

Klytemnestra



divergence vocal theater



Cast

Misha Penton: Klytemnestra I
Meg Brooker: Klytemnestra II
Miranda Herbert: Klytemnestra III
Meredith Harris: viola
Kyle Evans: piano

Creative Team

Misha Penton: Artistic Director, Writer of Sung Words, Concept, Stage Direction
Dominick DiOrio: Composer
John Harvey: Writer of Spoken Words
Misha, Meg, Miranda: Collaborative Staging
Meg Brooker: Choreography
Frank Vela: Lighting
Sarah Mosher: Costumes
Serret Jensen: Wigs & Stylist

A note from Misha...

I'd like to tell you a little about the strange and serendipitous circumstances whose conspiracy led to the creation of this opera. About a year ago, John Harvey, poet and playwright, asked me to portray Klytemnestra in his new translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon - and I thought, "Oh, God - I have to memorize lines" - it's funny, but in response to that, my second thought was, "Well, if I have to deal with memorizing lines, then I want to create an opera companion piece" (somehow this seemed easier than slaving over spoken text - which is some ways, for me, it is). And so, John asked me to write from Klytemnestra's point of view... and my writing became the sung words for this opera. Actress Miranda Herbert, joins me in portraying another facet of Klytemnestra in the opera - her spoken lines are John's words - so tonight, I sing the words I wrote, and all the spoken words belong to John. Meg Brooker, a brilliant dancer, is the third aspect of the character. The work is set for viola, piano, soprano, actress, and dancer. I think of the piece as an original work in its totality: the way a choreographer might think of their work. My theatrical vision for the piece is not separate nor superimposed over the music - it's part of it. I've worked with Meg and Miranda several times before, and that's another key to my aspiration of making work with a strong theatrical identity - Meg and Miranda very much understand my aesthetic - it's like having two more versions of me with different skill sets, but each feeds a common vision - and that's a very, very big deal to me, artistically.

I asked Dominick DiOrio to set my words to music - and with Mozartian brilliance my words wriggled from inky scribbles on a page into the soaring vocal embodiment of, arguably, the most influential and subversive Greek Heroine in all of the plays: Klytemnestra. She stands against the polis, against the emerging male-ordered, linear, dualistic state; against the forming patriarchy that will define our culture (for women and men) for thousands of years after her time. She possesses the inherent potential of subversive expressivity in body, voice and word, and thus the power to entirely restructure the male paradigm of society. Her murder of Agamemnon is a symbolic rejection of Order and an embrace of Chaos - it is Joy Unleashed, Metamorphosis Complete - a release from the confining limitation of societal acquiescence to power-over.

And now, the Tapestries are laid: follow their never-ending purple into The House of the Family of Atreus:

*Klytemnestra, daughter of Leda and Zeus
Fabled Swan
Mother to Iphigenia, the sun walking in a yellow dress
Sister to Helen of Troy
Wife of Agamemnon
Who sacrificed their daughter to war
My sweet, young girl
My only flower
Her throat a smile
Lips silent and set open
Where were you when he dropped her on stone like an animal and slit her open?
Where were you when time fell to banish him to dark roadways?
Walls bulge here and there
Gaps smile up at you from the floor
The house shudders, drops to its knees,
breaks apart
Its an old house
Your daughter's not coming back
Blood in The House of Atreus
Again, tell it again*

(deconstructed from John Harvey's beautiful translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon)

A heartfelt thanks to John Harvey for the inspiration to do this piece, to my collaborators for bringing my vision to life, and to the love of my life and my muse, Dave Nickerson.



