

More About **THE TORMENT OF MEDEA**

Carlisle Floyd (1926-2021) was arguably the most noteworthy and prolific composer of operas that America has produced, and I was very fortunate to have studied with him when I was in graduate school at Florida State University in the early 1970s.

For my summer quarter composition project in 1973, before I began work on my DM dissertation that fall, I wanted to take advantage of his expertise and write something operatic. Carlisle suggested a monodrama (an operatic composition for one solo performer and orchestra) and pointed me towards **Andromache's Farewell** by Samuel Barber as a model.

In discussing the form, Carlisle also told me that his opera **Wuthering Heights** had started out as a concert aria (similar to a monodrama but shorter) setting a famous monologue from the Bronte novel, and that he was later commissioned to expand it into a full-length opera. He then challenged me to look through the opera score and isolate that section. I quickly found it, much to his somewhat surprised delight.

While I was studying both the Barber and Floyd works, I was also looking for a suitable text to use for mine. Barber's libretto was drawn from Euripides' tragedy **The Trojan Women**, and that inspired me to look for a source text in classical Greek drama. I wanted a gut-wrenching, tragic scene and it didn't take me long to find the perfect monologue for the libretto in another great Euripides tragedy, **Medea**.

Not enrolled in any other classes that summer I could work very fast, and learning much from Carlisle's expert guidance, I managed to complete the piano score and most of the orchestration by the end of the summer term. By the time the fall quarter started I had finished the complete full score. I usually have a hard time naming my compositions, but this time I had little difficulty settling on **The Torment of Medea** as a title for my 15-minute work for soprano and orchestra.

It was performed the following winter at FSU with piano accompaniment, and a couple of times a few years later in Austin, Texas, also with piano. After that it slid into that familiar "dustbin of academic obscurity," where it languished for several decades until 2021 when I decided that it deserved to be revived.

So I dug it out and started the long tortuous process of obtaining permission to publish and record it with the copyrighted translation that I had set so many years earlier. Once that license was finally secured, I put it through an extensive revision process to lift it from so-called "student work" status to a legitimate mature composition, added a memorial dedication to my wonderful teacher Carlisle Floyd--who had recently passed away at the age of 95--and the long-lost work was finally ready to unveil.

The Torment of Medea has been recorded by soloist Bree Nichols with the Janáček Philharmonic Orchestra and released on the album **Tapestry of Voices** by Navona Records. Please see the Discography page of my website for more information.

The scene-setting prologue and libretto follow below...

Prologue

Since his arrival in Corinth, Jason the Argonaut has made such a favorable impression on King Creon that he has been offered the hand of the King's daughter, Princess Glauce, but only on the condition that his wife Medea, and his two small sons go into exile. Jason has accepted the offer and Medea has pretended acquiescence, but secretly plots a twofold vengeance. First, she will send poisoned gifts to the princess, hoping that before she discovers the treachery and dies, Glauce will be so pleased that she will allow the boys to remain with their father. Then Medea will kill the boys to complete her revenge on Jason.

The plot has proceeded according to plan, but as the time to kill her sons draws near, Medea's love for her children rises in conflict with her determination to sacrifice them. Her tormented monologue to the uncomprehending boys expresses the battle violently raging within her.

Libretto

From the **Medea** of Euripides - English translation by Philip Vellacott

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Oh, children, children! You have a city, and a home;
and when we have parted, there you both will stay forever,
you motherless, I miserable, miserable.

And I must go to exile in another land,
before I have had my joy of you,
before I have seen you growing up, becoming prosperous.
I shall never see your brides, adorn your bridal beds,
and hold the torches high.

All was for nothing, then - these years of rearing you;
my care, my aching weariness,
and the wild pains when you were born.

Oh, yes, I once built many hopes on you;
imagined, pitifully, that you would care for my old age;
and would yourselves wrap my dead body for burial.
How people would envy me my sons!

That sweet, sad thought has faded now.
Parted from you, my life will be all pain and anguish.
You will not look at your mother any more with these dear eyes.
You will have moved into a different sphere of life.

Dear sons, why are you staring at me so?
You smile at me, your last smile: why? why?

Why? Oh, what am I to do? What am I to do?
Their young bright faces; I can't, I can't do it.
I'll take them away from Corinth.

Why should I hurt them to make their father suffer,
when I shall suffer twice as much myself?

When I shall suffer twice as much myself!
I won't think of it again. I won't think of it again...

What is the matter with me?
Are my enemies to laugh at me? Laugh at me!
What a coward I am! What a coward,
even tempting my own resolution with soft talk.
What is the matter with me? My hand shall not weaken!

My hand? Oh, oh, my heart, don't, don't do it!
Don't do it! Oh, miserable heart, let them be.
Oh, miserable heart, spare your children.
Let them be; spare your children!
Oh, miserable heart, don't do it!

We'll all live together safely in Athens,
and they will make you happy.

No! No! No!...
By all the fiends of hate in hell's depths,
by all the fiends of hate in hell's depths, no!
I'll not leave sons of mine to be the victims
of my enemies' rage! No, never!

Come, children. Give me your hand, dear son. Yours too.
Now we must say goodbye. Now we must say goodbye.

Oh, darling hand, and darling mouth;
your noble childlike face and body!
How sweet to hold you! How sweet to hold you!
And children's skin is soft, and their breath, their breath pure.

Go! Go away! I can't look at you any longer.
My pain is more than I can bear!

I understand the horror of what I am going to do, but anger...
Anger, the spring of all life's horror,
anger masters my resolve!