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PERSEPHONE

A Musical Allegory for the Stage

By David Hoffman

*In Concert Performance
July 21, 2010*

*The Great Room
The Alliance of Resident Theaters
South Oxford Space*

This particular story was so important to all of those ancient Greek and Roman dumbbells of whom Ms. Wafers was so dismissive, that they made it the centerpiece, the very gospel, of their most important religious ceremonies – the Mysteries of Demeter at Eleusis – which were held outside of Athens for at least 2,000 years. The initiates at these ceremonies, who included every important classical philosopher, artist, and playwright, and every Roman Emperor until the rise of Christianity, were taught this story, and used it to guide them to a secret truth that they thought to be crucial to their successful entry into the afterlife. What, exactly, this secret was has remained secret (a fact that, itself, is remarkable considering the prolific literary output of those 2,000 years of initiates), but there are layers of importance, and of metaphor in the story that we can find without too much digging.

One comes when we analyze Persephone's motivations: why does she eat the damned pomegranate (literally, the pomegranate of the damned) in the first place? All the retellings of this story suggest that it is that conscious decision, not her initial abduction, that ties her forever to the world of the dead. She chooses to be there, for at least part of the year – to be the wife of this awful god who has abducted her. His approach was god-awful, for sure, but he is the second most powerful person in the universe, and he sees her not as a little girl but as his queen. Heady stuff for a confused teenager, and an offer that, in my mind, she eventually accepts consciously and willingly.

A second comes in the part of the story that is most often left out of third-grade retellings: that Demeter has adventures among the humans during her despair over her lost daughter, and ends up teaching them agriculture. Before the cycle of the seasons began we lived in an Eden of perpetual summer. Until there was a winter – a time when we would die if unprepared – there was no need for us to grow to the point of self-sufficiency any more than there was for Persephone to do so before she was abducted from her responsibility-free life in her mother's house. This gift of agriculture allowed the birth of civilization, and is a direct result of cycle of the seasons that Persephone's abduction causes to begin.

Persephone is herself the seed that descends into the ground and rises again, ready to blossom, and also the ground, that receives the seed and bears fruit. And thus do we feed ourselves, and have the wherewithal to take control of our environment; thus do we all move forward.

At this time of economic upheaval and cultural divisiveness, there is no more important story than this. Both of the main storylines – Persephone's growth into womanhood and humanity's growth into civilization – offer hope and guidance for life during troubled times. Persephone learns that she has the strength to chart her own course and make her own decisions. She learns that she is every bit as strong as her loving but dominating mother, her cold and distant father, and her crude and awkward lover. The human race learns that the great cycles of the world – warm and cold, light and dark, birth and death, boom and bust – are not insurmountable obstacles, but rather natural parts of existence, and necessary for moving forward to greater things. That which is stagnant cannot grow.

Author's Note

*Some stories are magical, meant to be sung
Songs from the mouth of the river when the world was young
– Paul Simon, “Spirit Voices”*

I first heard the story of Persephone and her descent into the Underworld the way most of us probably did – in a mythology unit in the second or third grade. In my case, it was presented by a particularly rusty cog in the under-oil wheel of the Cobb County, Georgia public school system as an example of the stupidity of our forebears: “Back in ancient times, children, people made up silly stories to explain things they didn’t understand, so they wouldn’t be afraid of them.” She then went on to tell about how those poor, ignorant, ancient Greeks didn’t understand why the world got cold in the winter, so they made up a story about a girl being abducted by the King of the Underworld who was forced to eat some fruit, and therefore could only come back up for part of the year. This made her mother sad, so she created winter during the time her daughter was away. “Isn’t that silly? We know now that that’s not why there’s winter. Winter happens because of *science*. Now, who wants Nilla Wafers and apple juice?”

I was not intellectually prepared, at the time, to press this educational paragon for either her own knowledge of General Relativity (which I suspect may not have been quite up to explaining the gravitational imperative behind the shifting of the earth’s tilt in relation to the sun over the course of its orbit) or for an explanation of how, if people like Aristotle, Plato, and Pythagoras were so damned dumb we ever came up with science in the first place, and so I was forced to toddle off to recess with a vague feeling that I wasn’t getting the whole story.

