

A short explanation of the process of composing and creating
HER BODY: The Anatomy of a Woman
by Seawolf (Dr Self)



Two years ago, I embarked on a new type of operatic composition. My key aim was to reveal authenticity through the process of auto-ethnography and to deconstruct my operatically trained voice. In my first show, *Analysis*, the libretto was created during a memoir writing course I did on the island of Skyros with Dr Alison Habens. She suggested that I go on to compose music for these episodes from my life. Dramaturgically these went on to become contextualised through the prism of a Jungian Analysis which I undertook some years ago after my father died. This year when I was discussing with Bill Bankes-Jones about the possibility of bringing a show to the Tête à Tête festival I suggested *Analysis* which had a tried and tested record of performances in Birmingham. However, Bill encouraged me to take further risks with my research and create something new. I had an idea for a work that would incorporate physical theatre,

soundscapes and installation of film and set, all of which have become integral to my practice. Like many people I am affected by my perception of my body image and it requires inner work to accept how I am. Therefore, *HER BODY* provides an opportunity to literally embody our shared experiences. During lockdown I was able to formulate the compositional and dramatic aspects of this work entirely on my own. The film installation is all shot on the North Norfolk coast where I live and the choreography takes its lead from Pina Bausch, Jonathan Burrows and DV8 physical theatre company. The music consists of three distinct styles:

1. Notated punchy minimalist music for string orchestra, pianos, saxophones and structured voice.
2. Abstract Soundscapes created with live sampled voice transformed through Logic Pro and improvised voice.
3. Simple lyrical songs.

Improvising with my voice afresh for each performance introduces an element of vulnerability so that inevitable mistakes have to be accepted in a similar manner to the purpose of the show, which is to embrace our bodies as they are. *HER BODY* doesn't have a through narrative, although there are nine distinctive sections.

1. A woman runs into the central space carrying a frame drum. She is a bird goddess, Erda in Wagner's Ring, an Egyptian

woman drummer or Aphrodite. She moves matter (twisted wrapping paper) and sings long cool tones which at times deconstruct into bird calls. Her movements emulate a bird.

2. A harp plays and the woman sings a love song *Amarilli* to herself in Italian.

3. We begin a journey sequence along the sea cliffs of the woman's internal landscape. She reflects on her young friend, Eva, who took her own life during the pandemic earlier this year. She struggles with why this happened because she can get no information on the circumstances. She transforms Eva into a goddess.

4. The filmscape becomes a snow-covered forest. Glimpses can be seen of a little dog. The woman brings on her guitar and explores a question that she asked on social media "How do you feel about your body?".

5. The woman sings about the soul and the whole of a woman.

6. Rhythmic music in 5/8 provokes the woman to sing "I know that my body excites women, body excites men".

7. The filmscape features an Aegean bay. The woman speaks a visualisation, creating an analogy between her body and an island in the bay.

8. The woman mischievously suggests blowing up two balloons to make big breasts.

9. The woman enters the Cosmic Forest of her internal body. She is a woman or man, a bear or whale, a wolf or snake. She transforms the chaos of matter into form by making a three-dimensional installation reminiscent of a Jackson Pollock painting or Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Room*. The woman can be

whatever she wants to be. She is fully embodied and sings soaring vocal improvisations over lush harmonies.

Music scores by Seawolf/Dr Self to purchase:

Her Body: The Anatomy of a Woman

for marimba and string orchestra

<https://composersedition.com/susannah-self-her-body/>

Arie Nuove

for medium high or medium low voice and piano

<https://composersedition.com/susannah-self-arie-nuove/>

Analysis

a song cycle with monologues for mezzo soprano and piano with optional cello and string quartet

<https://composersedition.com/susannah-self-analysis/>

