

Songs of Descent Audience Guide

Songs of Descent is a monodrama for singer and sinfonietta ensemble that retells the myth of Persephone's descent as an allegory of psychological descent and queer experience. It is a surreal gothic tale about compassion and finding beauty in the ugliest and darkest of contexts. This guide contains the lyrics as well as short commentaries by the composer on each of the movements. Between most of the movements, you will hear recurring passages called Ritornellos which act as a kind of bookmark and narratively portray Persephone's obsessive intrusive thoughts.

I. PASSACAGLIA: the euphoria of being right where you belong

*I'm just so happy
I am right where I belong
It's no big deal, it's no big deal
No this won't fuck me up, no, I'll be fine*

*I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
I'm so happy, I'm so happy I could die
Right where I belong
Right where I belong
Right where I belong*

We first see Persephone in a state of denial and disassociation - repeating delusional mantras all the while crumbling inside and beginning her descent to the underworld.

II. THE LIPLESS ONE WHO CRIES TOO MUCH

*Lipless one: Why so ugly? Why so lonely?
Why so fucking ugly? Why so disgusting? Humiliating?*

Why

*Persephone: Lipless one aren't you tired
You've cried enough for a lifetime*

The first monster she comes across is the Lipless one. He was once a young boy so beautiful that his existence itself insulted the goddess Aphrodite. As a punishment she took his lips and threw him into the depths of the ocean, condemning him to live the rest of his life as a shark-like creature. He is uncomfortably self-pitying and itching to get out of his own body - a sad sight to behold.

III. VAMPYRE SONG

*Sexy Vampyre: I just wanna suck your, suck your, suck your blood out of your veins and feed
it into mine*

*The glamour of death and destruction fades, only life remains
I wanna have fun, have fun with your flesh your animal your trauma within
I wanna swallow you whole, no kindness at all*

*I want humiliation, degradation
Sadistic squealing, piggy screeching, scare you shitless
Fluids trickling down my flesh and into your florid flower chamber, blooming tenderly*

Tv Presenter: RED MEAT IS MOST INDULGENT WHEN IT'S FRESH

Sexy Vampyre: My pleasure, my shame. But they are one, but they are...

*Tv Presenter: ADD ON TOP A HEALTHY AMOUNT OF SIN AND GUILT FOR
BITTERNESS*

Sexy Vampyre: The sins of my flesh, I can't deny I can't de...

Tv Presenter: AND SOME VULNERABILITY FOR SPICE

Sexy Vampyre: This timeless stickiness

*Tv Presenter: LEAVE IT TO SIMMER FOR A MILLION YEARS, TO WALLOW AND
INFUSE WITH CENTURIES OF VIOLENCE AND FEAR*

IT'S DONE WHEN IT'S READY TO EXPLODE OF PENT UP ANGER

IT'S DONE WHEN PEOPLE DESIDE IT'S DISGUSTING

IT'S DONE WHEN TWITTER SAYS SO

*IT'S DONE WHEN AT LEAST 50% OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION HAS CANCELLED
IT*

*IT'S DONE WHEN IT'S FUCKED BY A CELEBRITY
IT'S DONE WHEN IT HAS BEEN TRAUMATISED TO THE POINT OF DISSOCIATION,
ACTS POORLY ONCE BECAUSE OF THIS AND PEOPLE THEN FEEL THE NEED TO
PERSECUTE AND PUNISH IT. IT'S LIKE A CONSTANT FUCKING WITCH TRIAL. SLAP
IT UNDER A GUILLOTINE, BEHEAD IT AND EAT IT.*

YOU MIGHT AS WELL

IT'S DONE

*Sexy Vampyre: This endless hunger This timeless hunger
This endless hunger*

*I just wanna lick your, lick your, lick your, lick no Suck your, suck your, suck your, suck no
Have fun, have fun, have fun
I just wanna f*

Persephone: Outside, better yet than inside

Warm blood bringing sense of time

Outside, better yet than inside

My love bringing sense of time¹

I think that the truly terrifying thing about vampires is that they remind us of our animalistic urges. How much can our existence in a society tame our lust for food and sex, and at what point do we need to stop pursuing pleasure? This vampyre has done it all but is still hungry for more. At the same time, a TV presenter gives us the recipe for perfect cancelling, both sides possibly taking it a little too far. Persephone sees how violence breeds violence, and that no individual is innately good or evil, but only a product of their environment. She realises that people should be held responsible for their actions but also that compassion and kindness are very healing to humanity as a whole.

