Death’s Jest Book, Libretto by Thomas Lovell Beddoes, adapted by Jerome McGann, Music by Brian Holmes

1. Mandrake’s Song (“Folly hath now turned out of door”) 1:45
2. Kate and Chorus: Song from the Ship (“To sea, to sea”) 1:46
3. Sibylla: Song from the Waters (“The swallow leaves her nest”) 1:44
5. Mandrake: Wolfram’s Dirge (“If thou wilt ease thine heart”) 2:01
6. Mandrake and Kate: The New Cecilia (“Whoever has heard of St. Gingo”) 4:02
8. Entr’acte: Sibylla: Dream-Pedlary 2:05
9. Kate and Chorus: Song in the Air (“The moon doth mock”) 2:36
10. Chorus: Song of the Deaths (“Mummies and skeletons”) 5:34
11. Wolfram, Melveric, Beddoes: Drinking Song (“My goblet’s golden lips”) 2:40
12. Wolfram’s Song (“Old Adam, the carrion crow”) 2:52
13. Wolfram, Sibylla, and Chorus (“We do lie beneath the grass”) 3:19
14. Mandrake’s Song (“Folly hath now turned out of door”) 1:51

Thomas Lovell Beddoes began Death’s Jest Book when he was a 22-year-old student who had left Oxford to continue his medical studies in Germany. When the play was rejected by his best friends, he fell into a bout of drinking and depression that ultimately resulted in his being expelled from Göttingen University. He completed his medical degree at Würzburg and spent the remaining 24 years of his life, until his ultimate suicide, adding songs and scenes to his play. The themes were immediately tied to his tormented homosexuality, and to the experience that taught him that all expressions of desire were taboo and must be repressed or hidden. Lovers love in vain: the only consummation is in the grave. Dramatic moments of grief lapse inevitably into mocking fatalism. One by one, each of the characters is murdered, yet each refuses to die and continues to play.

DEATH
BEDDOES, Poet and Mountebank
MELVERIC, Duke of Münsterberg
ZIBA, Necromancer
TORWALD, the Duke’s Minister
CHORUS

MUSICIANS
Jeff Moguillansky (keyboard), Master Kaneshiro (guitar), Jong Ling Wu (flute), Brian Holmes (horn)