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❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ **MEDEA**

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For singer, also playing percussion (bodhran and a handful of household cutlery)  
and using electronic loop pedal with foot-switch

Duration: c.6 - 8 minutes

January 2006  
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**Text:**

**The text is a paraphrase of various modern internet translations 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 fell 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 the 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. Set up diagram below. Please contact me for help if necessary!

Loop tracks 3 and 6 are pre-recorded and similar: a gasp and another gasp or perhaps a shuddering breath. This will resemble the first looped bar you create (loop 1). All other

loop tracks are created (recorded) and added to (overdubbed) in situ as part of the performance.

‘hh’, ‘ha’ ‘hurgh’ etc throughout the text: these can be interpreted as you like, changing and developing as her 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.

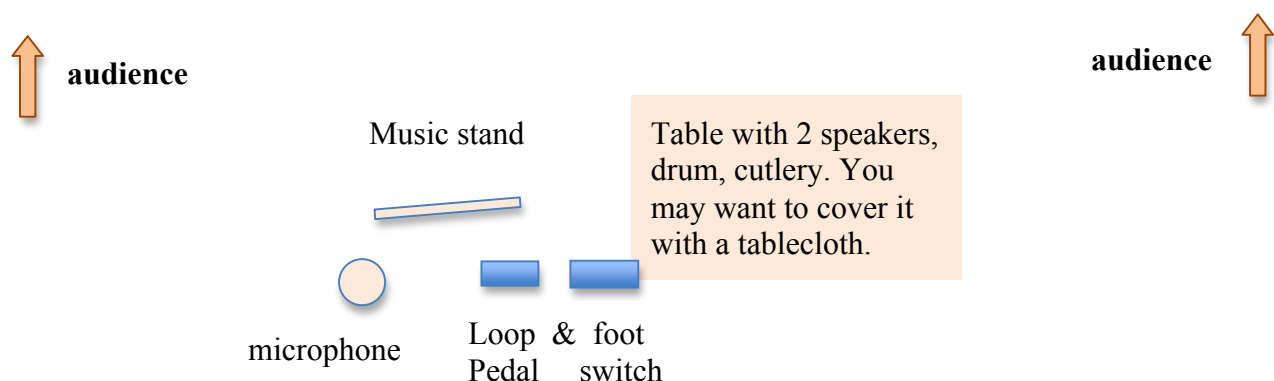
At D, a complete change: perhaps you see your children approach? Singing over the top of the drum – mouth virtually on the skin – creates a lovely spooky resonance. In between vocalisations, you could use the drum to play ‘peek-a-boo’ with the children?

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

♩ = 180

LOOP 1 REC OFF

LOOP

white tone

voice

gliss.

hh!

ord.

A - - 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 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*

21

voice

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

24

Drum

DRUM

voice

soon as shesaw the robeshe put it on put it on put the gil-ded robe on andshe

*p*

27

Drum

voice

set the gold - en crowna-bouthergold en ring-lets ex - ult - ing

*mp* *molto* *f*

30

Drum

voice

set the gol - den crowna-bouthergol-den ring-lets set thegol-den crown

*p*

LOOP 1 PLAY

Drum

*mf*

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

*f*

36

loop

6/16

voice

6/16

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

39

LOOP 1 O/DUB

LOOP 1 PLAY

A

loop

6/16

7/16

ha ha ha ha ha  
(random timing)

voice

6/16

7/16

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

*mp*

42

loop

8/16

voice

8/16

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 STOP

loop

Drum

voice

Pan\_ orsomegod sent Pan orsomegod sent raised a cry of prayer -

*f*

SWIRL DRUMSKIN

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

mouth from her mouth she saw the poi-son bub-bles ri sing, poi-son bub bles ha ha