IV. INTERMEZZO: looking upwards. A little bit. Maybe?

Even in the darkest of situations you can have moments of normality, mundanity and even a little bit of happiness. However, be especially wary of happiness when you don't feel it often because it can easily turn into mania.

V. RECITATIVO: vision of angels

Persephone: Burning bright with terrifying objectivity

Their marble mouths gnawing at my face

Pulling apart my past, nowhere to hide

Paranoia-inducing

¹ Part of the lyrics and vocal melody in this last section were composed by Phoebe Taylor.

*Good morning mister magpie
Bringing forth judgment like a cold phallus, too big for my gut
Should I repent for my sodomy, my impulse
Should I live apologetically*

These angels are akin to the ones found in Rainer Maria Rilke's poems; absolute, perfect, terrifying. They represent Persephone's struggle with getting to grips with cold 'objective' reality and the idea of fair judgment. Sometimes trying to find what is 'true' over what you have perceived or experienced can seem like the most impossible and terrifying task and can lead to relentless obsession and paranoia.

VI. THE MOURNING FIELDS

*Ghosts: This is an AA meeting for ghosts with unrequited love
We all wasted our lives loving someone who doesn't love us back
Cursed with endless longing and melancholia
Our memory's sweetness is also its pain
And this is why we don't like honey*

*Clinging to the saturation of our memories
Holding on to every single one
With our wispy tiny fingers
And our feeble grip
We can't soothe our throats with warm honey*

*Persephone: Outside, better yet than inside
My love bringing sense of time*

Next, she stumbles across the Mourning Fields; a special place in Hades reserved for those who have died of unrequited love. These ghosts have group meetings where they share their eternal pain and longing, hoping that the solidarity will ease their suffering.

VII. PERSEPHONE

*Persephone: Is it better to die with unrequited love or to go from pain and dysphoria
Because you're terrible and you think you have done something bad
No melancholy, no longing, just dreadfully sad
This feeling is thankless and distorts your sense of memory
How nice would it be if my memories had clarity*

*I'm tired and need some serenity
Maybe I'll find it, somehow, if I kill myself
Would it be rope or water or something else?
Is endless longing better than endless shame and guilt
Is endless longing better than endless shame and guilt
Is endless longing better than endless shame and guilt
Is endless longing better than endless shame and guilt
Is endless longing better than endless shame and guilt*

*Burning bright
Burning bright with terrifying objectivity
Burning bright with terrifying objectivity
Their marble mouths gnawing at my face
Burning bright with terrifying objectivity
Their marble mouths gnawing at my face
Pulling apart my past, nowhere to hide
Burning bright with terrifying objectivity
Their marble mouths gnawing at my face
Pulling apart my past, nowhere to hide
Paranoia inducing
Good morning mister magpie
Bringing forth judgement like a cold phallus, too big for my gut*

*Should I repent for my sodomy, my impulse
Should I live apologetically
No I shouldn't*

After seeing how the feelings of the ghosts she just met were frozen in time, Persephone imagines her own death and feels petrified at the idea that her feelings will also last forever. This provokes thoughts of suicide and a ritualistic self-flagellation, manically examining her memory of the angels and the judgement they would bring to her.

VIII. PASSACAGLIA: little ghost

*Persephone: Little ghost don't be afraid
You're a little girl from a little world more sensitive than most
Eyes of hawk, teeth of wolf, brains of owl did you have in your world?
Poor thing - now you do*

*Little ghost don't be afraid
You will find yourself and you will do magic
Just as you wanted to as a child, when you fell and broke your head
And everywhere you bled, white blood*

And your father asked you: 'Honestly, in your past life were you a devil? In your past life were you a devil? '

At this lowest point, Persephone manages to see a vision of her child-self as a little ghost, similar to one of the other tragic monsters she met and very kindly offered compassion to. She sees her imperfections, her trauma and her vulnerability and manages to give a warm hug to this wounded little ghost, therefore starting the first steps towards ascent.