The truth is, of course, that this seemingly simple little fable wasn’t an attempt to explain literal history, or literal science, any more than the Book of Genesis is (though this, of course was a parallel Ms. Nilla Wafers certainly wasn’t going to draw for us pre-pubescent scions of the Bible Belt, if she had any interest in continuing to listlessly cram the three R’s into our little skulls at public expense). So what is it for? Some variation of this astonishingly old story can be found as far back as we have any records of human thought. Why has it survived to be told today?

It is for, of course, what all mythology, and for that matter, all poetry, all songs, all theater, all literature, all religion, all art is for: to teach us something about the world we live in, and about ourselves, that can only be properly understood at the level of metaphor. The universe is enormous, and “The Truth” is possibly even bigger. There are ways of understanding fundamental aspects of that truth that simply cannot be put effectively into sensible, logical arguments, just as there are mathematical truths that cannot be properly expressed in letters and words. Fairy tales, just like music, poetry, and painting, have always existed because they speak truths to us that we cannot express, or understand, rationally.

Demeter
Persephone
Hades
Celeus, Thanatos, Poseidon
Aphrodite
Zeus
Hypnos, a Man, Apollo
Harmonia, an Old Woman, Demo
Metaneira, Eunomia, Callithoe
Hecate
Narrator

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Piano
Flute, Percussion
Guitar
Bass Guitar
Vibraphone, Timpani, Percussion
Percussion
Drum Set
First Violin
Second Violin
Viola
Cello

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Executive Producer
Associate Producer
Associate Producer
Associate Producer

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Stage Manager
Videographer
Audio Engineer
Photography
Graphic Design

Alison Rose Munn
Miriam Pultro
Andrew Overcash
Michael Coco
Katie Iacona
David M. Kirby
Roy Richardson
Rebecca Kopec
Mariah Ciangiola
Vlada Tomova
Thomas C. Lucas

Benjamin M. Rauhala
Sophia Saunders-Jones
David Acker
Dimitri Moderbacher
Jason O’Brien
Andy Blanco
Anthony Taddeo
Emily Holden
Brooke Quiggins Saulnier
Nora Krohn
Maria Bella Jeffers

Kiryn Haslinger Hoffman
Daniel White
Will Thaxton
Maria Bella Jeffers

Ruth Gersh
Horst Dieter Baum
Jonathan Plummer
Chris Davis Cina
Justine Seligman

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About the Company

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David Hoffman (*Composer and Author*) wrote music and lyrics for the theater pieces *Juliet and Romeo: The Fatal Tour* (Excerpt performance, the Folger Shakespeare Theater, Washington, DC) and *Patent Pending* (Workshop Performance, Silver Spring Stage, Silver Spring, MD); music for the films *Little White Boy* (Audience Award, Dahlenega (GA) International Film Festival) and *Dream House*; and released three full length albums: *The Runway* (2002); *The Rise and Fall* (2003), and *Smash Hit* (2005); and two EPs: *Clarity* (2001) and *Six More Songs About Women* (2007) as a solo artist. He graduated, with honors, from the Berklee College of Music in 2002. He is also an accomplished painter, with pieces hanging in galleries and private collections throughout the Northeast. www.workbydavidhoffman.com

Alison Rose Munn (*Demeter*) is thrilled to be a part of this exciting work! Favorite regional credits include *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (Christine Colegate), *Seussical* (Mayzie), *Oliver!* (Nancy), *Blood Brothers* (Mrs. Johnston), *Hello, Dolly!* (Mrs. Malloy), the soprano soloist in Handel's *Messiah*, and the National Tour of *The Taffetas* (Peggy). She is a graduate of NYU. Love to my ever-supportive family and roommates. www.alisonrosemunn.com

Miriam Pultro (*Persephone*) is a native of Philadelphia, PA, where she grew up performing in musical theatre. Favorite roles include Mimi in *Rent*, Squeaky in *Assassins*, and Belle in *Disney's Beauty and the Beast*. Currently she is signed to Manhattan Records with the group Bellaria, with their debut album and concert DVD set for release later this year. Film work includes lead roles in *Browncoats: Redemption* and *Laundromat*. www.miriampultro.com

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Andrew Overcash (*Hades*) recently appeared as Fritz Kuhn in the world premiere of *The American Way: The Musical*. Other regional works include: Jamie Wellerstein in *The Last Five Years* (The Apollo Theatre), Jesus in *Godspell* (Lion's Hart Theatre Company), and Frederic in *The Pirates of Penzance* (Meyers Jacobs Theatre). He is trilled to be a part of *Persephone* and is honored to be working with such an awesome cast and crew. Enjoy.