*breathily*

*p*

62

loop

voice

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

*f*

*f*

O/DUB 2

PLAY 2

65

loop

voice

s k s k s k s s s s s s

roll ing in their so ckets s k s k s k s s s s s s The neck-lace of gold

69

loop

voice

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

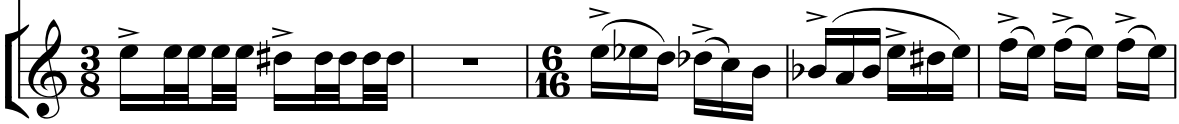
Drum

voice

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

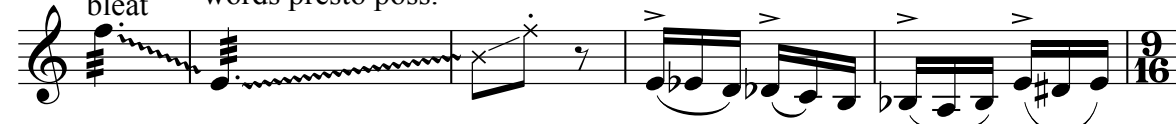
86 ord.

Drum 

voice 

locksshkshk locksshkshk *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 

then\_ to the earth\_ she sinks\_ then to the earth\_ she *mp*

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*

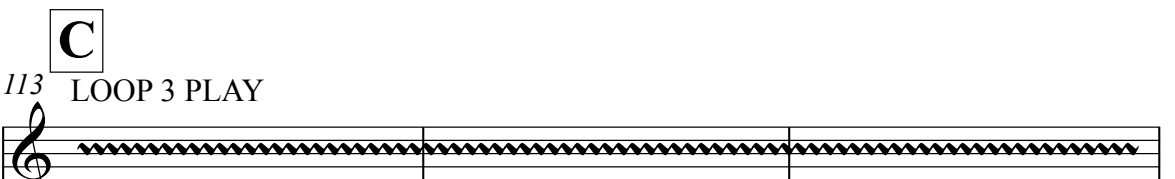
110 LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 3


voice 

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

*mf*

**C** 113 LOOP 3 PLAY

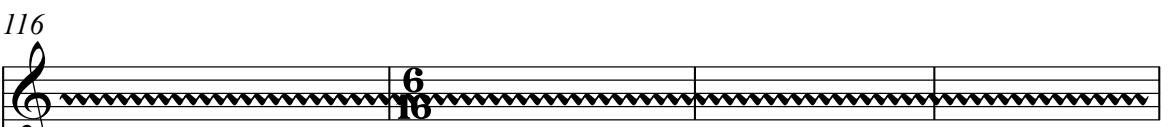
loop 

voice 


pee - - ling off peel-ing off peel-ing off

*f*

116

loop 

pitch approx. (madly!)

voice 

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.....

sharp inward breath through teeth

ssss

p 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

unvoiced and/or semi-voiced whispers

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



135

loop

Why do you smile u pon me? hh

139

loop

put drum down

(mime the words)

hh why do you smile up on me?

STOP

144

**E** ♩ = 180 (tempo primo)

voice

*ff* Steel thy - sel - ff! s - s - s - steel mmm\_

shake cutlery with right hand in palm of left

cutlery

tongue clicks

150

voice

s - s - steel steel thyself steel s - steel nnn\_

*mf* *mp*

cutlery

clicks

156

voice

l n n n g l n n

*mp* ss - teel

163

(like a pulse)

very free time

voice

ss - ss - teel steel

*mp* *f*

LOOP PEDAL UP TO TRACK 5

168

voice

steel *p*      <sup>3</sup>tha a a a a ay selfff      *mp* Stee - ll thy

173

loop

LOOP 5 REC      LOOP 5 O/DUB

voice

sel - ff sel -      ff      steel steel steel      thy\_

cutlery

179

loop

CONTINUE TO O/DUB

*pp* thy\_      self\_

183

loop

sudden STOP

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

*mf* steel\_      steel\_      *ff*

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)* *outward unvoiced sigh*

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

*mp*

$\text{♩} = 56$



206

voice

*rit.*

*hh* *hh* *hh*

*mp* *mf*



211

voice

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

*fff*

*gliss.*

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