Madness as Explained by Steven

Recently Steven made this post about how Madness works in correlation with the release of the Pixie some of the other official storytellers and myself felt it would be helpful to new Storytellers as well as players who have questions about how Madness works:

I was recently asked a question about the "timing" of madness and "enforced" madness in regards to the Pixie. Since the Pixie is being released, I figured it might be useful to post my responses so that everyone can see it.

Madness can be a tricky concept, particularly for the Pixie because the Pixie player can "be mad now" but not "have been mad for the game as a whole", or the Pixie player can not "be mad now" but "has been mad for the game as a whole".
My response to the question is posted here. It's a bit technical, but might help you understand and run the Pixie better if you were having trouble beforehand.

The Pixie gains their Pixie ability at the start of the game.
The Pixie gains the ability of the player that they were mad as being, immediately after that player dies.

For the sake of this conversation, let's assume that the character that the Storyteller has shown to the Pixie player is the Washerwoman.

If the Storyteller believes that the Pixie player was making a sincere attempt to convince members of the group, or the entire group, that they are the Washerwoman, then the Storyteller can give the Pixie the Washerwoman ability. The Storyteller is the judge of whether the Pixie player is mad or not.

If the Pixie player was initially mad about being the Washerwoman, then was silent for two days, the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was mad as the Washerwoman, and grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially mad about being the Washerwoman, then the player tried to convince the group that they were the Savant, but all players think that the Pixie is in fact the Washerwoman, the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was mad as the Washerwoman, and grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially mad about being the Washerwoman, then the player tried to convince the group that they were the Savant, and all players believe that the Pixie is in fact the Savant, the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was not mad as the Washerwoman, and not grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially mad about being the Washerwoman, then the player tried to convince the group that they were the Savant, then tried to convince the group that they were mad due to the Cerenovus and really are the Washerwoman after all, the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was mad as the Washerwoman, and grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially silent for two days, then was mad about being the Washerwoman, and came up with a believable reason as to why they were silent, then the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was mad as the Washerwoman, and grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially silent for two days, then was mad about being the Washerwoman, but did not come up with a believable reason as to why they were silent, or came up with a believable reason but didn't seem to be trying very hard to convince people and instead seemed to just be saying words so that the ST would reluctantly give them the Washerwoman ability, then the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was not mad as the Washerwoman, and not grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially mad about being the Fortune Teller for five days, then hurriedly said that they were the Washerwoman just before the Washerwoman is executed, then the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was not mad as the Washerwoman, and not grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

If the Pixie player was initially mad about being the Fortune Teller for five days, then said that they were the Washerwoman and had a really convincing argument as to why they bluffed as the Fortune Teller, and they give their Washerwoman information and it generates discussion and the other players start to believe that the Pixie player is the Washerwoman and to use their false Washerwoman information in the game, then the Washerwoman died by execution that day, then the Storyteller would likely judge that the player was mad as the Washerwoman, and grant the Washerwoman ability to the player.

Whether or not a player "is" mad is entirely the judgement call of the Storyteller. There are no hard rules about what can be said, what can't be said, or when it must or must not be said. Each situation is different. What matters is whether the Storyteller believes that the Pixie player is putting in the effort / is sincere in their attempts to convince others that they are the Washerwoman / is making good arguments that their Washerwoman information is correct and should be listened to / other players are believing the player / etc.

Precisely when the Pixie player was mad, and specifically what the player did or said that fits into the category of "mad" is not something that can be precisely stated and a hard rule made about it. Treat judging madness like judging humour. The Deviant is a good example. If the Deviant got some laughs at the beginning of the day, but not the end, the ST may judge the Deviant as funny today. If the Deviant got some laughs at the end of the day, but not the beginning, the ST may judge the Deviant as funny today. If the Deviant got some laughs at the beginning of the day, then got salty and brought the mood down afterwards, the ST may judge the Deviant as not funny today - yep, they were funny, but the overall judgement of the ST was a thumbs down. The Deviant can get no laughs at all, but if the ST believes that the Deviant was funny but that the other players were deliberately trying to not laugh just so that they could execute the Deviant, then the ST may judge that the Deviant was funny and prevent their death.

