



PERSEPHONE'S DREAM LIBRETTO

Libretto and Direction devised by Tania Holland Williams

Persephone's Dream was conceived as a chamber opera in five scenes with overture and commissioned by Tat Festival and Arts Council England.

The piece was conceived as a digital/live hybrid opera to tell the story of withdrawal from a diseased world. Unpicking the rites of hibernation and exploring whether, in our waking sleep, we can still yearn, struggle, resist - be human.

Through the central figure of Persephone and a 2D online chorus of curious eyes, the piece explores the purifying power and danger of isolation and interrogates the threshold between sleep and waking, suspension and action, the real and the imagined.

Roles/Orchestration

- **Persephone** - Mid range Female Voice
- **Chimera and Radio 4 Presenter*** - Cellist prepared to sing and be part of the action.
- **BBC Radio 4 Voice*** This can be pre-recorded, but preferably with Cellist speaking the lines
- **Chorus of Curious Eyes** - A silent online Chorus
- **Electronic sampling** desk and looping machine
- **Czerby the 3-headed dog** - small stuffed animal

2020 Cockpit Theatre realisation:

Composers - Gavin Alexander, Anna Braithwaite, Kevin Grist

Designer - Sarah Jane Booth

Creative Partners - Bill Bankes Jones, Wendy Daws, Clare Foster

Persephone - Anna Braithwaite

Chimera/BBC Radio 4 Voice - Clare O'Connell

Electronic sampling musician - Gavin Alexander

Premiere performers virtual performers

Chorus of Curious Eyes (CoCE) - Mark Brophy, Nikki Carter, Sue Childs, Jo Eden, Sarah Howlett, Jacqueline Male, Angela McHutchon, Julia Noakes, Gail Pallin, Mary Popple, Lin Russell, Kieran Shannon, Angela Turner, Marilyn Wheeler, Jenny Weston,

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As audience settle **Radio 4 presenter** - *Ladies and gentlemen - welcome to the Cockpit Theatre and the comfort of living rooms across the UK. Persephone is about to start dreaming and the Chorus of Curious Eyes are making their way to the screen. So please make yourselves at home, doing so as silently and as invisibly as possible. You may close your eyes and keep hold of your blankets during the performance.... And do please remember....unattended ice-cream can make a mess.*

OVERTURE

The theatre projector is unfocussed and comes into focus during the overture. Persephone is already on her plinth, standing facing DS looking for something — avoiding the eyes of the audience but interested in them

Chimera is already sat on her stool DSR facing US - she is powerful and serene and impassively considers the plight of Persephone.

Persephone has about her a set of keys which she finds, explores and then secretes again.

Members of the **Chorus of Curious Eyes** step into camera view according to sound cues.

They enter in different sized groups. Turn to the front. Sit. Lean in to look and then settle back still looking at the screen. Chimera acknowledges the CoCE as they enter.

Sc1. WITHDRAWAL

Perspephone: *The door is shut, the window closed....all safe and sad within.*

The tide runs inward unsure where it belongs... all safe and sad within.

Mountain's gaze, the breath of plains and the wide sea song... long gone.

Small things weight my eye.

Look? There - a chip on the tile. That thread is caught. The page torn.

Ssss - scratching at my mind.

I never saw, never noticed the broken things before.

All doors are shut, all windows closed, all frozen ghosts...we chafe and crowd within.

....a chip on the tile. That thread is caught. The page torn.

Sssss -scratching at my mind. ...we chafe and crowd within.

As she sings "All doors are shut" for the last time - the CoCE slowly raise their eyes to the screen. Persephone who is positioned in front of the CoCE feels their gaze, but does not look at them. Radio 4 Voice is activated. We come in midway through an episode of Gardener's Question Time

Radio Voice: (Radio tuning sounds) *Gardening advice has to be moderated by the weather. No two Springs are ever the same and the amount of shade, rainfall and type of soil can all make a big difference. Gardens are not made by singing "Oh how beautiful"....although..... heaven is found in a wild flower!*

Persephone takes a piece of gold thread and starts to unravel it.

Persephone - Hello... can you hear me?



