Tsippi Fleischer

ציפי פליישר

Medea מדאה

Chamber opera in seven scenes (1995) Libretto: Rivka Kashtan אופרה קאמרית בשבע תמונות (1995) ליברית: רבקה קשתן





Tsippi Fleischer Medea – A New Vision of the Myth

a chamber opera in 7 Scenes for mezzo-soprano and 4 acting Instrumentalists Libretto: Rivka Kashtan

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In this facsimile score there are no bar numbers. All participants play from the score.

In scene 4 there may be transpositions in the role of the singer because of the changes of timbres between Medea and Jason, depending on the voice qualities of Medea.

The Hebrew phrases are written due to the worlds premiere in Israel, where the acting instrumentalists (the local "Corianthians") were Israelis.

Ensemble

Medea/Jason - mezzo-soprano (playing also some percussions)

4 instrumentalists acting as citizens and Corinthians:

Recorders/Flute/Piccolo/Alto Flute
Violoncello (must be a woman)
Clarinet/Bass Clarinet/Alto Saxophone
Percussion: Xylophone, Glockenspiel, Sleigh-bells, Cow-bells, Cymbals,
Gong (medium), Bongos, Tam-tam, Wood Blocks, Triangle

TSIPPI FLEISCHER

MEDEA

A Chamber Opera

Libretto: Rivka Kashtan

Foreword by Avi Hanani

Artistic Director Kol Israel Upper Galilee Music Days, Israel, Summer 1997

Her preoccupation with contexts of and connections between the culture evolving here in Israel and other cultures - distanced by time or locality or even those seemingly closely related to one another but, on reinvestigation, revealing the need to be broken up, re-evaluated and re-assembled – is one of the most outstanding characteristics of Tsippi Fleischer's oeuvre. Thus her choice of the historical-mythological-artistic figure of Medea as the focus for a multimedia composition appears to be almost inevitable. The delineation of the various aspects of this figure, familiar to us mainly from its appearance in Greek tragedy, the discovery of its roots in the Republic of Georgia, the clarification of the image forming processes that accompanied its development in Western culture and the non-traditional treatment of all these, set the stage for a fascinating work. And Rivka Kashtan's libretto - based on a longer play of hers directed Tsippi Fleischer towards the path of discovery and the creation of an extremely original musical language, shedding a most uncompromising new light on the well-known plot.

The Ensemble too – one vocalist and four instrumentalists / actors who share the various roles testifies to the new concept. This, then, is the position taken by an

active, involved composer at the end of the 20th century, in relation to a myth, its heroine and her exploits; and in relation to the intrinsic concepts of drama and opera formulated during the past centuries and in the process of being reexamined today.

16.6.1997

Why Medea?

A past without a bridge, a future without an anchor

The librettist Rivka Kashtan tells about her work:

For a year and a half I lived on the eastern side of the Black Sea, in the Republic of Georgia, and there awoke in me a desire to write Medea's story anew. I realized that is where the story started. It is there that I gained a different perspective

Medea was born in ancient Colchis, the site of which is now in Western Georgia. The Georgians see her primarily as a healer, an expert on medicinal plants; Medea is a name they happily give to their daughters. Yet her full story, as known in the Western world, was written by the Greeks, and from their stories emerges a different woman: a barbarian sorceress, murderess, who arrives one day from the far side of the Black Sea, on the deck of the fabled "Argos", alone amongst a warrior crew, her hands already stained with her brother's blood. And murder will mark her for the rest of her life.

In re-imagining Medea I tried to make sense of these contradictory stories. I attempted to understand this woman, to conceive of her as a whole person. Who was she before she met Jason? What in that encounter with the stranger was that changed her life? How did she turn from a healer into a killer?

Sartre's resonant words came to me: "A man meets his destiny in his character? What is destiny? May not circumstances also shape

character." A captivating remark,

but perhaps insufficient. What is

our character, or vice versa?

The Medea whom we meet in Euripides' play is already a mother, who has been living in Greece for ten years. But when Medea first met Jason she was a young girl, most probably inexperienced. I could imagine how easily she could be impressed by such an 'exotic' foreigner and have fallen under his spell: infatuated, lacking the awareness, she could willingly use her knowledge of plants and do everything for him.

This incendiary compound of liminal knowledge and lack of awareness leads her to break one boundary after another: - stealing the Golden Fleece, dishonouring her father, abandoning her homeland, committing fratricide.

