

Lyrics for Euripides' *HELEN* (2017)

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adapted to music by Jeri Fogel

SONG 1: Down By the Indigo Waters

HELEN:

Virgin daughters of the Earth,
Sirens, spread your wings
come join me, with African flutes,
your flutes of lotus wood,
bring the syrinx:
and harmonize
with my tears, my sorrow, my pain!
Tune your song to my lament
and we'll send our melody downward:
A paian drenched in tears
and ringing with bloodshed
for Persephone there in the halls of night
and all the pale exhausted dead.

CHORUS:

There beside the indigo waters,
There beside the indigo waters,
I had spread the crimson robes
to dry on the bank beside the green tendrils,
on a bed of reeds
in the golden rays of the sun.
Then I heard an anguished wail
like a Naiad, cornered and desperate:
A tune no strings will play
a nymph in the mountains
who is shrieking in pain from the crags that Pan
is making her his bride by force.

HELEN:

Who was the man,
Trojan or Greek,

CHORUS:

There beside the indigo waters,
There beside the indigo waters,

whose axe felled the pine?
The wood let loose a tide
of tears
when Alexandros shaped it
and sailed his foreign ship
to my hearth
to my home

A tune no strings will play

Beside the streams of Simoïs,
my name is dragged down
by the lies,
the lies people tell.

I had spread the crimson robes
to dry on the bank beside the
green tendrils
on a bed of reeds

in the golden rays of the sun
Then I heard an anguished wail
like a Naiad, cornered and desperate:
A tune no strings will play
and ringing with bloodshed
for Persephone there
in the halls of night
and all the pale exhausted
dead.

SONG 2: Ask Theonoë!

CHORUS:

Ask Theonoë: ask her if your husband
is still alive, or if he's left the daylight.
Rejoice or weep, depending on your fortune.
Before you know things rightly, what's the point
of lamentation? Please let me persuade you.
I'll go inside with you; we'll go together
to hear the words of the prophetic virgin.
Women should stick together, help each other.

HELEN:

My friends, I'll take your good advice.
Go inside, inside the house,
and there you will find out
what struggles lie in store for me.

CHORUS:

There's no need to ask me twice.

HELEN:

What tearful tale,
what words of sorrow will I hear?

CHORUS:

Don't be an oracle of woe.
Why weep ahead of time, my friend?

HELEN:

My miserable husband: What has he endured?
Does he gave upon the daylight,
does he see the four horses
of the sun's chariot? Does he see
the pathways of the stars?
Or does he dwell beneath the earth,
forever lost among the dead?

SONG 3: I've Heard the Word I Sought (The Waves of the Sea)

HELEN & CHORUS: I've heard the word I sought; the question that sent me into the palace has been answered. The prophetess says: "The waves of the sea wear him out day by day."

The waves of the sea; waves of the sea

Menelaus has not yet been covered by earth, or gone down to Erebus' radiant darkness. The waves of the sea wear him out day by day.

The waves of the sea; waves of the sea

He has not yet entered his fatherland's harbors; he leads a wanderer's life, poor man with no friends: The waves of the sea wear him out day by day.

(repeat)

SONG 4: Something Much Better (Duet)

HELEN: So many burning suns have risen and set, since the last time I threw my arms around you:

MENELAUS: So many things I want to say—I don't know where to start. A tear is rolling down my cheek.

BOTH: Back on our wedding day, beneath the torches, on their white horses, my/your brothers blessed us, blessed us, blessed us then! Now, the god's hand steers our fortune to something much better.

MENELAUS: So many burning suns have set and have risen, the gods have not been idle;

HELEN: So many long years—It took a long time but now, an unlucky stroke of good luck!

BOTH: Back on our wedding day, beneath the torches, on their white horses, my/your brothers blessed us, blessed us, blessed us then! Now, the god's hand steers our fortune to something much better—You're in my arms! You're in my arms! Now, the god's hand steers our fortune to something much better—something much better.

SONG 5: Nightingale

CHORUS + HELEN

Amid the trees' deep tresses you trill your songs;
I call to you now, in your green concert hall,
bird of sorrow,
O nightingale, loveliest singer,
bard of lonely tears:
come take your place here by my side;
as the melody melts in your golden throat,
sing with me—we will both lament
the struggles and woes
of Helen, and the tearful fate of Troy's women
when their city fell beneath Achaean spears:
barbarian oar
rushing gray waves,
brought woe to the sons of Priam—
Helen, Paris —
escorted by Aphrodite.

CHORUS + MENELAUS

So many Greeks were killed, in a rain of spears
and boulders thrown through air; their souls sank
down to Hades.
Their wives, alone in their bedrooms,

cut their hair in grief.
So many Greeks gave up their lives
off shore from Euboea, tricked by
false beacons set by a lone Greek boat:
a fraudulent star
that dashed them on the rocks and
smashed their ships to fragments on Aegean crags:
barbarian shores,
harborless landfalls,
far from my home: storm-winds;
Menelaus, - poison,
a phantom contrived by Hera.

