

Janet Oates

2006 / 2017

Medea

For solo soprano or mezzo, playing hand-percussion (bodhran and a handful of household cutlery) and using a loop pedal system with foot-switch

Duration 6 – 8 minutes

The text paraphrases extracts of Euripides's play *Medea*.

In the first section Medea describes to her faithless husband Jason how his new wife was poisoned and killed by the gown and gifts that Medea had given to her via Medea and Jason's two young sons:

As soon as she saw the ornaments, she took the gilded robe and put it on, and set the golden crown about her golden ringlets, exulting. In a moment she turned pale and reeled backwards, trembling in every limb. Thinking it was a fit from Pan or some god sent, she called a cry of prayer, till from her mouth she saw the poison-bubble rising, her eyeballs rolling in their sockets. The necklace of gold was sending forth a wondrous stream of ravening flame, while the fine garment was preying on the luckless maiden's fair white flesh; and she rises from her seat in a blaze and seeks to fly, and the flame, as she shook her locks, raged forth the more with double fury. Then to the ground she sinks, from the crown of her head blood and fire in mingled stream ran down; and from her bones the flesh kept peeling off beneath the gnawing of those s.....

Medea then has to steel herself to kill her sons, as the final vengeance against Jason:

Why do you gaze and smile upon me so?

Steel thyself...

Performance notes

The theatricality of the piece is more important than accuracy of pitch and rhythm; feel free to take breathing spaces as you like, without losing the manic forward thrust.

You will need a microphone on a stand, a loop pedal (to record, overdub, play) and a footswitch to stop the tracks (button B) and to move up the tracks (button A). Speakers will play this without amplifying it louder than your natural voice. The set-up diagram below. Please contact me for help if necessary!

All loop tracks are created (recorded) and added to (overdubbed) in situ as part of the performance, except loop tracks 3 and 6 which are pre-recorded and similar: a gasp and another gasp or perhaps a shuddering breath. This will resemble the first looped bar you create live (loop 1).

'hh', 'ha' 'hurgh' etc throughout the text: these can be interpreted as you like, changing and developing as Medea's emotions change and develop. It may be a sharp inward breath through the teeth, or a loud short pant; it could be a long shuddering breath in or out.

Overdubs, for example, bar 39: the notation is approximate. Choose a length and content of over-dub that fits the emotional narrative.

'LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 2' and similar instructions – these are a visual aid to remind you to change track upwards. You may choose different places to do this.

At B and again at bar 63, choose notes and timings that blend with the track you have created.

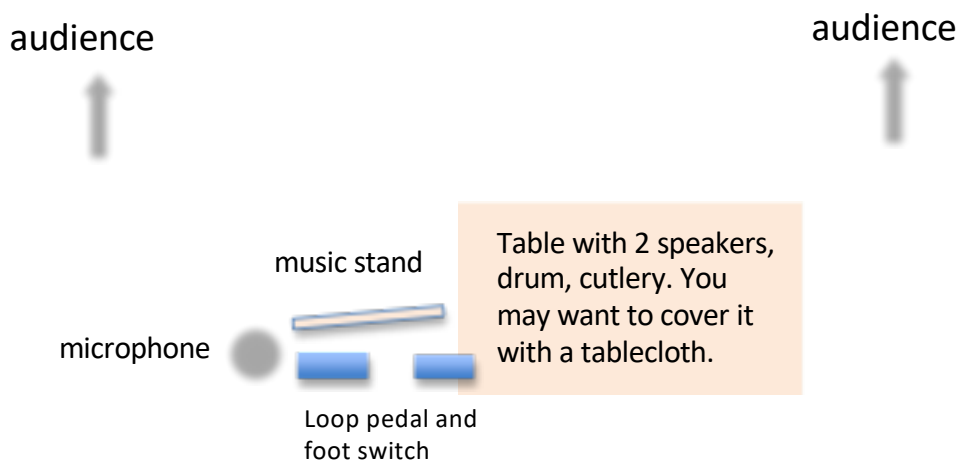
At D, a complete change: perhaps you see your children approach? Singing over the top of the drum – mouth virtually on the skin – creates a lovely spooky resonance. In between vocalisations, you could use the drum to play 'peek-a-boo' with the children?