Upon her arrival in Greece, she murders the royal usurper, Pelias (who refuses to return the kingdom of Iolcos to Jason, his nephew, despite receiving the gift of the

A route carved with blood.

It is not surprising, then, that under certain circumstances, when Medea hears the news which threatens to shake her very existence, she acts in the only way she knows. Again she uses (or abuses) her power, but this time – against Jason.

Another major factor in her life, caused by this taboo-breaking, seemed very crucial to me. It influenced her difficult social and psychological circumstances in Greece: she was always the 'other', the stranger. Moreover, she could never consider going home again. This formidable woman, capable of wielding powers of life and death, was completely dependent on her husband, bound to him not only by passion but also by the murders she had committed for him.

It is when Jason informs her of his decision to marry another woman that her fragile social identity collapses. Medea is exposed to a past without a bridge and to a future without an anchor. Enraged and

terrified she turns against her rival, the usurper, the Greek woman, using her awesome knowledge of plants, for the first time, not for Jason but against him.

And as the dominant narrative unfolds, her thirst for revenge drives her to kill even Jason's offspring – her children.

Above all, this ending – what the world has seen as her archetypal crime against nature – awoke in me a gnawing question: was Medea the real murderer of the children, or was she perhaps used as a scapegoat? With such terrible events taking place in Corinth - how simple it would be to cast such guilt on her.

I had been pondering the fact that it was Euripides, a man, a Greek, a native, who wrote about her - a woman, a barbarian, a foreigner.

Two days after arriving back from Tbilisi, Tsippi Fleischer phoned me and asked:

- Would you write a libretto on
- I can't believe it, I replied. I've been thinking of writing a play about her...

March 1997

Synopsis

Prologue

The people of the city of Corinth are about to celebrate the state wedding of Glauke (daughter of king Creon) to Jason, the former leader of the Argonauts, who captured the Golden Fleece from Colchis, on the eastern side of the Black Sea.

As the ceremony reaches its climax, Glauke's skin begins to burn and drop away from her body. Creon runs to protect her and is similarly afflicted. The city is in uproar. Who is to blame?

Scene One

Medea - Jason's rejected wife searches desperately for her children, in fear of a mob baying at her heels. Her search is intercut with enacted flashbacks from her life: as a child, as a young woman learning the craft of healing, reacting to Jason's arrival in her native Colchis, and as the killer of Apsyrtos. Are her children present with her or just figments of her imagination?

Scene Two

Citizens of Corinth enact a polyphony of prejudice against Medea as a foreigner, as the "other". The voice of uncertainty, of a more balanced enquiry is drowned out. In her own world. Medea counterpoints this hatred with a dance of ritual healing.

Scene Three

Medea acknowledges her responsibility for smearing Glauke's dress with poison. She tells her children real or imagined? – the story of the Golden Fleece... Her mind turns once again to the memory of the occasion when....

Scene Four

In Corinth, Jason breaks the news to Medea of his intention to divorce her and marry Glauke, so as to insure his inheriting the kingship of Corinth. Medea argues and pleads with him, to no avail.

Scene Five

Her feelings in tumult, her supplications to the Great Mother to change Jason's attitude, are progressively transformed into arias of hatred and spiralling visions of revenge.

Scene Six

The citizens excoriate Medea anew and plot to murder her children and put the blame on her. Simultaneously Medea dances out an emotional counterpart, a ritual of evil intent.

Scene Seven

Back in the dramatic present. Medea finally acknowledges the truth of her situation, echoed by Jason's screams of agony. She appeals to Hecate, her mother, to Helios, the Sun God, for help.

Epilogue

The citizens make a modest proposal to the playwright Euripides sitting in the audience...

The composer's commentary

written by Tsippi Fleischer immediately after completing the composition, California, Villa Montalvo, July 1995

A rituous melange of whispers from archaic tonal worlds (originating in various scales of primitive cultures). some fragments of Renaissance modes, and exuberant blendings of all these, bringing to mind the combinations of man and beast in works by artists from Hieronymus Bosch to Pablo Picasso: mixing together, they exert their influence on the melodic contours of the opera and create a totally new tonal asthetics into which are incorporated avant-garde methods of voice production. While re-reading the libretto before approaching the actual compositional work, I was steeped in the atmosphere and textures of the traditional music of Greece and Russian Georgia (Medea's place of birth!) and I felt the need for a few exotic eastern elements (glissandi, doubling of octaves). All this is, of course, consistent with the modernistic fragmentation of European tradition in the making of contemporary

This seven-scene opera is to be performed without a break, and with no conductor. Each scene has a distinct profile: each has a specific world of scales (as described above), and of temperament (and thus of rhythm), and has its own textural shape, particular instrumental sound and a dynamic graph, and specific functions of the percussion section. Thus a basic outline is formulated for each scene from which the whole scene then evolves.

