

high voice

# persephone, unheard

words by  
rachel rose

music & movement by  
jeffrey ryan

Perusal Copy

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## *Performance notes*

**Total performance time:** ca. 4'45"

**Vocal range:** A3 (ossia D4) to Bb5

### **Spoken voice:**



single-line staff with x-shaped noteheads indicates spoken voice. General pitch level is relative to the staff line. The shift between spoken voice and sung voice is always immediate.

**Movement:** The notated head movements create a visual effect similar to blunt cuts in film editing. The performer has three primary positions of the head: CENTRE facing front (as though a camera were directly in front of the performer); approximately 45° to the LEFT (as though a camera were filming a three-quarter view to the performer's right); and approximately 45° to RIGHT (as though a camera were filming a three-quarter view to the performer's left). These movements must be executed quickly, and metrically as indicated. Along with the head movements, there are frequent jump cuts between text fragments, which plays with perceptions of time, memory and repetition. From the vantage point of a particular audience member, the "camera angle" constantly shifts during the performance. (Except where specified, the hands, etc., are free.)

The notated movement is an important part of the theatre of the piece and may not be omitted. However, in all cases, while observing the notated movement and staying within the character of the piece, the individual performer is invited to make the movement organically her own.

## *Programme note*

*Unheard* is a suite of four Song Theatre works for unaccompanied female voice with notated movement. They may be performed as a set, individually, or in any combination. Poet Rachel Rose has been writing an on-going series of poems in which she gives voice to female characters from literature and mythology who are largely unheard in traditional tellings, usually in favour of the male characters. We hear from these women after they have left their stories, expressing their experience in hindsight and illuminating for us a different perspective while connecting with women's experience in contemporary times.

The Greek story of Persephone is usually told from her mother's perspective. Persephone is abducted by Hades and taken to the Underworld. Grieving mother Demeter neglects her duties as Harvest Goddess. Hades is convinced to release Persephone, but having eaten some pomegranate, she must return to Hades several months each year, the winter of Demeter's grief. But what if Persephone ate the pomegranate on purpose? In *Persephone, Unheard*, we hear from a teenager determined to make her own choices. To Persephone, hell is leaving her boyfriend every year to be with a mother who doesn't understand her, and in a torrent of repetition and shifting camera angles, she unleashes the revelatory tirade she had played and replayed in her head.

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**BRITISH COLUMBIA  
ARTS COUNCIL**

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## **Persephone**

*by Rachel Rose*

It was my sex that made you crazy, mother:  
when I started doing in the dark what you did  
to create crops, to blossom. I was supposed to stay  
your small fruit, green and unplucked on the branch  
until I was picked to bear. But I didn't want the fruit,  
only the pollen, only the flowering, the nectar.  
I wanted it always to be spring, never autumn, never harvest.  
I stopped the throat of my womb with rocks  
so I could bloom all over him.

It was hell only to you, who owned the language  
of the fields, when I followed him down to the wet  
bedrooms of the body. To me heaven was in the dripping  
sweat of our smashed bodies, colliding, spent. I no longer  
wanted the light. Or rather, just the first kisses of dawn, not full day,  
not duty, not babies. When you came for me,  
I followed, dragging my filial debt like a stone.

It was only at the door of light, his sweet seed  
dried in my fist, that I hesitated, that I licked my own  
salt-stained palm and returned to him, undead  
which means alive, O alive to the body's hungers.

I cannot weed the garden for you, I cannot put up tomatoes  
gather apples, fill your lap with grandchildren,  
all I want is to die and die with him.

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## Senza misura

enter from offstage (or back of house). The "door of light" is upstage centre. Approach the door, as every year's duty. This time, the hand raises in a gesture of "no"—this year you cannot go through. Turn away from the "door" and proceed downstage centre.

anguish, frustration, an impossible situation **f** >  
angrily fold arms over chest **mf** in a flood

♩ = 150 A tempo

CENTRE RIGHT  
**mf** in a flood

Arrgh! It, it was,

6 CENTRE LEFT CENTRE RIGHT  
it was my, it was my sex, it was my sex that, it was my sex that made,

11 CENTRE RIGHT LEFT CENTRE roll eyes  
it was my sex that made you, it was my sex that made you cra - zy,

16 RIGHT CENTRE roll eyes LEFT roll eyes  
it was my sex that made you cra - zy, mo-ther, made you cra - zy, mo-ther,

21 RIGHT scowl CENTRE fling arms in frustration mf with a slight sneer guttural  
cra - zy, mo-ther. Cra - zy mo-ther! When I start - ed do-ing in the dark what

25 RIGHT LEFT CENTRE point drop stamp LEFT  
finger hand foot  
you did, what you did, what you did, what you did to cre - ate crops, to

31 RIGHT stamp CENTRE  
foot p  
blos-som, to blos-som. I was sup - posed to stay your small fruit,

36  
green and un - plucked on the branch un - til I was picked to bear.

Persephone (high)

40 RIGHT *mf* CENTRE LEFT CENTRE RIGHT

But, but I, but I did-n't, but I did-n't want the fruit,

45 CENTRE LEFT RIGHT *f<sub>sub.</sub>* *mf<sub>sub.</sub>*

want the fruit, I did-n't want the fruit, I did-n't, on - ly the

50 CENTRE *f<sub>sub.</sub>* RIGHT *mf<sub>sub.</sub>* CENTRE *f<sub>sub.</sub>* RIGHT *mf<sub>sub.</sub>* smoky, with a sting

pol - len, on - ly the flo - wer - ing, on - ly the nec - tar.