Misha Penton, Artistic Director, Opera Concept, Soprano, Writer of Klytemnestra's sung words

Soprano Misha Penton's diverse performing career includes opera and multidisciplinary performance projects. She recently sang the principal role in Divergence Vocal Theater's world premier opera, Selkie, a sea tale, composed by Elliot Cole; and the role of Leah in Ofer Ben-Amots' contemporary multimedia chamber opera, The Dybbuk, presented by the Jewish Community Center Houston's Maurice Adamo Music Foundation Residency; and Marguerite in Norman's Incline, O Maiden, a monodrama for soprano and chamber ensemble, with Audio Inversions, a new music ensemble in Austin, Texas. Misha is the founder, artistic director, and ensemble lead artist of Divergence Vocal Theater, a Houston-based opera and multi-performing arts company. In 2008-09 she sang Ottavia in Divergence Vocal Theater's The Ottavia Project, Sapho in The 10th Muse, and was a featured soloist in Autumn Spectre, a multimedia evening of staged arts songs, piano works, and dance. The most recent Divergence Vocal Theater project was the world premier of Selkie, a sea tale, composed by Elliot Cole, a setting of Misha's libretto. Additional performances include Voix et Harpe, a performance of French art song, poetry and dance, in the galleries of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. Misha has created original soundscapes and sound design for contemporary dance performances at DiverseWorks Arts Space (Houston), the University of Houston Center for Choreography, and for New Orleans contemporary dance company, Happensdance. Upcoming projects include Zachary Wadsworth's Venus & Adonis with Divergence Vocal Theater in 2012, and the artistic direction and curation of the company's new performance and multi-arts space, Divergence Music & Arts.

Dominick DiOrio, Composer

Dominick DiOrio (b. 1984) is one of the most recognized young composers of vocal music of his generation. He has been the recipient of many recent awards including the 2009 Young New Yorkers' Chorus Nathan Davis Prize, the 2007 Allen E. Ostrander International Trombone Composition Prize, the 2006 Cantate Chamber Singers Young Composers' Competition, and the 2006 Raymond W. Brock Memorial Student Composition Prize given annually to one young composer by the American Choral Directors Association. He has received recent commissions for new music from Commonwealth Youth Choirs, the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, and the Cornell Chorale. Upcoming performances are planned for 2011-2012 with Houston Chamber Choir, Divergence Vocal Theater, and Juventas New Music Ensemble. His work is published by Alliance, Lorenz/Roger Dean, and Oxford. A noted choral conductor, Dominick is director of choral activities and associate professor of music at Lone Star College-Montgomery. He is pursuing the DMA at Yale University, and has also received the MMA and MM in Choral Conducting from Yale and a BM in Composition from Ithaca College. In October 2009, he was one of only twelve conductors from around the world invited to Sweden to participate in the Eric Ericson Award, the top international competition for young choral conductors. A serious advocate of new music, he has conducted premieres of new music by Zachary Wadsworth, Tawnie Olson, Santana Haight, Dewey Fleszar, Kevin O'Neill, and his own compositions, as well as acclaimed performances of contemporary works by Stravinsky, Penderecki, Rautavaara, Pärt, and James MacMillan. A tenor, Dominick sings professionally with the Houston Chamber Choir. www.dominickdiorio.com



John Harvey, Poet, Writer of Klytemnestra's spoken words

John Harvey is Director of the Center for Creative Work at The Honors College at the University of Houston. As Resident Playwright for Mildred's Umbrella Theater Company he has premiered seven plays in Houston, his eighth "Under the Big Dark Sky" opens April 21 at Barnevelder Movement Arts Complex. His poems have appeared in The Gettysburg Review, Gulf Coast, The Paris Review, Whiskey Island and others. His translation of Aeschylus' Agamemnon opened April 8 at the Wortham Theater, UH and is the third Greek tragedy he has translated and directed over the last three years.



