

# MATA HARI

by  
NIGEL CLARKE

Scene 1: Dancer in the Shadows  
Scene 2: Deceit and Seduction  
Scene 3: Evasion and Capture

## COMPOSER'S NOTE

'Mata Hari' was commissioned by Dr. Matthew George and the University of St. Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble in Minnesota, USA.

I have written 'Mata Hari' as three speculative scenes from her life. **1. Dancer in the Shadows** - focuses on Mata Hari, the dancer, entertaining the troops at the outbreak of the Great War. **2. Deceit and Seduction** - describes Mati Hari, the seductress, wooing her lovers to gain that vital piece of pillow talk. **3. Evasion and Capture** - depicts Mata Hari in the eye of the storm with hostile forces moving against her. I have given 'Mata Hari' a triumphant ending to reflect her final defiant moments.

## Background

*Margaretha Geertruida Zelle-McLeod*, better known as Mata Hari, was born in Holland in 1876 and executed by a French firing squad as a spy on October 15 1917.

There are many unanswered questions about the life of Mata Hari, particularly as her trial was conducted from behind closed doors by the French authorities. After eight decades the French government is re-examining the files of this controversial cabaret artiste. New evidence suggests that she might not have been a spy at all. It is probable that she was guilty of passing information to more than one side, and this, combined with her (in the eyes of the authorities) immoral lifestyle and the embarrassment she caused to the establishment ultimately condemned her at her trial.

Myth and truth start to mix when she moved to France at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and became an exotic dancer. Her beauty was legendary and her star quality evident in the glamour pictures of her that have survived. She gave herself the stage name Mata Hari which means 'Eye of the Day' in Malay. Her lifestyle led her to move in Europe's highest circles, including having an affair with the Crown Prince of Germany. She began to associate with men that would have had access to intelligence sought after in the murky world of espionage. It is known that she was under surveillance by British MI5 by 1915, while also under the watchful eye of the French authorities. At her trial she is known to have confessed to being the German spy known as 'H21', although the truth of this confession has never been validated.

At her execution she was reputedly defiant to the end. She refused to have a blindfold and was said to have maintained a smile at the soldiers who were the traditional twelve paces away from her. On the order they shot her in the body with an officer firing one shot behind her ear. Though her life ended at 41, Mata Hari's memory lives on as the most famous seductress and spy of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

**Nigel Clarke**

**First performance:** University of St. Thomas Symphonic Wind Ensemble conducted by Dr. Matthew George in Orchestra Hall, St Paul, Minnesota, USA 20 October 2002.

**First recording:** Royal Northern College of Music conducted by James Gourlay.  
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