Scene 1

This scene serves as an exposition of almost every nuance to appear during the opera, and may be considered as an overture to the opera itself.

I edited the relatively long text into 15 subsections according to the subject matter. After a musical opening – an instrumental idea in miniature which may be completed in a number of ways – Medea's spoken sections first appear. The small introductory musical phrases are extremely varied and portray the prevailing mood, thus paving the way for a sensory conception of the drama to which the spectator is soon to be exposed.

I ask for placards to be displayed, and direct Medea in the use of movement and pantomime in addition to her spoken the text.

Scene 2

The instrumentalists act the part of citizens of the big city, gossiping about Medea. The libretto is divided into eight successive pictures. Medea begins and ends the opening tableau. Each citizen-instrumentalist has simple intervallic patterns of definite pitch on which his recitations throughout the eight expositions are based; all this proceeds with an accompanying bourdon element in the cello and the citizens' particularly prominent cries -Brrrr... There are moments of "chorale" and moments of polyphony in the vocal make-up.

The cellist (who must be a woman) is the only one who sympathises with Medea to a certain degree.

Scene 3

In this scene Medea withdraws from her tragedy and retreats into the world of legend; she tells the story of the Golden Fleece to imaginary children in a specially endearing way. Here I composed tunes to suit the specific text: one is an extremely tranquil one for the Georgian lullaby, and two others, contrasting restless images, also appear in the text in a purely lyrical fashion. Of these, one evokes the mood of childrens' fears of dragons

and other nightmares, and another deals with the disappearance of Phrixos (the husband of Medea's sister).

When Medea is involved in her life story – at the beginning and the end – Sprechgesang dominates her singing style; in her dreamworld, it is the arioso or arietta that characterize her rendition of the quasi folkloristic tunes. In this scene, fragments of the Renaissance Lydian and Mixolydian modes are much in evidence.

Scene 4

This scene contains the duet of Medea and Jason, sung by a single vocalist. There are absolutely clear, defined limits of pitch and vocal timbre for both Medea and Jason as well as typical motives for each of the protagonists.

The two figures undergo in the course of the scene different psychological processes: Medea's feminine elegance and her relatively constant restraint in contrast to the strong shift in Jason – from relative coldness in the beginning to the expression of all his frustrations later on. Both revert to cunning, to viscious tongue-lashing, to sadism, bringing up memories and settling of accounts from the past. Medea exhibits her vulnerability in moments of relative softness when she recalls her love for Jason, or when at the end she calls out to the citizens for help.

Aria sections for the two protagonists are included here. The pitch element is reminiscent of Indian music.

Scene 5

In this scene – the opera's poetic, ecstatic core-components of ancient India's tonality are included.

Medea is lonely in her utter isolation and unhappiness. Her body and soul are consumed by the fire of passion, and whoever hears her must sympathize with her intense suffering. The impact of her big aria will become the central gesture of the opera:

The wind is shrieking, the trees are crying, my flesh is burning, screams knife my body! The earth is barren, ebb away the waters, you queen of curses, bind him to his duty, burst open his heart!

Throughout this scene, while Medea is singing, her hatred for Jason becomes increasingly deeper.

Scene 6

After having been emotionally spent in the previous scene, Medea comes to the realization that she is trapped. There is no way out for her; in the extremity of her anguish, it seems as if she is about to stumble and fall-off the stage.

The four Corinthians (acted by the instrumentalists) serve as a speaking chorus and through the music the sensation of escalation from single individuals to a group or a mob is developed. Restlessly, Medea continues to run, as if only by so doing she is able to endure her unbearable existence.

Scene 7

In this scene the instrumentalists pick up their instruments once again and play fragments based on an ancient Chinese scale. They accompany Medea, who regains the dimensions of any woman in her condition - one who, having lost her children and everything else, is trying to save whatever she can. She hears Jason shouting, but her heart is steeped in darkness, she is helpless. She ends with a desperate prayer to Helios, and slowly exits carrying the suitcase that has been with her throughout the opera. The Epilogue follows.