Sc2. SOMNOLENCE

Chorus begins to play cat's cradle and creating angular lines with gold thread. They concentrate on the beauty of what they are weaving. **Chimera** - Sings a melody on a vocalise and puts the cello down she goes and picks up a piece of the thread. Persephone resists the melody

Persephone to audience:

Sprechgesang - *Hello can you hear me? Excuse me have you got the time?
...Is my audio switched on?... Is my audio switched on? (She gives up)*

To herself sung: *Time lifts his head...I turn to the dance...but here in the darkness... steps are misremembered.... Hands are losing hold.*

Sung - *Hello can you hear me? Excuse me have you got the time?
I fall into the gap*

To herself sung: *Where are the clocks?...No measuring pulse to shape my passing...
Just a slowing loop of hearts and bodies cooling in the night.*

Sprechgesang resisting the lullaby of the cello/Chimera starts to sing:

*I could bake a cake...
learn to play the cello...
Are the tips still open?
...Mustn't forget to walk the dog....*

PAUSE *Mm the dog...*(looking for where Czerby the 3-headed dog has gotten to)

Sung working with the cellist's lullaby: *Is it Friday today?It's always fish on Friday.*

Sung by both Chimera and Persephone: *Don't forget to wash your hands*

Chimera - *Continues to insist on the sleep-inducing melody and eventually takes up the cello to start playing the Desert Island Discs Motif.*

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Sc 3. RESISTANCE

Chorus begin point, freeze, release gestures. **Persephone** becomes completely entangled in the gold thread through her sleep. Between her words she has fits and starts to the music, but is immobilised when she sings.

Persephone: *Stay home!. Keep fit! Don't rest!*

Avoid touching your face.

This world is dangerous,

Be wary of the invitation to sleep.

Corners pinch like prying eyes.

Too many walls in this dark and lonely liberty.

Clap, clean, sing Happy Birthday, sing Happy Birthday

Wave, cry, sing Happy Birthday, sing Happy Birthday

Isolate hide, keep your distance, stay safe, stay safe, stay safe - STAY ALERT.

Sing Happy Birthday, Sing Happy Birthday,

Sing Happy!

Clap!

Clap!

Cry

Projection Black Out - Chorus change their background images.

Radio 4 Voice comes back on to a quasi-meditation - spoken with artificial cheerfulness.

Radio 4 Voice : *Does life might feel a bit more challenging than normal right now? Why not take a few moments just to be?....Find the present...*

Be thankful for the weather. Take time to look around you...Breathe deeply.

That's right...get the air right down into the end of those tippy-tippy-toes.

Slowly let go of all those anxious thoughts.....Time to tend the garden maybe.

Chorus put the thread to one side. They keep their heads bowed pick up garden implement and start to weave gold thread around it.

Sc.4 PURIFICATION

Persephone slowly unwraps herself from the gold thread and takes her place at the altar. She finds and opens the pomegranates and fills a bowl with the seeds getting red juice everywhere. Towards the end of the scene she comes to a point where she tries to offer pomegranate seeds to the audience. The CoCE walk from the rear of their respective virtual spaces into position with their looping films on behind them slowly scenting the space with the garden psalters.

Persephone *I stand, make my intercession. A new disciple of the Fragrant Hand.
I give my sacrifice, skin and wit and bone at Morpheus' Altar.*

*But I still remember the other time.
Spring Hymn come again, fill me with your song.*

"The Crocus hope for winter's end. Come! Step under the sun again.

Flock of Iris full of wisdom, nodding approval,

All unsullied my Rosebud children.

*Oh Hyacinth - Please forgive us. Hear our muted confession. Take the strain of fear away.
Draw us out, untainted at break of day.*

*Incense of Narcissus bear me into the light. Let me dance once more, embrace and sing.
And in my mingling, remove the dark and lonely blight."*

Persephone turns away, puts the Pomegranates down.

Radio pips are heard. Chorus reach out and disappear to change their screen.

Radio 4 Voice: *And in the news today people are advised that they may take up to one hour of exercise...*

Persephone: *Mountains breathe...the wide seas sing again...*

Radio 4 Voice: *...The public are permitted to leave their house once a day to run, cycle or walk*

Persephone: *Ha, how clean the air...*

Radio 4 Voice: *...People are advised to maintain a 2M distance at all times...*

Persephone: *...I will hold you in my arms, gaze at your dawn and lie with you as you sleep.*

Radio 4 Voice: *....And to refrain from visiting places of natural beauty*

Persephone: *If the dream is good, why wake?*

Chorus hear bird song and start to shine a light into the computer cameras.

Persephone takes a seat and starts to unfold her dress and release the greenery within.

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Sc.5 THRESHOLD

Persephone: The earth has spun,
Replenishing herself.
Though the night is done,
The garden is not the same.

Is it safe? Was it ever safe?

Who will teach me to adapt?

Am I still the Keeper of the Grain?

The earth has spun, replenishing herself.
Though the dawn has come
The garden is not the same.
It has become untamed - beautiful again.

Am I to blame?

What if I remain all safe and sad within

Chorus bring a hand to the screen and hold it there to effectively bring the screen to Black Out.



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