I often use this analogy when people ask me to make a ruling on what does or does not constitute being mad. Imagine some confused Storyteller had the following query... "*I was in a game when the Deviant player made a knock-knock joke. One player giggled, but that player is really immature and will laugh at anything. All the other players just groaned and rolled their eyes and didn't find it funny at all. Does this mean that the Deviant was funny? Does telling a knock-knock joke constitute "being funny"? I argued to the group that since one player laughed, then the Deviant was funny so couldn't die. The players argued that since most players did not laugh, then the Deviant wasn't funny. Can I please get some clarification on what types of jokes are funny, and which types aren't? Do personal anecdotes or witty comebacks count? Can we also get some clarification on how many players need to laugh to prevent the Deviant being executed? Does one player laughing at three separate jokes mean that the Deviant is just as funny as three players laughing at one joke? The players are requesting some specific rules on what does and does not make a Deviant funny, so that they know when to nominate Deviants. Also, I ruled that the next day, the Deviant wasn't funny because they didn't tell any jokes at all, even though the whole group was in stitches due to the Deviant's hilarious execution description. Was this correct?*"

These questions are an exaggeration, and they don't really get asked about the Deviant since (compared to madness) it is more intuitively obvious when someone is funny or not. In the above example, I wouldn't even want to try to tell the hapless Storyteller what criteria they should be looking for to judge funny. Either they know something is funny, or they don't.

It's the same with madness, and what a player says or does not say. And it's the same with the timing of when they say it or don't say it. If you judge that a Pixie player put the effort in to convince the group that they were the Washerwoman, then you can give them the Washerwoman ability. If they put the effort in to convince the group that they were the Washerwoman for six days straight, then another player says that the Pixie player is probably the Pixie, and the Pixie player just winks and stays silent... then I would almost certainly judge that the Pixie player was "not mad that they were the Washerwoman" because they tipped their hand at the last minute. But maybe if the Pixie had done significant damage to the good team's information library by claiming Washerwoman, and their wink was seen as cheekyness and only half the players believed that the Pixie was the Pixie and the other half believed that they were the Washerwoman... then I would be inclined to still give the Pixie the Washerwoman ability, even though they flat out signalled that they were the Pixie. Everything comes down to what the Pixie player does, how convincingly they do it, what the Storyteller judges to be the Pixie player's intent, and what the effect of the Pixie players words and actions has been.

The purpose of the Deviant character mechanic is to encourage humour and laughter and lightheartedness. If the Deviant player does this, they get a reward.
The purpose of the drunkenness / poisoning mechanic is for good players to unknowingly spread misinformation.

The purpose of the madness mechanic is to encourage good players to knowingly spread misinformation. If they do this, they get a reward (or avoid a penalty).

This simple way of looking at things can be very helpful, and avoids the trap of thinking that madness has, or needs to have, a precise set of criteria that the player "needs to meet". Either the player is on board with acting mad, or they are not. Either is fine. Trouble arises when a player is not on board with acting mad and is looking for loopholes to technically qualify as "on board" so that they can get the benefits without the downsides, or when they believe that acting mad is about fulfilling a specific set of criteria that is written in the rules.

The Pixie is a bit weird because most other madness characters have a window of a day for the player to act mad. For the Pixie, the window is the entire game up until the point that the Washerwoman dies. When judging whether or not the Pixie "was mad", I would often give preference to the most recent words and actions of the Pixie as opposed to things that they said much earlier in the game, depending on the context.

That's the best answer I can give. I hope it clarifies things. Unfortunately, I don't know what is meant by "enforced madness". Each player can say whatever they want at any time, and is never forced to say anything they don't want to. Each character that utilises the madness mechanic does so in a unique way, and madness has a particular penalty or benefit to saying (or not saying) particular things in a particular way, but the player is never forced to say anything.