June 1997

While composing this opera during my stay in the artists' colony in California, I worked a great deal out of doors, among trees and shrubbery, near a murmuring stream. Pencil in hand, I sat on the damp ground and wrote most of it. This was my way of arriving at complete sensual identification with the characters and images of the world of Greek mythology. I sincerely hope that some of this will be communicated to the audience wherever a production of this opera takes place.

Undoubtedly my doctoral thesis on Cherubini's "Médée" (after Euripides) prompted me to produce a "Medea" of my own; then Rivka Kashtan and I together found a new mode of implementing this idea.

To the work's main language – English – Greek and Georgian have been added. Any additional production of this opera, in whichever country it may take place, is welcome to use the language spoken in that particular country for the dialogue by the citizens/ Corinthians. In the world premiere in Israel we naturally used Hebrew.

Reflections through a glass darkly

The director - coreographer Nigel Watson explains:

Oedipus apart, Medea is the only

protagonist from classical Greek drama to have sustained a seething afterlife in the European imagination. Each occupies a distinctive, taboo-breaking position in the pantheon of patriarchal anxiety. Euripides' MEDEA is the dramatic source of the modes in which Western civilization has constructed and represented this gendered myth. Seneca's portrayal persistently connects childbearing, hysterical emotion and the dark powers of Hades and is framed by odes from a male chorus inviting spectators offended by Medea's 'foreignness' and to approve of her abandonment by Jason. Seneca's plays were to be a seminal influence on the re-emergence of tragedy in Elizabethan England and in 17th century Europe.

During the same period the Florentine Camerata were 'inventing' opera, imagining themselves to be reviving Greek tragedy and restoring some balance to the relations between words and music, predicated on the Platonic-Aristotelian view of music as an art capable of profound moral influence.

Tsippi Fleischer's and Rivka Kashtan's MEDEA is the most recent work to examine and challenge the nature of this status, created by women artists long involved with crosscultural perspectives. Their portrayal unfolds conflicting actions, characterizations and motivations struggling to become the authorized version of a story. What-is-authorized is built around an apparently unchanging kernel or essence – in Medea's case, the murder of her children.

Fleischer and Kashtan weave together the weft of the real interdependence of singer and instrumentalists that any musical theatre performance requires, and the warp of this struggle between competing fictions. Their music and words dance together in and out of step, interrogate, undermine and affirm each other in entirely contemporary ways – in pursuit of contemporary concerns.

Table of Contents:

Scene 2	
Scene 3	 . 1
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Total free improvization

non-symmetrical, not too

many tones, give enough

breaks in each instrument

and sometimes the whole ensemble will be in Silence Fade: less and less densed.

Searching the children Scene 1

(after Overture -if any) possesses

Scene 1 -1-

Isabelle enters on Ziv's Fade he continues until disappears - she continues Where are you? Where are you, children?

Disappeared.... Sone....

And I -Alone.... My heart, lacerated torn, torn to pieces, alone to

Are you your brother's keeper?

Chaotic, clash.

[Between units 1+2]

ひめ 6690

is bivit oiciosit ig best bik

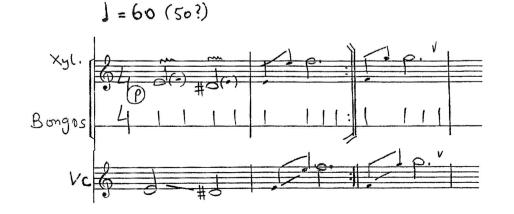
The loss of the מפט המוים

Forgive me, Apsyrtos, It was Jason's plan.... I was afraid....

I wanted you at my side, my own bone and blood.... But Jason had a different mind, he needed you as a hostage And he was right,

We had to stop him, and you were butchered, hacked, scattered across the seas.... sashinelebaa!!! chemi sakutari dzma!