3. (spoken)

*What is and isn't god, and what's in-between—
what mortal can say? Human inquiry
reaches its limit as soon as it finds
the ways of the gods cannot be predicted:
they jump around crazily,
constantly changing their course,
bringing fortunes nobody has foreseen.*

*All you who strive for excellence, fighting wars
with valorous spears, have you lost your minds?
Seeking release from your struggles in death!
If all things are settled by bloodshed and battles
then trouble will never
be gone from the cities of men.*

SONG 6: Mountain Mother (Stolen Maiden)

The gods' Mountain Mother, once upon a time,
raced through woodlands and glades,
waded the streams of rivers;
traversed the resonant salt sea waves
in longing for her daughter,
whose name may not be spoken.

The cymbals crashed, and the air rang with a shrill vibration!
When she had yoked wild beasts to her carriage
and rode out to uncover the theft of her daughter,
who was snatched from the chorus of maidens,

rushing right after her came the two goddesses, whirlwinds:
Artemis with her arrows,
Athena, Fierce-Eyed with her spear.

Exhausted, the Mother, who'd wandered for so long,
called a halt to her chase,
gave up the chase and lay down
on Ida's palisades swathed in snow—
where nymphs keep watch;
in sorrow, amid the rocks and snowdrifts,
she flung herself in a thicket, helpless
in the face of the underhanded theft of her daughter.

From the fields she withdrew the rich harvest;
from the flocks she withheld the leaves and green tendrils.
People were perishing, cities were withering, the altars were empty:
No batter cakes, no thighbones were laid on the flames for the gods.

Zeus tried to soothe the hateful rage of the Mother;
he spoke to the Graces and Muses:
Go, relieve the grieving Goddess of her anger
over her stolen maiden by wailing in your wildest voice,
by singing as you dance!

The gods' Mountain Mother, once upon a time,
raced through woodlands and glades,
waded the streams of rivers;
traversed the resonant salt sea waves
in longing for her daughter,
whose name may not be spoken.

The cymbals crashed, and the air rang...

SONG 7: O Sailors, Sailors! (Send Helen Home)

Oh, sail away! Oh, sail away!
O sailors, sailors! O sailors, sailors!

Swift Phoenician ship, O craft of Sidon,
the waves of Nereus rush to embrace you!
Leader of dances, and the circling dolphins respond to your song
in lovely array
When the wind has died down,

and the lovely Galaneia, the pale-eyed daughter of Pontus speaks these words:

Let your sails hang down: there is no more breeze.
Take the oars up in your hands:
Sailors! Sailors! O Sailors, sailors! Send Helen home!
Send Helen home to reach the pleasant harbor,
the shores she left long ago,
the city that Perseus founded.

Oh, sail away! Oh, sail away!
O sailors, sailors! O sailors, sailors!

There beside the waters of the river (Eurotas),
or by the temple of Pallas at long last festival dances
and Leucippus' daughters will welcome her home
perhaps at revels
that gladden the night,
for Hyacinthus, whom Phoebus once when the discus left his hand
killed: the son of Zeus
decreed a feast-day:
Sailors! Sailors! O Sailors, sailors! Send Helen home!
Send Helen home to reach the pleasant harbor,
there Helen will find her child, there Helen will find her child.

Oh, sail away! Oh, sail away!
O sailors, sailors! O sailors, sailors!

If I had wings I would go flying through the
aether where Libyan birds soar high above in formation,
keeping time with the syrinx song
of their leader who guides them beyond the wintery storms,
long-necked flyers, cranes, companions of racing clouds:
Set your course by the Pleiades,
fly straight,
fly through night, past Orion:
Send Helen home! Send Helen home—
Touch down at Sparta, tell them the news:
Menelaus destroyed the towers, he's coming home!

Oh, sail away! Oh, sail away!
O sailors, sailors! O sailors, sailors!

Sons of Tyndareos, twins who dwell beneath

the brilliance of whirling stars in the sky:
come leap through the aether, on your steeds,
come and be the savior of Helen,
ride over the pale salt waves of the sea,
over the pale salt waves of the sea –
oh bring gentle winds, come rescue your sister now—
Set your course by the Pleiades,
fly straight,
fly through night, past Orion:
Send Helen home! Send Helen home—
Touch down at Sparta, tell them the news:
Menelaus destroyed the towers, he's coming home!

Oh, sail away! Oh, sail away!
O sailors, sailors! O sailors, sailors!
Send Helen home! Send Helen home!

SONG 8: The Gods Find a Way

The designs of the deities take many forms;
they often accomplish what no one would hope for.
What we expect may not happen at all,
while the gods find a way, against all expectation,
to do what they want, however surprising.
The gods find a way to do what they want.