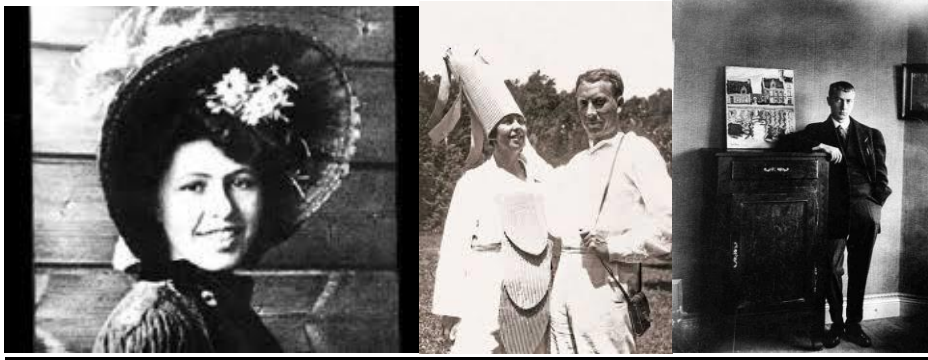


SOPHIE

Music and Libretto by Helen Caddick © 2021

Inspired by the Swiss Dancer/Artist Sophie Taeuber and her relationship with the Poet/Dadaist Jean Arp



SCENE 2
Meeting at the Tanner Gallery, Zürich, 1915

Lights up: Stage split into two:

Sophie is dancing outside on the street as Soprano Sophie sings:-

SOPHIE: Dear Erika ...I am finally noticing I am free, freer and more independent. However I have faced discrimination for being a woman. Unable to study with the tutor I wished for, unable, as I am a woman... a woman. I resolve to forge ahead in my quest to be an artist. I resolve...resolve in my quest to be an artist.

Sophie dances into the gallery -- we see works of art – sculptures – male dancer is walking around viewing as if a prospective buyer, jotting things down in a notebook

ARP: I was born in nature. I was born in a cloud. I was born in Strasbourg. I was born in a robe. I have four natures. I have two things. I have five senses. Sense and no-sense. Nature is senseless. Make way for nature. Nature is a white eagle. (*He sees Sophie*)

SOPHIE: I live between Swiss Arts and Crafts and the cosmopolitan avant-garde. (*as she sings she becomes aware that Arp is watching her*)

ARP: I am part of a flock of poets and painters, submissive and obedient to their shepherd... (*staring at Sophie*)

SOPHIE: I live between Swiss Arts and Crafts and a cosmopolitan avant-garde.

ARP: ...obedient to their shepherd.

SOPHIE: (*Now looking at Arp*)
In a flower in a beetle every line every form has arisen out of a deep necessity.

As the dancers (shadows of Arp and Sophie) begin to dance facing each other at a distance – they move closer & eventually intertwine as they realise they have found a like-minded soul They begin to mirror each others actions as if looking in a mirror

ARP:/ The stone washed by the rain spun by the rivers achieves its form

/SOPHIE: In a flower in a beetle every line every form has arisen out of a deep necessity.

SOPHIE: A flower...every form has arisen out of a deep necessity...mmm

ARP: The stone...spun by the river achieves its form...submissive to their shepherd... Your name?

SOPHIE: Sophie, and yours?

ARP: Jean

Sophie smiles and leaves the stage

ARP: Roses and Stars have Sophie's face, the softness of her heart, her purity. Roses and stars have Sophie's face like the leaves on a tree in a fairy tale she has descended on my existence.

SCENE 3
Cabaret Voltaire

ARP: Here is your costume I've created, worked on my designs for you. Here is your costume I've created worked on my designs for you...

SOPHIE: I shall wear it with joy I shall wear it with joy I shall wear it with joy I shall wear it with joy!

Dancer Sophie re-emerges wearing a costume designed by Arp spinning onto the stage / lights cast big shadows on the walls as she dances

ARP: The statue lamps come from the bottom of the sea and shout

ARP+SOPHIE: Long live DADA!