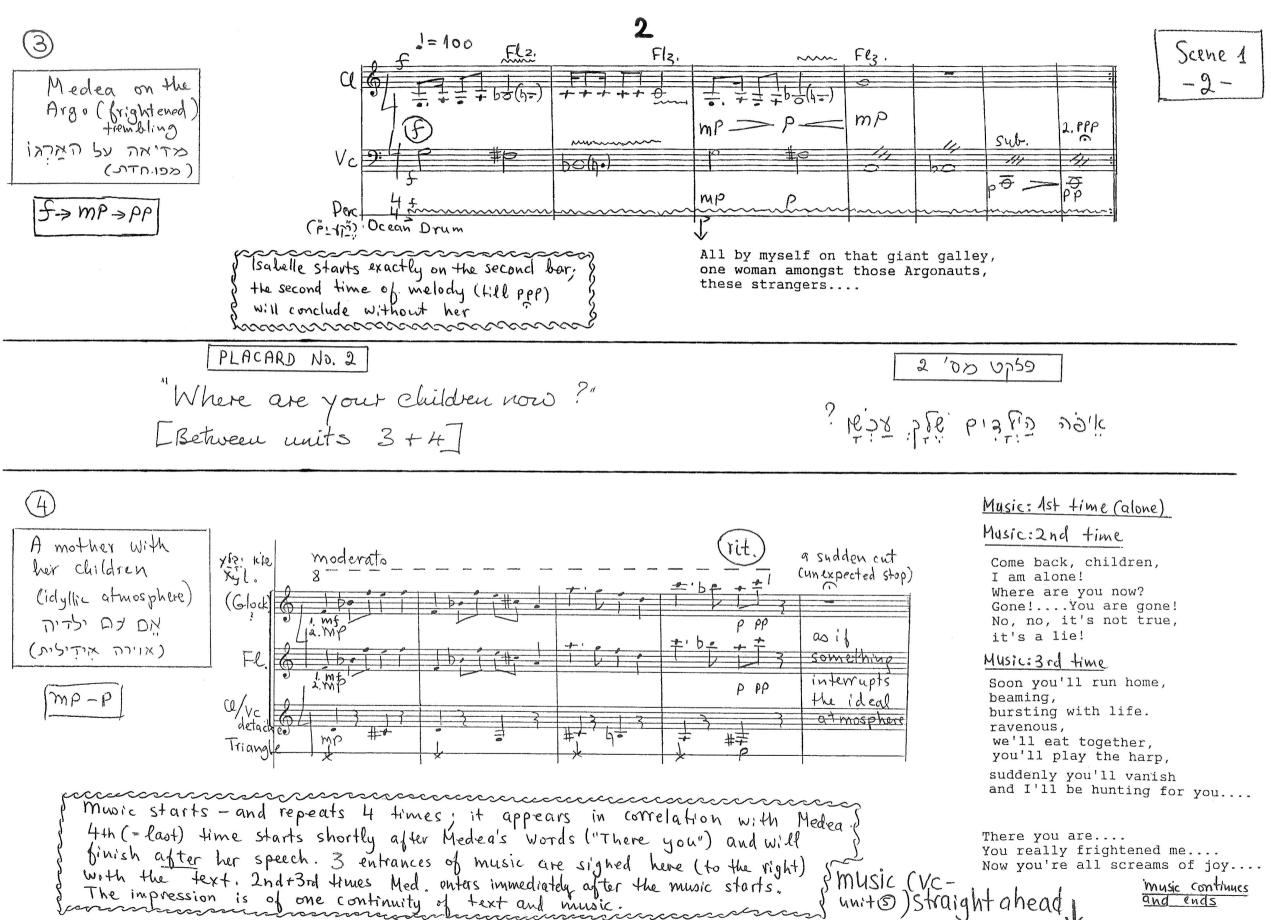
I music straight ahead I bailled my own brother!



like my brother, Apsyrtas, dismembered, limb by limb, scattered on the face of the seas, hurled by scornful waves....

No, no, my father gathered up the pieces wrapped you in hides, exposed you, on top of a willow-tree.... - Tradition he dare not break...

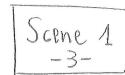
Our father pursued us.

