seaton is shown in to the King's chambers where he informs the king of his denouncing of Gillie and the fact that, under-torture, she has named some of the others in her coven and revealed a plot against the king's life. Meanwhile, in the town of Tranent it is market day. The company, gossiping about the accusations of witchcraft, sing "Have You Heard the News?"

The Queen has returned to Holyrood and - although James tries to send her away - she insists on staying while Gillie is brought before the king. Gillie is frank and honest and does not seem to have anything against the king personally. When she sees Bothwell, however, it appears that the two know each other, although Bothwell has been using another name. Gillie explains that, "He Promised me the Stars." James and Anne gently question Gillie further. All four sing "Choices" questioning what has brought them to where they are today.

Bothwell is sent away, although he is to be watched closely. James sends Seaton to find the others named by Gillie.

In Parliament Square, as the company sings, "Who Can You Trust?" several other witches are arrested by Seaton and the King's men.

At Edinburgh Castle, the four witches - from all walks of life - are put on trial. All have confessed under torture. One of their number - Agnes Sampson - appears to have been the ringleader and mocks the King, wondering what he has done that has angered Satan so much that he should want him dead. She also tells of the plot to sink the King's ship as it returned from Denmark after James' marriage to Anne, and implicates Bothwell in their dealings. The King asks Gillie to sing one of their songs: "Cummer, Ye Go Before." James is unconvinced. Even when he hears of the dreadful practices the accused have carried out as they cast their spells, the King remains doubtful. It is not until Agnes whispers to him something he said to his wife on his wedding night that he is convinced. The sentence for witchcraft is that the convicted should be strangled and then burned. All are sentenced except for Bothwell, against whom, James maintains there is insufficient evidence. He is to be banished from Scotland on pain of death. Kerr - the

King's most trusted servant – is told to bathe Gillie's wounds and be kind to her. Together they sing "Mistakes".

Parliament Square is crowded on the day of the executions. The company sing "Burn" as the witches are put to death.

### Cast

**David Seaton** - Deputy Bailiff of Tranent

**Lilian Seaton** - his wife

**Meg Gallacher** - a local girl

**Meg Gallacher** - her mother

**Angus** - a servant in the Seaton household

**Gillie Duncan** - servant to the Seaton household - a witch

**John Kerr** - servant to King James

**James** - King of Scotland

**Bothwell** - an Earl, favourite of the King

**Euphemia MacAlzean** - a rich woman - a witch

**Dr Fian** - schoolmaster - a warlock

**Anne** - James' wife - Queen of Scotland

**A servant**

**A minister**

**A doctor**

**A clerk**

**Agnes Sampson** - a witch

*citizens of Edinburgh and its environs*

*musical numbers*

|    |                          |         |   |
|----|--------------------------|---------|---|
| 1  | Overture - Promises      |         |   |
| 2  | Ring the Bells           | Company |   |
| 3  | Jigs - Instrumental      |         |   |
| 4  | A Thousand Roads         | Company | Solo line for: Lilian Seaton                          |
| 5  | The Hunger in Your Eyes  | Solo    | Gillie Duncan<br>Gillie Duncan, Lilian Seaton         |
| 6  | I'm Aware                | Duet    | Seaton  |
| 7  | Some Otherwhere          | Duet    | James, Bothwell                                       |
| 8  | Have You Heard the News? | Company |   |
| 9  | He Promised me the Stars | Solo    | Gillie Duncan<br>Gillie Duncan, James, Bothwell, Anne |
| 10 | Choices                  | quartet |   |
| 11 | Who Do You Trust?        | Company | Gillie Duncan, Phemie McAlzean, Agnes Sampson         |
| 12 | Cummer, Ye Go Before     |         | John Kerr, Gillie Duncan                              |
| 13 | Mistakes                 | Duet    |   |
| 14 | Burn (finale)            | Company |   |



Carpe Diem