Bar 141: you could stop track 4 suddenly here and mime the words into silence, if you prefer.

The whole of section E: notes, pitches, the start of the recording and overdubbing, and the length of this section should all be improvised according to how the performance is feeling. You're planning to kill your children – you might have a lengthy quiet, spacious bit first then a sudden furious build-up, or a gradual and painful build up to distortingly loud with dozens of layers... vary the pitches of the overdubs microtonally so it ends as a horrible chaotic internal scream.

Similarly, section F is a build-up of voiceless emotional vocalisations with constant overdubbing. Allow it to build ready for the sudden stop at G.

Possible performance set-up



Medea

J. Oates

♩ = 180

LOOP 1 REC OFF

LOOP

voice

white tone

gliss.

! hh!

ord.

Ah - - s! hh! soon as she saw soon as she saw

p *p*

5

saw all the soon as she saw all of the orn - a-ments orn - a-ments

7

soon as she saw she saw saw saw soon as she saw soon as she saw

11

or-na-ments soon as she saw or-na-ments soon as she saw all the all the or na ments

14

soon as soon as she saw she saw all of the all of the or na ments she saw saw saw

17

saw saw saw then she took the gil-ded robe and put it on_ took the gil-ded robe and

f mp

voice

21

put it on, put it on then she took the gil-ded robe and gild-ed robe and put it on

Perc.

DRUM

soon as she saw the robe she put it on put it on put the gil-ded robe on and she

p

Drum

voice

27

set_ the gold - en crown a-bouter gold en ring-lets ex - ult - ing

mp molto f

Drum

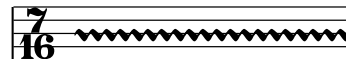
voice

30

set_ the gol - den crown a-bouter gol-den ring-lets set the gol-den crown

p

LOOP 1 PLAY



Drum

set the gol-den crown ex - ul - ting Hah! In a

loop

voice

mo-mentsheturn'd pale fell back wards trem-bling trem-b ling in ev'rylimb

LOOP 1 O/DUB



LOOP 1 PLAY

loop

ha ha ha ha ha
(random timing)

voice

ha ha ha ha ha trem-b ling in ev-erylimb
mp

loop

voice

sheturn'dpalesheturn'dpale_ fell_ back-wards fell_ back - wards
mf

45

loop

voice

trem-b-lingalingaling think-ing think-ing it wasa fit wasa fit from

mf

48

loop

STOP

Drum

SWIRL DRUMSKIN

voice

Pan_ orsomegod sent Pan orsomegod sent raised a cry of prayer -

f

LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 2

Drum

voice

LOOP 2 REC

O/DUB 2

B PLAY 2

Drum

voice

(random - insolently: 'so what?!')

mm_ mm_ mm_ mm_ mm Till from her

mp

59

loop

voice *breathily*

mouthfromhermouth she saw the poi-sonbub-bles ri sing, poi-son bub bles ha ha *p*