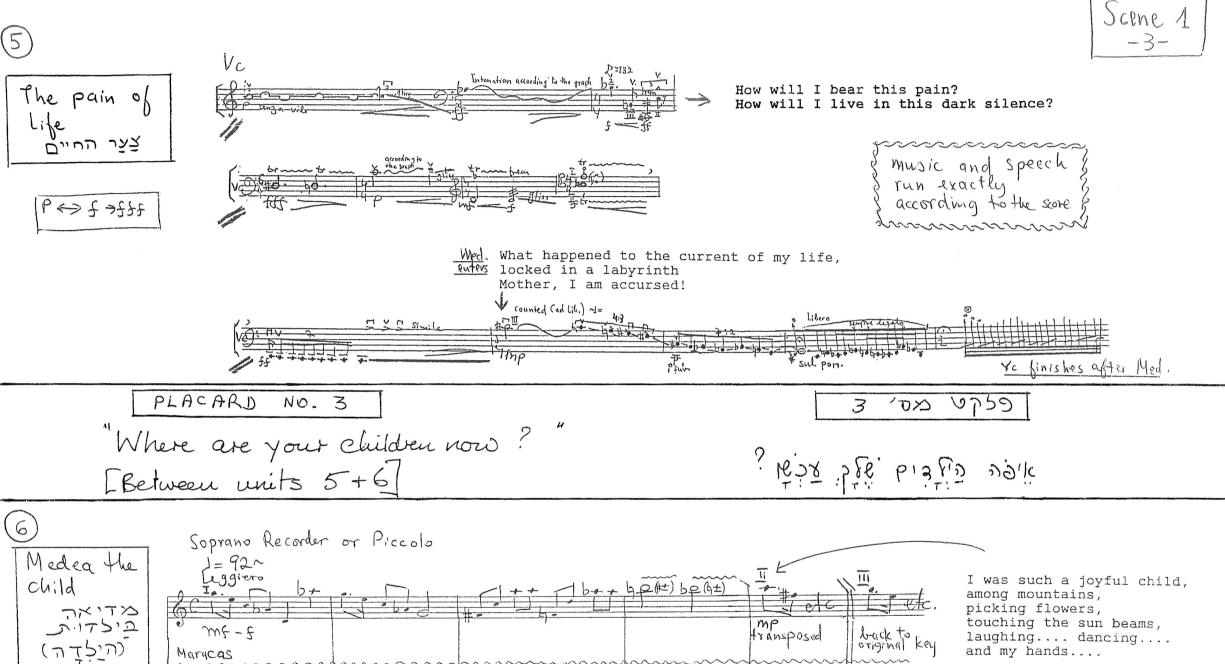


There you are.... & music (vc-& units) straight ahead

You really frightened me.... Now you're all screams of joy....