ARP: to greet the passing ocean liners and the presidents ... and three rabbits in india ink

SOPHIE: by Arp

ARP: Dadaist

SOPHIE: In porcelain

ARP: of striped bi bi striped bicycle

SOPHIE:/ dada a dada the dada the dadas I dada you dada he dadas /

/ARP: We will leave for London in the royal aquarium ask in any pharmacy for the Dadaists of Rasputin the Tzar and the Pope who are

SOPHIE+ARP: valid only for two thirty.

SOPHIE: Make dada way for dada nature make dada way for dada nature...

ARP: Make dada way for dada nature make dada way for dada nature...

SOPHIE: *(Looking again at her costume)* joy I wear it with joy... joy I wear it with joy joy I wear it with joy joy I wear it with joy!

ARP: The statue lamps come from the bottom of the sea and shout

SOPHIE+ARP: Long live DADA!

ARP: to greet the passing ocean liners and the presidents

SOPHIE: Dada a dada the dada the dadas

ARP: and three rabbits in india ink

SOPHIE: by Arp

ARP: Dadaist

SOPHIE: In porcelain

ARP: of striped bi bi bi bi bi bi bi cycle

SOPHIE: dada a dada the dada the dadas I dada you dada he dadas

ARP: dada a dada the dada the dadas I dada you dada he dadas

SOPHIE: he dadas dada a dada the dadas I dada you dada he dadas

ARP: dada a dada the dada the dadas I dada you dada he dadas

SOPHIE: he dadas

SOPHIE+ARP: and three rabbits in india ink

SOPHIE: by Arp

ARP: Dadaist

SOPHIE: Dadaist

ARP: In porcelain

SOPHIE+ARP: of striped bicycle we will leave for London in the royal aquarium ask in any pharmacy for the dadaists of Rasputin, the Tzar and the pope who are valid only for two thirty

ARP: tressli bessli nebogen leila flusch kata ballubasch zack hitti zopp zack hitti zopp hitti betzli betzli prusch kata ballubasch fasch kitti bimm zitti kitillabi billabi billabi zikko di za kkobamfisch kitti bisch bumbalo bumbalo bamboozitti kitillabi zack hitti zopp tressli bessli nebogen grugu laulala viola bimini bimini fusch kata ballubasch zick hiti zo

As Arp recites Hugo Ball's sound poem 'Seahorses and Flying Fish' Sophie dances increasingly frenetically to mirror Hugo Ball's description – "Mademoiselle Sophie Taeuber delirious oddity in the spider of the hand vibrates rhythm rapidly rising to the paroxysm of a mocking, capriciously beautiful insanity" - dances to exhaustion til we see her collapse...

Stage plunges into darkness

SCENE 4 **The Sanatorium**

Split stage between Arp and Taeuber. We see Taeuber in a yellow room – she is in bed letter writing / On the other side of the stage we see Arp working in his studio – creating sculptures / showing artworks to dealers (played by the dancers) / socialising/ writing

Sophie (singer) is in a hospital bed in a yellow room at the sanatorium. Letter writing ensues.

SOPHIE: Dear Jean, I'm so tired it took me all day to write. I'm laying in the North wing, the rooms without pictures or ornaments, lots of mirrors and beautiful washing facilities. Yellow room... yellow room mmm. Frau Mass brought a painting from you in a black frame and put it on the wall, it looks very nice. Afterwards she sent me yellow flowers afterwards she sent me yellow flowers because of the yellow room. Now you have the freedom to do things for yourself now you have the freedom to do things for yourself. *(she falls back against the pillow and rests)*

ARP: My dear Sophie. I am very worried about you. What do you have? I really want to know. What did the doctor say? Did he do a thorough examination? I'm working the whole day...I'm working the whole day...

SOPHIE:/ The doctor tells me it's exhaustion I just need to rest... I just need to rest.