Michael Coco (*Celeus, Thanatos, Poseidon*) is celebrating 10 years in New York City with this performance in *Persephone*. He is happy to be back on stage after many years on the other side of the footlights.

Brooke Quiggins Saulnier (*Second Violin*), born in Nashville, TN, began her violin studies at age five. She has performed in recitals and concerts throughout the United States and Europe and has won top honors in numerous solo and chamber music competitions, including the National Association of Music Teachers National Competition, the Lillian Fuchs Chamber Music Competition, and the Bergen Orchestra International Concerto Competition, to name a few. Brooke has performed in many venues, such as Carnegie Hall, Avery Fisher Hall, Madison Square Garden, Alice Tully Hall, and Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola (Jazz at Lincoln Theater). In 2004, she received high acclaim for her playing as the solo violinist in the Broadway show *Vivace!* at the New Victory Theater. Brooke received her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from the Manhattan School of Music under the direction of Sylvia Rosenberg and Lucie Robert. She currently holds Principal Second Violin positions with the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas and the Ridgefield Symphony Orchestra, as well as an Associate Principal Second Violin position with the Miami Symphony Orchestra. As well as her orchestral positions, Brooke is also a member of the string quartet Osso, a group that spans the gap between classical music and indie rock. Brooke currently resides in New York City with her husband.

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Nora Krohn (*Viola*), a native of Baltimore, Maryland, graduated magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Brown University, where she earned a Bachelor's degree in Music and Hispanic Studies. She received her Masters degree in Viola Performance from SUNY Purchase College, where she studied with Ira Weller, founding member of the Mendelssohn String Quartet. Summer festivals include Eastern Music Festival, the Pierre Monteux School, the Meadowmount School, and the Manchester Music Festival. A busy freelancer in New York City and the metro area, Nora also works part time at Tarisio Auctions, where she manages an inventory of over 1,000 instruments and bows.

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Maria Bella Jeffers (*Cello, Associate Producer*) has been living and performing in New York City since 2001. She has undergraduate degrees from the University of North Texas and a graduate degree from the Manhattan School of Music. As well as performing the traditional role of a cellist Maria has become a part of the indie rock community. She can be heard with My Brightest Diamond, The National, DM Stith, the Polyphonic Spree, DeVotchKa, Meatloaf, Sufjan Stevens, and on *Paste Magazine's* record of the decade, Sufjan Stevens' *Illinois*. Maria is the cellist and founder of the string quartet Osso, which is on the Asthmatic Kitty label.

Jason O'Brien (*Vibraphone, Timpani, Percussion*) is a freelance percussionist and composer living in New York City. He is an adjunct professor at Monmouth University and Passaic County Community College. In 2004 he won The College of New Jersey Orchestra's concerto competition, and subsequently performed with them as a soloist. He has studied with Bill Trigg and Greg Giannascoli, and graduated with a Masters of Music in 2006 from New Jersey City University.

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Andy Blanco (*Percussion*) enjoys a diverse career performing in concert halls, theaters, and studios in New York and around the world. Andy was most recently heard as the percussionist with the First National Tour of *Oprah Winfrey Presents The Color Purple*. On Broadway, Andy has performed with *Disney's The Lion King*, *Disney's Tarzan*, and *Oprah Winfrey Presents The Color Purple*. As an orchestral musician, Andy has performed with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, the Detroit Symphony, the Philharmonic Orchestra of the Americas, the Albany Symphony, the Chattanooga Symphony, and the Huntsville Symphony. As a chamber musician, Andy was a founding member of the Elektra Chamber Players and has collaborated with the percussionists of the New York Philharmonic.