Music Continues and ends



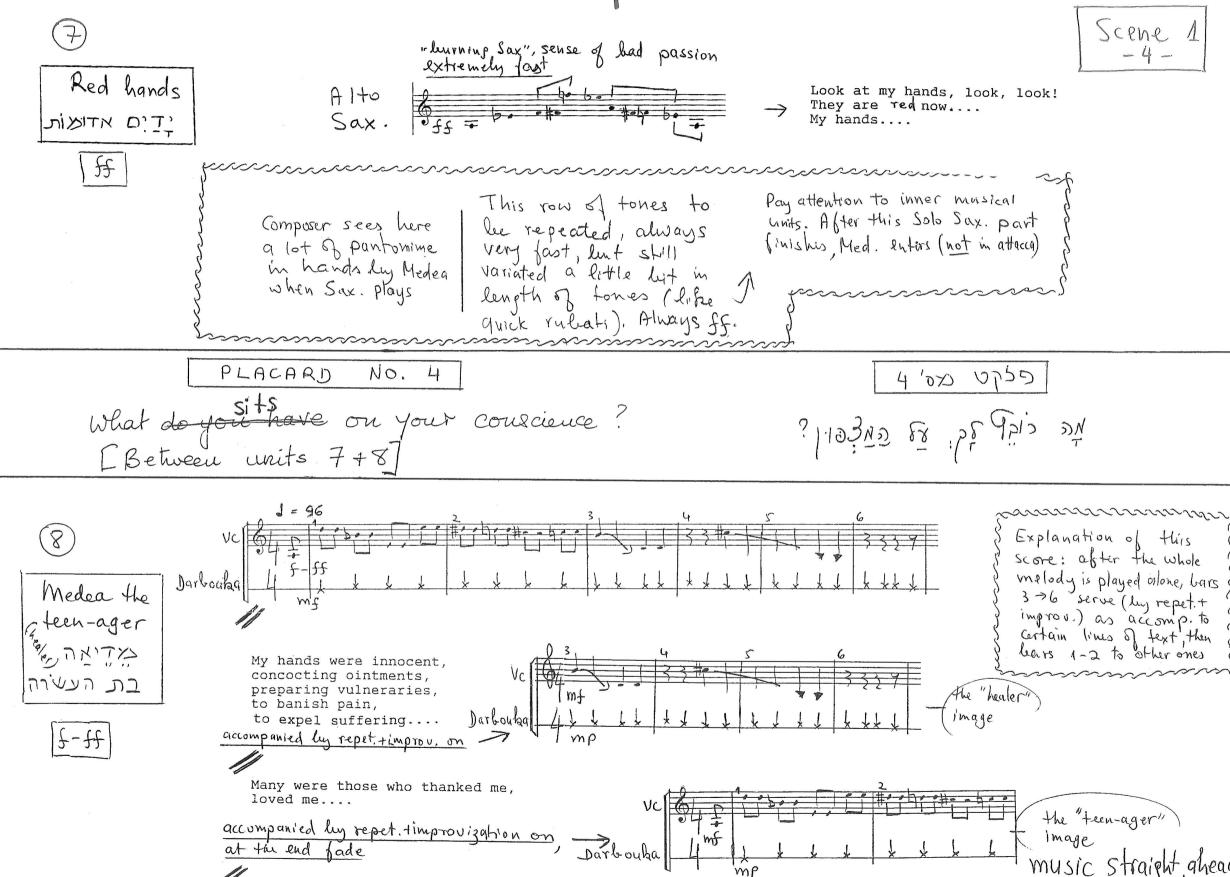


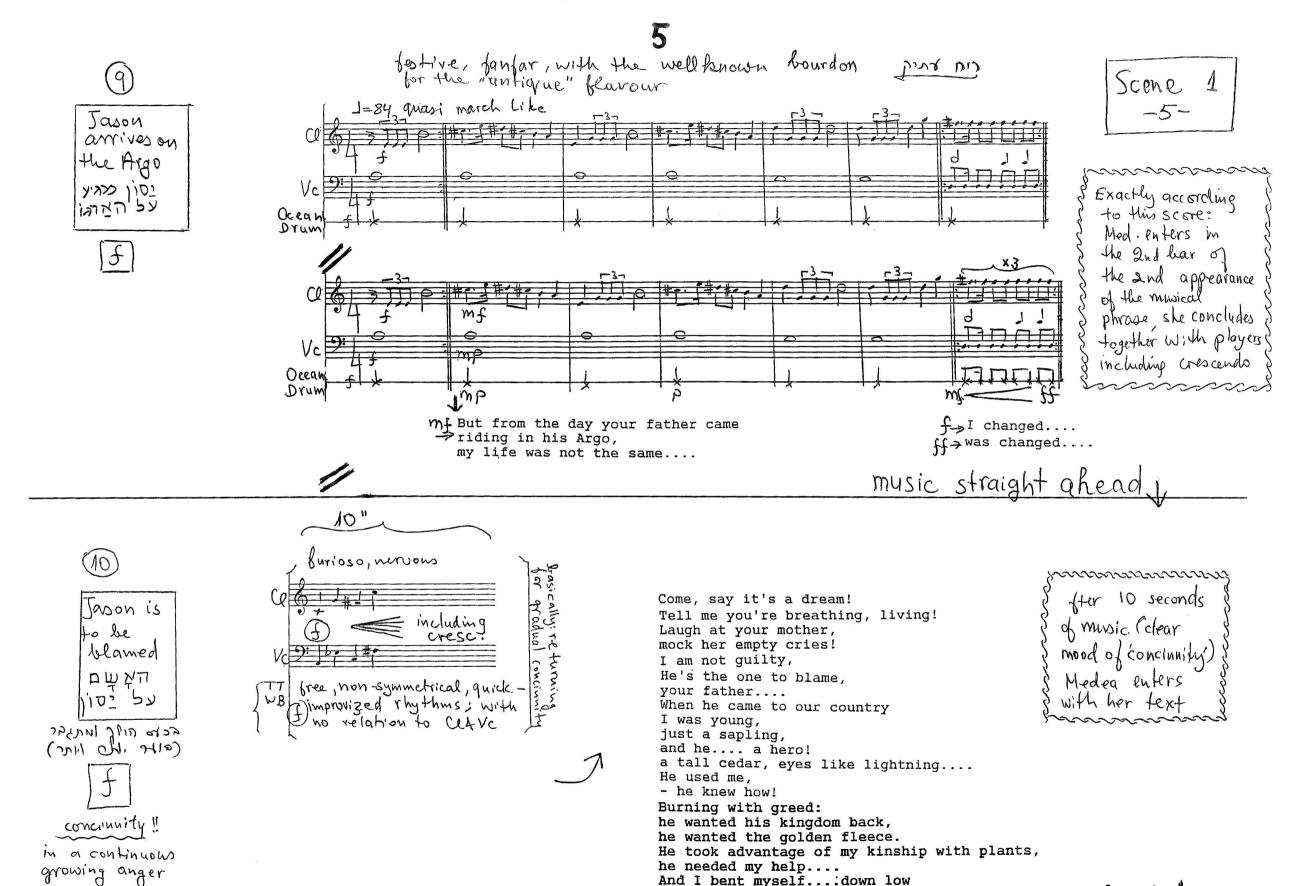
Composer sees here a lot 21/2 times. Recorder (+ Maracas) starts and finishes of Medea's dancing, alone the first time; after starting the 2nd time especially in the 1st time (transposed to a-ft.) Med. starts her text. She reaches a melody, before she starting in the third entrance. They happen to starts speaking stop together in the middle of melody (after the 3rd entrance)

mp

mf-f

music (Alto Sax. unit@) straight ahead 1





music straight ahead



a tiny change of dose....

away from evil eyes....

a tiny change of dose,

will turn elixir into poison!