ARP: /My dear Sophie. I am very worried about you. What do you have? I really want to know. What did the doctor say? Did he do a thorough examination? I'm working the whole day...I'm working the whole day...

We see Sophie working on an embroidery. Breakfast and a newspaper are delivered to her bed – she reads an article and gets more and more agitated - she sings to the audience:-

SOPHIE: I am fuuuuuuurious. What a load of rubbish, 'radical artist'. If I were an artist and my name were constantly made to look foolish by such shouting, squealing, howling, scrawling and printing I'd stuff a fistful of glue down the throat of the one responsible and bite his fingers so that he can do it no more. No-one is interested in someone dancing about vainly. All that matters is the work, making manifestos like that is more than idiotic. Advertising is essential if you want to earn money but then it should be done in an entirely different way. Dada is something different, you see what you make and everyone can think whatever they want...you see what you make and everyone can think whatever they want...they want can think whatever they want...can think whatever they want...whatever they want...whatever they want.

Arp arrives to visit Sophie

ARP: How are you my little bird? Are you well? How are you feeling?

SOPHIE: The doctor says I must continue to rest, but I am so much better for seeing you.

ARP: I have something to show you (*He shows her a drawing*)

SOPHIE: (*Laughing*) It looks like you've drawn potatoes with growths of bones or chickens fighting...beetles chickens fighting beetles and premature excited ducks! My brain blossoms are crying! You must tell the dadaists that they can't see the brilliance of their ideas!

ARP: (*Laughs*) I will, I will ...but who do you spend time with here at the sanatorium? I have heard that you speak to the male patients – you don't think of me.

SOPHIE: You are a silly boy. Would I write to you so often unless I was thinking of you? I am completely filled with you. The biggest thing is to be truthful to one another. You are a glittering sky blue magician.

ARP: Then, may I ask? May I ask? Will you marry me? (*He produces a ring*) Will you marry me?

SOPHIE: (*gasps*) Your ring gives me joy! Your ring gives me joy! I really love you. I have never met a person with whom I wanted to live with forever, ever and have children.

ARP: No. No I can't! This is something I cannot entertain. We are artists. How can we provide for a child? We must focus on our work. We are artists...are artists.

SOPHIE: But try to imagine...

ARP: We can't have children.

SOPHIE: from every flower a new flower will bloom again...

ARP: We are artists.

SOPHIE: bloom again.

ARP: We are artists please...

SOPHIE: and out of every jellyfish

ARP: ... consider how we could provide for a child?

SOPHIE: will be another

ARP: we need to focus on our work

SOPHIE: It is so very natural to wish for a child...as natural as rain...

ARP: Sophie...

SOPHIE: ...or a tree

ARP: we have little money

SOPHIE: I can't be blamed for this it's instinctual. This is a hard thing you ask...

ARP: It will be too difficult...

SOPHIE: ...of me, a hard thing you ask

ARP: ...to raise a child...

SOPHIE: If we get married...

ARP: ...and continue our work.

SOPHIE: I will have to completely suppress the thought of ever having a baby and this will be so difficult for me.

ARP: Perhaps in time this feeling will go away

SOPHIE: But we are like animals and plants naturally by instinct we want to reproduce. It's instinctual. It's instinctual. It's instinctual

ARP: In time...

SOPHIE:/ It's impossible for me to talk about this in a way you can understand /

/ARP: ...in time this feeling will go away...away.

SOPHIE:/ We cannot go against what we are like animals and plants and naturally by instinct we want to reproduce- it's instinctual.

/ARP: In time... in time this feeling will go away ...in time this feeling will go away.

Arp turns and leaves

SOPHIE: *(singing after him)* How can I make you understand? How can I make you understand? *(to herself)* will this feeling go away?

She breaks down.