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Anthony Taddeo (*Drum Set, Percussion*) is currently a senior at The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in New York City. He will be graduating in December with a BFA in music performance. He is very knowledgeable in many different styles of music including Jazz, Rock, World/Latin, Funk, and Pop. Anthony has performed extensively as a freelance drummer in the United States and Europe. One of his most recent achievements is playing at the Bern Jazz Festival in Switzerland. After graduating he plans on remaining in New York to further his career as a jazz musician and educator.

Emily Holden (*First Violin*) recently returned to New York after touring Germany as the solo violinist with the Franco Dragone show INDIA. She has performed throughout Pakistan as part of a string quartet promoting cultural diplomacy, and regularly travels to Sierra Leone as a representative of the non-profit organization Arts Education International. Emily performs regularly with several Brooklyn bands, processing and looping her violin sound through her laptop using the software Abelton Live and a MIDI foot controller. Emily received her Bachelor of Music from the University of Colorado, Boulder. She now lives in Brooklyn, NY, where she is an active improviser, freelancer, and teacher.

Katie Iacona (*Aphrodite*) has a B.A. from Fordham University's Theatre Program and has studied vocal music since the age of six. Her recent credits include: Off-Off Broadway: *Kris Kringle The Musical* (Evelyn Clause), *Celluloid* (Angel), *The King in Exile* (The Wife), *Drawbridge* (Alexis del Monte); Film: *A Walk in the Park* (Kate), *O.B.I.* (News Reporter), *The Slumberland* (Cecilia); Television: *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (Season 5, Ep. 9). Katie can be seen in this summer's Fringe Festival as Sofia in the play *How Alfo Learned to Love Women*. Katie is very excited to be a part of this amazing cast and for the opportunity to sing David's beautiful music. Special thanks to David, Kiryn, and Ruth for all their help!

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Roy Richardson (*Hypnos, A Man*) is a recent graduate from NYU Steinhardt School, where he was seen in productions of *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (Valentine) and *Candide* (Lion/Baron). Regionally Roy has performed at Triart's *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (Marcus Lycus) and at the York Theatre *Lotta's Foutain* (Enrico Caruso). Roy is proud to be a part of this new work and would like to thank his friends and family for their support.

Rebecca Kopec (*Harmonia, an Old Woman, Demo*) was most recently seen on stage in the award-winning production of *Ampersand: A Romeo and Juliet Story* at The Looking Glass Theatre, but has been seen on various New York stages as everything from a semi-gothed-out cannibal, to an adorable pregnant turtle (also at Looking Glass Theatre where she won the award for Best Actress), to a blues singer dying from Swine Flu. Some favorite roles in the past include Little Red Riding Hood in *Into the Woods*, Lenny in *Crimes of the Heart*, and the Fish Witch in *The Little Mermaid*. She has also completed the independent feature film *The Best Laid Plans*, which is currently listed as in post-production on IMDB and hopes it comes out any day now because it's pretty darn funny. Rebecca plans on continuing performing in all mediums and is excited about life and all its possibilities!

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David M. Kirby (*Zeus*) is a versatile actor, singer, and director who recently returned to New York City to pursue his dream of performing full-time. He is a graduate of the Atlantic Theater Company Acting School. David's favorite prior roles are as diverse as Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, Schroeder in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, and Sheriff Hartwell in *The Front Page*. He also enjoys concert work and is an occasional soloist with the Choral Society of Durham (NC).

Mariah Ciangiola (*Metaneira, Eunomia, Callithoe*) is excited to be a part of this original and collaborative work with David and company. Her recent adventures have been touring with American Family Theatre performing the roles Beauty in *Beauty in The Beast* and Mary in *Babes in Toyland*. Before that she toured with a choral group Cornerstone Choral directed by Bruce Vantine. She is a recent graduate from Ithaca College where she received her BFA in musical theatre.

