

The Society for the History of Emotions
Presents

Dear Mrs Kennedy: Music and Mourning on the Death of a President

Elder Hall, University of Adelaide, Tuesday 28 November 2023, 6pm



Ask anyone old enough to remember, and they will tell you where they were when they heard that President Kennedy had been assassinated. In November 1963, it was hard to believe that such a popular, youthful president could be cut down by a lone gunman as his motorcade passed the Texas School Book Depository Building in Dallas.

People from all around the world were so moved by grief that thousands, upon thousands, including many Australians, wrote letters of condolence to his widow, Jacqueline Kennedy. The amount of mail was colossal. 45,000 letters arrived on one day alone. Within a week 250,000 letters arrived at the Kennedy compound in Hyannis Port. In total, at least 1.5 million letters were received, and three years after the assassination, the White House staff were still trying to process them. Some of these letters contained gifts, including cards, artwork, and music. This condolence material now sits in the Kennedy Library, but most of the music sent to Mrs Kennedy, has never been heard.

Music allows us to express our deepest emotions when words fail, and now, 60 years later, it is time to open the music archive and hear what grief for Kennedy sounded like all those years ago for so many people - men, women and children, professional musicians and people who had never composed before.

In conjunction with *The Fourth Biennial Conference of the Society for the History of Emotions*, Professor Jennifer Clark will explore music as part of the condolence material sent to Jacqueline Kennedy on the death of her husband. Some of these pieces will be publicly performed for the first time since their composers sent them to Mrs Kennedy as an expression of grief and love. The theme of the conference is *Unsettling Emotions*. Nothing was more unsettling 60 years ago than the assassination of President Kennedy. Music provided mourners with an important vehicle to explore their feelings in response to a tragic and politically significant event.

Music will be performed by students of the Conservatorium's Music Theatre program. Join Professor Jennifer Clark and the Society for the History of Emotions as they explore the role of music in providing a space for public mourning on the 60th anniversary of John F. Kennedy.