Meg Brooker, Dancer & Choreography

Meg Brooker is a multidisciplinary performing artist and choreographer whose background ranges from Isadora Duncan dance (Lori Belilove & Company) to avant-garde theatre (Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theatre). Credits include numerous New York City venues as well as international festivals in Moscow, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Ukraine. Located in Austin, Texas, Meg is a sought-after guest artist, specializing in early modern dance history and techniques (www.mb-arts.com). Meg has presented scholarship on early modern dance for the Congress on Research in Dance, the Society of Dance History Scholars, and Moscow State University. Meg also collaborates with musicians, visual artists, and other contemporary choreographers and was nominated for a 2008 Austin Critics Table Award for her performance of "Isabella." Meg is currently working with painter Linda DeHart on a dance video project designed for large-scale projection in public architectural spaces (www.colorsinmotion.com). She is on faculty of Tapestry Dance Academy and Sundara Yoga Therapy in Austin, and she has taught on the faculties of the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation and the School at Steps on Broadway in New York. She holds an MFA in Performance as Public Practice from UT Austin and a BA in Theatre Studies from Yale.

Miranda is thrilled to collaborate with Divergence Vocal Theater once again! Other recent Divergence performances include Selkie: A Sea Tale & Voix et Harpe. Past Houston performances include work with Mildred's Umbrella (Museum of Dysfunction series), The Fan Factory (August in August and An Adult Evening of Shel Silverstein) and the The University of Houston (The Prime of Miss Jean Brody, The Good Woman of Setzuan, Buy One Get Five Free, Bobrauschenbergamerica, and A Free Man of Color). During the day, Miranda leads the Student Affairs Dept. at The Art Institute of Houston-North, is a Teaching Artist for HITS Theatre, and manages her fight troupe, Houston Pirates for Hire (find us on Facebook!). Miranda is a graduate of The American Musical and Dramatic Academy NYC, Loyola University Chicago (BA) and The University of Houston (MFA). Many thanks to everyone for your generous support of this show! My performance is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandmother, Dorothy Herbert (b. July 14, 1925 - d. April 5, 2011); one of the strongest and most independent women I've ever known.

Miranda Herbert, Actor



Meredith Harris, Viola

Meredith Harris, a native of North Carolina, currently lives in Houston, TX where she enjoys performing and teaching Suzuki violin and viola. She graduated with her Masters of Music from Rice University in 2006. Since graduation Meredith has enjoyed performing with various ensembles in Houston some of which include the Houston Symphony, Houston Ballet, Houston Grand Opera, River Oaks Chamber Orchestra and the Houston Chamber Choir. She has also been invited to attend and perform at various festivals across the United States including Tanglewood, Grand Teton Music Festival, Spoleto, Kennedy Center, Four Seasons Next Generation Concert Series, Las Vegas Music Festival, and North Carolina School of the Arts Summer Program. Meredith spends most of her time performing concerts and outreach programs with her string ensemble, Quartus Chamber Players. During the summers she is on faculty at the North Carolina Suzuki Institute and the Summer Suzuki Strings in Chesapeake, VA.

Kyle Evans, pianist, grew up studying with his aunt, Dr. Elaine Walters and made his orchestral debut at age thirteen with the Houston North Symphony. Currently, he is active in Southwest Texas as a soloist and accompanist with more than twenty schools, churches, and other organizations. He has performed with HGO's Opera to Go! at the Miller Outdoor Theater, and occasionally accompanies their high school studio masterclasses. He has been guest artist several times at First Methodist Downtown, which is broadcast, and has served as the staff organist at Westminster Methodist. He accompanied a cabaret musical at the Sage Theatre in NYC. He has appeared in concert with Brian Connelly at a regional convention to premiere music for two pianos and has also played for silent films at the MFAH. Kyle has an BM from Oklahoma City University where he was winner of the school's concerto competition and an MM from Rice where he assisted with the opera department and premiered and recorded many new works.

Kyle Evans, Piano



Sarah Mosher, Costumes

Sarah Mosher received her MFA in theatrical Design from University of Texas at Austin where she produced her thesis, The Fiber of Being: an exploration of the way clothing is used in fairy tales to control, protect and liberate women. Sarah has designed costumes for Ashes, Ashes a new play by Eve Tulbert, directed by Dustin Wills for which she was nominated by the Austin Critics Table for Outstanding Costume Design 2008 and The Way of the World, directed by Jesse Berger, for which she won the 2006-7 Austin Critics Table Award for Outstanding Costume Design. Sarah's credits also include: Plump Jack, an original opera, The Cinderella Factor, produced at Tacoma Museum of Glass and J.B. among others produced in Seattle and Austin.