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Vlada Tomova (*Hecate*) is Bulgarian/Russian-born vocalist, composer, and puppeteer, based in New York City. Vlada leads a world music ensemble, Balkan Tales; she founded and led Yasna Voices, New York's first Bulgarian Women's Choir; and is a member of female vocal quartet Lila. Her work with the group Balkan Beat Box continues to receive international acclaim. Her voice is featured on National Geographic's touring exhibit King Tut, and was heard in the sound installation Echoes from the Mountains at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Italy. Vlada is a guest vocalist in demand in the world music and theatre communities, and collaborates on a variety of interdisciplinary projects. As a puppeteer, Vlada has worked on Erin Orr's & Rima Fand's adaptation of Lorca puppet plays, *Don Cristobal*, and is a decade-long member of the Boston-based Luna Theater. Vlada's recent appearances include Carnegie's Zankel Hall in New York, the Montreal International Jazz Festival, Chicago World Music Festival, New York Summer Stage, and the Second Annual New York Gypsy Festival.

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Thomas C. Lucas (*Narrator*) is very excited to be a part of *Persephone*. He recently moved to NYC from Chicago and is thrilled to call New York City his new home. Some of his favorite credits include Dave in *The Full Monty*, Stanley in *Run For Your Wife*, and Mr. Fag in *The Rivals*. Enjoy the show!

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Benjamin M. Rauhala (*Piano*) coaches performers currently appearing in Broadway's *A Little Night Music*, *American Idiot*, *Jersey Boys*, *Rock of Ages*, and *Wicked*. A graduate of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, he is currently pursuing his Master's degree in Orchestral Conducting at the University of Central Florida. Previous credits include music direction at the Laurie Beechman Theater, the Producer's Club, the New Repertory Theatre (Watertown, MA), Emerson College, UCF, and UMass Amherst.

Sophia Saunders-Jones (*Flute*) graduated from New York University with a Bachelor of Music in 2007. Sophia has studied flute with Keith Underwood, Kathleen Nester, Wendy Stern, and Chris Krueger. Sophia now studies privately with Keith Underwood and plays in various orchestras and ensembles throughout the city including the Greenwich Village Orchestra, the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony, the Brooklyn Repertory Opera, and Kidz Theater.

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David Acker (*Guitar*) has had extensive experience as a musical performer and educator over the course of his thirty-year career. He has performed with Charles Earland, Jack McDuff, Bernard Purdie, Grady Tate, Glenn Moore, Marty Ehrlich, Ron McLure, Will Lee, Nat Adderly, Jr., Patti Austin, Richard Bona, Gil Goldstien, Andy LaVerne, Peggy Stern, Steve LaSpina, Mike Clark, Jeff Andrews, Jerome Harris, Stu Woods, Paul Bollenbeck, and many others. In 2006 David toured Ecuador, Honduras, Cuba, the Bahamas, and Puerto Rico for the State Department. In 2007 he played at the Port a Prince Jazz Festival in Haiti with his group The Handmade Quartet. David holds a masters degree in classical guitar performance from the Mannes College of Music in New York City and has studied with Charles Banacos, Frederic Hand, and John Scofield. He has taught at Bennington College, Hunter College, City University, and Concordia College. David currently teaches private students at the Dwight School in New York. He has recorded three albums as a leader: *Angles in Time and Space*, *Echoes and Images*, and *Handmade*. He recorded demonstrations for the guitar maker Ken Parker of his newest instrument, which can be heard at www.KenParkerArchtopGuitars.com.

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Dimitri Moderbacher (*Bass Guitar*) studied music at California State University Northridge and completed his Bachelor of Music in Jazz Performance at William Paterson University in 1996. Since moving to New York City in 1998, Dimitri has performed at clubs and venues such as The Blue Note, The Jazz Standard, The Knitting Factory, S.O.B.'s, Symphony Space, Central Park SummerStage, and Gillespie Auditorium at the Bahai Center; as well as at The Atlanta Jazz Festival, The St. Lucia Jazz Festival, The World Creole Music Festival, and on The Late Show with David Letterman; performing with a diverse list of artists that includes Aretha Franklin, Tabou Combo, Todd Rundgren, Christopher Cross, Lou Gramm, Norah Jones, Findlay Brown, Bo Bice, Jerry Lewis, The Jamie Begian Big Band, Angela Ortiz, Pyeng Threadgill, and Max Pollak & RumbaTap. Dimitri's debut CD, *Close to My Heart*, featuring Sandra Hempel, Phil Palombi, and Jason Wildman, was recorded live at SoHo's Kavehaz in February 2002. www.dimitrimoderbacher.com

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