Listen to me now

to placard No.6

Who visits you at nights? [Between 12+13] ? Ni 8: 12 : P! Elic 1cp 1.

(13)

Jason With
the new
woman
2011
COTY
THE

mpomf

expressive, romantic, sensual sound (totally free in rhythms)
Ad Lib.

Bass Party allegretto

Recorder Day to movement

Recorder according to movement

(ironically) Love!
Your father never really cared for me....
And now this new woman at his side,
this Glauke....
He kisses her at night,
caressing.... her breasts....
I shouldn't be telling you this....

After one appearance of this musical sentence Media speaks.

Compart sees a lot of movement (pantomine) by Medea while the recorder is playing

PLACARD NO. 7

edgu 200' F

And you claim to be a mother? [Between 14+15]

is kulc vice. Maic six vici

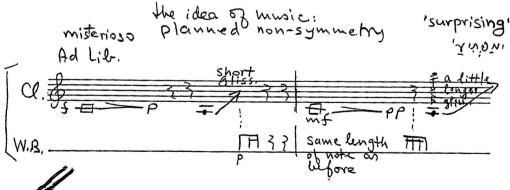
(14)

May the children be still alive?

T'DI TSIN

T'DI D'TSIN

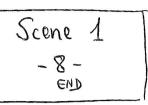
PP, P,

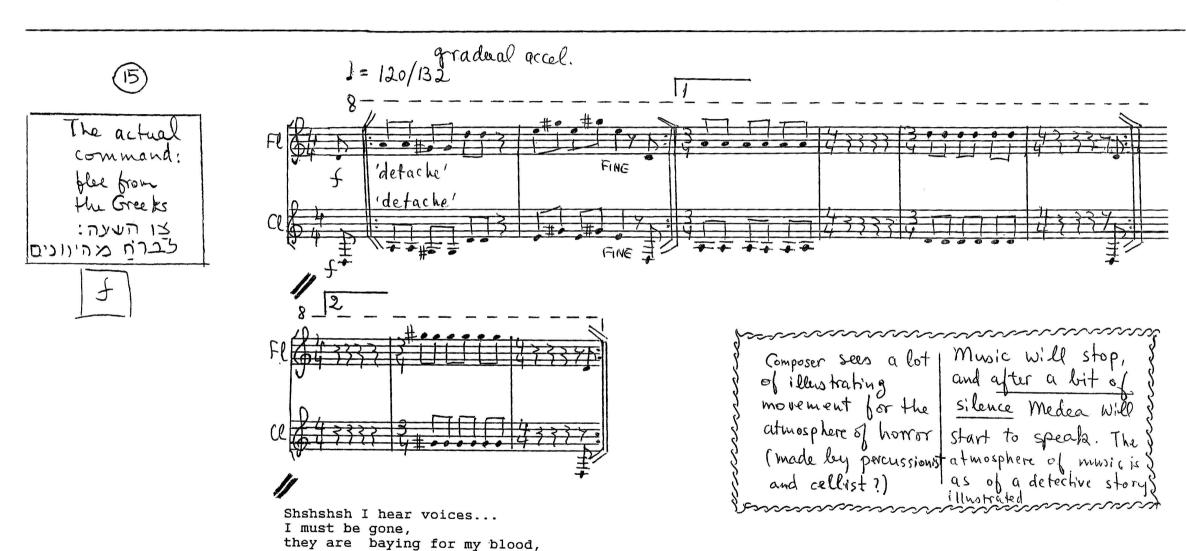


O, Hera, keep your promise to give them eternal life!
I brought them up in your temple!
I paid a heavy price Jason no longer visits me at nights....
The fire has turned to ashes....

d'After one appearance of this of musical sentence Medea speaks

Music Straight ahead V





these Greeks!

They never welcomed me!

The lies they spread, Your nurse has whispered everything...