We see time passing – going through days and nights x 3 with lighting to show time passing – we see Sophie writing and posting letters with no response

SOPHIE: Dear Jean. I don't know if I hurt your feelings when I said you don't understand...if you would only know how I wait for your letters...This is the 3rd letter I've written since yours! Write to me. Because you haven't written I won't let you know about my dreams. When we're together again I hope you'll have enough time for me away from your friends that you'll be able to give me your undivided attention without all those others around. I want to be alone with you I want you to be with me. With me, alone with you.
(To the audience) Slowly I realise that it's necessary to see men as plants and nature. Perhaps then I can understand them better and become calm. I will learn how to understand people I will learn how to handle human beings. The biggest thing is to be truthful, to one another we'll be truthful. I want you to be with me. *(Looking at Arp's photo as she sings)*

We see Sophie get up out of bed – she tries a few steps and tentatively begins to dance. We see her grow stronger and become herself again. She passes through into a teaching room –

SCENE 5

Classroom / The Marionettes

Sophie has become a textiles teacher – She draws/creates work and shows it to her students (Are the audience her students?) and sings:

SOPHIE: It's not kind to criticise artists there must be solidarity! You can start with the line. Try and see what expressions you can achieve with different wavy and jagged lines. Try to intertwine these lines in a different way. The intrinsic urge should not be eradicated. It is one of humankind's deep rooted primordial urges...it is one of humankind's deep rooted primordial urges. The intrinsic urge should not be eradicated...the intrinsic urge should not be eradicated...the intrinsic urge should not be eradicated... not be eradicated... not be eradicated.

Class (Audience) is dismissed. Clear in her thinking and seemingly at peace with herself, more confident, we see Sophie creating marionettes – using the dancers to create her marionettes - who then dance a shortened version of King Stag within the Opera (the production that closed early due to fears that theatres were helping spread the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic) as Arp narrates:

ARP: Deramo, King of the Asian Kingdom of Serendippo is searching for a wife. With the aid of a magical statue he has already interviewed and rejected two thousand seven hundred and forty eight applicants before meeting Angela, before meeting Angela - the beautiful daughter of his second minister, she alone loves him for himself not his crown, she alone loves him for himself. Unfortunately the evil Tartaglia, Prime Minister, wants Angela for himself. He is determined that the King shall marry his own daughter Clarissa. He is determined that the King shall marry his own daughter. Evil ensues but love triumphs eternal. Evil ensues but love triumphs eternal.

SCENE 6
The Wedding (October 20th 1922)

Music begins as we see Jean and Sophie solemnly walk in, stand side by side and the wedding ceremony commences. They mime taking their vows (presided over by one of the dancers as priest?) nodding in agreement in turn. They exchange rings.

SOPHIE: A circle is a unity. The circle is a unity.

ARP: A circle is a navel. The circle is a navel.

SOPHIE: A circle is a navel

SOPHIE+ARP: A circle is unity.

SOPHIE: With this ring I thee wed.

ARP: With this ring I thee wed.

SOPHIE: I promise to be faithful.

ARP: I promise to be faithful.

each looking at their wedding rings as they place them on each other's fingers

SOPHIE+ARP: Husband and Wife we now are. Husband and Wife we now are.

we hear church bells in the distance.

We now jump to:-

SCENE 19

1943. Sophie has died of Carbon Monoxide poisoning. Arp is devastated.

ARP: *(From the poem Black Veins)*
In my fog heart
The chimera of roses dies
A star settles on my bed, on the edge of my bed.
It's old and full of cracks, old and full of cracks.

Gray spiders, gray spiders,
Gray spiders fly away
Toward the black-veined horizon
They're going off as if to the burial of a fairy
They're going off as if to the burial of a fairy
The void sighs, sighs

My poor dreams have lost their wings
My poor dreams have lost their flames
They lock elbows

On the coffin of my heart
And dream of gray crumbs

The day reappears but I'm all worn out
The sky descends and covers me

(Ghost Sophie appears)

I open my eyes forever, forever, forever, forever.

Sophie leaves the stage.

Blackout.