55 wait for reaction CENTRE raise eyebrow in a dare *mf* quietly defiant free physical movement through m. 82

I want-ed it, I want-ed it al - ways,

60 *p*

I want-ed it al - ways, al - ways to be spring, to be

64

spring, ne-ver au - tumn, spring, al - ways spring, ne-ver har - vest, al - ways spring,

69 *mf p<sub>sub.</sub>* *mf<sub>sub.</sub> p<sub>sub.</sub>* *mf<sub>sub.</sub> p<sub>sub.</sub>*

al - ways, al- (ne-ver au-tumn) ways (ne-ver au-tumn) spring (ne-ver har - vest,


74 fold arms across chest - - - - *pp* (elided)

ne-ver har - vest). I, I, I, I, I, I stopped the throat of my

79 step forward, open arms, blooming, - - - - taunting


womb with rocks so I, I could bloom, I could bloom all

Persephone (high)

(bloom) ----- ,  
molto rit. ----- ,  
lunga 

lean back, smug,  
fold arms across  
chest again


A tempo  
LEFT **mf** CENTRE RIGHT



o - ver him. \_\_\_\_\_ It, it was, it was hell!

release arms, point

CENTRE **mf** LEFT (hand down) **mp sub.** point CENTRE



It was hell on-ly to you, on-ly to you, who owned the lan-guage of the fields,

LEFT **mf** point drop hand **mp sub.** CENTRE **mf** point drop hand RIGHT drop hand **mp sub.** point




on-ly to you, when I fol-lowed him down, on-ly to you, on-ly to you, down

CENTRE RIGHT point drop hand **mf sub.** **mp sub.** CENTRE **mf sub.** point RIGHT drop hand **mp sub.**




to the wet, you, wet bed-rooms, to you, bed-rooms of the bo-dy.

CENTRE **f** unbridled, free free physical movement through m. 121




To me, hea-ven, to me hea-ven was in\_\_\_ the drip-ping sweat\_



\_\_\_ of our smashed \_\_\_\_\_ bo - dies, col - lid - ing, \_\_\_ col - lid - ing,

stop **p** blissfully close eyes, in reverie

slowly open eyes, back to ----- , present, refocus on Mother



spent. \_\_\_\_\_

**mp** RIGHT CENTRE



I no long - er want - ed the light. I no long - er want - ed the light.

LEFT **p dolce** CENTRE RIGHT



Or ra-ther, just the first\_\_\_ kis-ses of dawn, not full day, not du - ty,

## Persephone (high)

150 CENTRE *look back over right shoulder* RIGHT *mf* CENTRE

not ba - bies. When, when you came, when you came for me,

158 LEFT *a burdensome annual ritual* CENTRE

when you came for me, I fol - lowed, I fol - lowed, I fol - lowed,

166 RIGHT CENTRE *eyes roll upward, long-suffering*

I fol - lowed, I fol - lowed, drag - ging my fi -

174 *eyes slowly look forward molto rit.* *a withering look* *the face set, the upper lip curling*

li - al debt like a stone. lunga

182 *A tempo expression ord. mp* *reach to front, as if the door is ahead* *mf* *slowly turn hand to look at palm*

It was on - ly, on - ly at the door, the door of light, his sweet

189 *look front, to the door mp sub.* *look at palm again mf* *make fist mp sub.* *look front, to the door mp sub.* *look at fist mf*

seed (at the door of light) dried in my fist (at the door of light), that I

196 *look front, open hand to "stop" gesture mp* *look front, to the door mp* *very slowly turn hand to look at palm mf sub.* *mp*

hes - i - ta - ted (at the door), that I licked my own, (at the door),

203 *mf sub.* *look slightly away, pull back from the "door" in front f* *f* *free physical movement through m. 234*

my own salt-stained palm (at the door of light) and re - turned to

211

him, un - dead, which means a - live,



♩ = 132 sub., broader

218 **ff** *mf* LEFT *mp* RIGHT *mp*

O a - live to the bo - dy's, to the bo - dy's

227 *mf* LEFT *mf* CENTRE *mf* (ossia: sing upper notes) the energy to fight dissipates

hun - gers, hun - gers, hun - gers.

237 LEFT *mp* dull tone CENTRE RIGHT CENTRE

I, I, I, I,

246 *mf* (hand down) *mp* LEFT *mf*

I, I can-not weed the gar-den for you, I can-not,

254 CENTRE *mp* LEFT *mf* CENTRE *mp*

I can-not put up to - ma - toes, I can-not, ga - ther ap - ples,

261 LEFT *mf* CENTRE *mp* drawing up

I can-not, fill your lap with grand - chil - dren,

♩ = 96 sub.

267 RIGHT *p* quiet but firm CENTRE RIGHT CENTRE

all, all I, all I want all I want is,

274 RIGHT CENTRE LEFT *molto rit.* pitched airy sound CENTRE *p* low and husky lunga

all I want is to die and die with him.