62

loop

voice *f*

ha f f f f f ff Her eye-balls eye-balls eye-ba-la-ba-la-ba-laba

O/DUB 2

PLAY 2

65

loop

voice *f*

roll ing in theirso ckets s k s k s kss sss— The neck-lace of gold

69

loop

voice *f*

neck-lace of gold was send-ing forth a won__ drous stream a

71

loop

voice

won drous stream of ra - ve - ning

ff

73

loop

voice

flame! haha hahaha While the fine rai - ment was prey - ing

unvoiced *Meno mosso* *f*

STOP

77

voice

on the luck less mai - den's fair fair fair white flesh fl fl fl fl

breathily

80

Drum

voice

and she starts from her seat in a blaze and seek to fly

tempo primo *ord.* *mf* *f*

SWIRL DRUMSKIN with fingernails


83

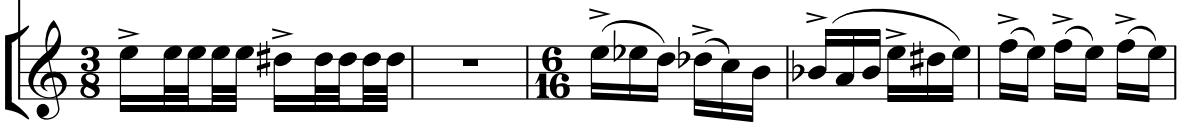
Drum

voice

fly and the flame as she shook her locks, shook her

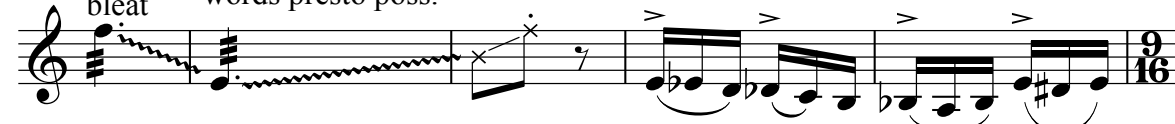
86 ord.

Drum 

voice 

lockssh ksh k locksh ksh k *ff* blazed_ forth the more_ more more more

91 throat bleat words presto poss.

voice 


with doublebubblebubble.fu - ry *f* blazed_ forth_ the more_ more

96

voice 


more more the more the more more the more the

97 *breathily*

voice 

mp then_ to the earth_ she sinks_ then to the earth_ she

99 **Meno mosso** ord. words presto poss.

voice 

sinks_ sinks and from the crown the crown of her headerheaderheader... *ff*

103

voice

Blood! blood and fire blood and fire in ming-led stream ran down down down down

106

voice

ran down down ran down down down down ran down

f *mf* *mp*

110

voice

LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 3

and from her and from her and from her bnbnbnbnbnbnb bones the fl-fl-fl-fifflflesh kept

mf

113

loop

voice

C LOOP 3 PLAY

pee ling off peel-ing off peel-ing off

f

116

loop

voice

pitch approx. (madly!)

off o ff! be-neath the gnaw-ing gnaw-ing gnaw-ing of the

ff

♩ = 56

STOP **D** LOOP 4 REC.

120

loop

SWIRL

Drum

voice

s.k.s.k..... ssss

sharp inward breath through teeth

p hh hh ss

f hh hh ss



126 LOOP 4 O/DUB CONTINUE TO O/DUB

loop

voice

shuddering outward breaths

hahhhh mp ooh ooh

sing over top of drum, catching its resonance



132

loop

voice

unvoiced and/or semi-voiced whispers

Why do you gaze and smile u-pon me so?



135

loop

voice

Why do you smile u pon me? hh

139

loop

voice

put drum down

(mime the words)

hh why do you smile up on me?

STOP

144

voice

cutlery

E ♩ = 180 (tempo primo)

ff Steel thy - sel - ff!

shake cutlery with right hand in palm of left

s - s - s - steel

mmm

tongue clicks

150

voice

mf s - s - steel steel thyself steel

mp s - steel nnn

clicks

cutlery

156

voice

l n n n g l n n

mp ss - teel

163

voice

(like a pulse)

very free time

ss - ss - teel

voice

f steel

LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 5

168

voice

steel *p* tha a a *mp* Stee - ll thy

(thy) a a ay self

173

loop

voice

sel - ff sel - ff steel steel steel thy_

cutlery

LOOP 5 REC LOOP 5 O/DUB

179

loop

voice

cutlery

pp thy_ self_

CONTINUE TO O/DUB

183

loop

voice

steel *mf* steel *ff*

sudden STOP

(continue this as you like, varying pitch slightly, tempo ad lib, enjoying the build-up of dissonance and anguish)

LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 6

LOOP 6 PLAY

F ♩ = 72

voice

voiced pant

sim.

hurgh

hurgh hurgh

cutlery

quavers executed by 'grabbing' the handles of cutlery tightly with R.H.

f



192

LOOP 6 O/DUB

loop

voice

hurgh

hurgh hurgh

cutlery



196

loop

voice

hurgh hurgh hurgh

hurgh hurgh

hurgh hurgh

cutlery

201 STOP

loop

voice

cutlery

*outward blow
(this will be
virtually inaudible)*

G *(inward)* ♩ = 56

*outward
unvoiced sigh*

p *fff* *hh mp* *hh* *hh hfoo*



206

voice

rit.

hh mp *hh* *hh mf*



211

voice

p *hh* *hh* *hh* *fff* *ahhh!*

gliss.

*inwards like a gasp,
semi-voiced and simultaneously
DROP (or throw!) CUTLERY*