Frank Vela, Lighting Design

Frank Vela, received his BFA in Theatre Design from The University of Texas– Pan American and his MFA in Theatrical Design from The University of Texas at Austin. Frank is an active member throughout the Houston Theatre scene. Some of his work includes Lighting and Scenic Designer for The Landing Theatre Company's first production, "The Glass Menagerie." He has also designed for various other companies such as (Stages Repertory Theatre) History of America (Abridged), Rabbit Hole; (UT Austin) Summer People; Dance Repertory Theatre; (UT Pan American) Once Upon a Mattress; (The Barn Theatre) Fiddler on the Roof, Gypsy; Lend Me a Tenor; The Rocky Horror Show; (Main Street Theatre) Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and The Best Christmas Pageant Ever. Other work includes As You Like It (Scenic Designer), Mouse Trap and Our Town (Lighting Designer) at University of Houston- Downtown. Frank is also Owner/CEO of Houston-based lighting/audio/video company Rocksteady Productions.

Serret Jensen, Wigs & Stylist

WigWitch extraordinaire. She's also one of those "I don't do bios" artists, mysterious diva that she is. She has done fantastic worked with Houston grand Opera, Alley Theatre, Houston Ballet, and Lion King on



Chris Becker, Composer (Saturday afterparty music)

The music of composer Chris Becker is equally inspired by rock and roll language, avant-garde jazz, dub compositional strategies, and musique concrète. His body of work includes compositions for dance, film, chamber ensembles, and mixed-media installations. Becker has received grants and awards from The Louisiana Division of the Arts, Meet The Composer, the American Music Center and The American Society of Composers and Publishers. His music has been featured on WNYC's New Sounds hosted by John Schaffer and Overnight Music hosted by Helga Davis. Becker has composed music for New York choreographers Sasha Soreff (The Other Shoe, Ailey Citigroup Theater, 2009), Adrian Jevicki (La Spectra, The Tank, 2009), and Rachel Cohen and Racoco Productions. Music for Cohen includes sixteen individual pieces for her highly praised evening length work If The Shoe Fits (2005). If The Shoe Fits ran for ten performances at the Walkerspace in New York City. New York Times dance critic John Rockwell called the work "...lavish and fully realized..." and included If The Shoe Fits in his end of the year list of the best dance performances of 2005. Thanks in part to a recent Creative Connections award from Meet the Composer, Becker traveled to New York in March 2011 for a performance of If The Shoe Fits at The Emeline Theatre, Mamaroneck, NY. In 2006 Becker released his CD Saints & Devils - a suite of ten tracks inspired by Southern music, history, and iconography. Composed, recorded, and mixed by Becker, the CD includes performances by musicians from New York City and New Orleans. Cohen and Becker are creating a dance installation work based around the CDs ten tracks. Becker lives in Houston, TX. He regularly gigs on laptop solo and in collaboration

with Houston improvisers sometimes accompanying contemporary silent films by filmmakers from New York City, New Orleans, and Houston. He has performed at Avant-Garden, the Binarium Sound Series, and Frenetic Theater. Becker writes twice a week about modern art and music for the Houston Press blog Art Attack and contributes Houston related news to the classical music website Sequenza21. He is also works for the Houston new music presenting organization Musiq. www.beckermusic.com

Klytemnestra is underwritten by PowerBarge LLC, Karadeniz Energy, SSS Steel and Birdwell Productions

Saturday after-party music by Chris Becker and media by Culture Pilot

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Thank you:

Dave Nickerson, Neil Orts, Joel Luks, Nancy Wozny, Joe Wozney, Geoff Smith, Lynn Birdwell, Raul Cesares, Lois Alba, MaryBeth Smith, Culture-Map, Houston Press, Chris Becker, Joel Luks, Culture Pilot, KUHF