



ABC
Classics
476 1927

Medea

A CHAMBER OPERA BY
GORDON KERRY AND
JUSTIN MACDONNELL



ABC
Classics

CHAMBER MADE OPERA
MERLYN QUAIFE • ANGELA GIBLIN
MICHAEL C. SMITH • DAVID LEMKE
MARK SUMMERBELL CONDUCTOR

Medea



A chamber opera in five scenes

Music by Gordon Kerry b. 1961

Libretto by Justin Macdonnell b. 1946 after Lucius Annaeus Seneca c. 4 BC–65 AD

Medea

Nurse / Chorus

Jason / Chorus

Creon / Chorus

Merlyn Quaife *soprano*

Angela Giblin *mezzo-soprano*

Michael C. Smith *tenor*

David Lemke *baritone*

Ensemble

Elizabeth Barcan *flutes*

Denise Papaluca *piano, keyboard*

Peter Neville *percussion*

Rosanne Hunt *cello*

Chamber Made Opera

Mark Summerbell *conductor*

Scene 1

1	The gods of wedlock are the gods of death <i>Medea, Chorus</i>	8'06
2	Be cunning, lady <i>Nurse, Medea</i>	2'01
3	But see now, Creon comes <i>Nurse, Creon, Medea</i>	2'09
4	You go, alone <i>Creon, Medea</i>	4'05
5	I am no tyrant <i>Creon, Medea</i>	4'38

Scene 2

6	If you seek, poor little heart <i>Medea, Nurse, Chorus</i>	1'55
7	Candida nostri saecula patres <i>Chorus, Medea</i>	3'49

Scene 3

8	Fate is hard <i>Jason</i>	3'35
9	The dreaming sea <i>Medea</i>	3'22

10	When Creon would have killed you <i>Jason, Medea</i>	8'08
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11	I have a robe, a gift of heaven <i>Medea</i>	2'40
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Scene 4

12	Nulla vis flammae tumidive venti <i>Chorus</i>	3'51
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13	Tu nunc vestes tinge Creusae <i>Medea</i>	2'12
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14	O horror! Disaster comes <i>Nurse, Medea</i>	2'42
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Scene 5

15	It is done. Father and daughter lie in the ruins of their house <i>Nurse, Chorus</i>	1'13
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16	Go now, Medea, while you still have time <i>Nurse, Medea</i>	5'17
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17	Assist me, citizens, to avenge your princes' death <i>Jason, Medea, Nurse</i>	3'58
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18	Per alta vade spatia sublimi aethere <i>Chorus, Jason</i>	3'41
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Total Playing Time 67'31

Before commencing a distinguished career in arts administration, my friend and colleague Justin Macdonnell had studied Classics. Some years ago, he suggested to me that the *Medea* of Seneca would, in his view, form a good basis for a piece of music theatre. I thought the idea fascinating, and it seemed like only a few days later that a draft libretto arrived on my desk in which Justin had distilled the essence of Seneca's tragedy – retaining some of Seneca's best poetry – into a lean, evocative and singable text. I sketched settings of some of the text (*Medea's* aria 'The dreaming sea' in Scene 3 is thus the earliest part of the score), on the basis of which Chamber Made Opera and ABC Classic FM commissioned the work in its entirety. This recording was made during the first season in Melbourne in 1993. Douglas Horton's production for Chamber Made has subsequently been seen in Sydney, Canberra and Washington's Kennedy Center conducted by Mark Summerbell; in 1995 it received a new production by the Berliner Kammeroper who presented it in subsequent seasons in Berlin and Düsseldorf conducted by Scott Curry. Merlyn Quaife has sung the demanding title role in all performances.

The piece is written in such a way that the Nurse, Jason and Creon can, as trio, duo or solo, function as the Chorus. In Scene 1 the Chorus is the off-stage voices of the Corinthian people, but they can also comment on the drama – particularly expressing fear at *Medea's* increasing

hatred and power and the exhausted horror of the tragedy's end. The instrumental ensemble consists of flute (doubling alto and piccolo), piano/synthesiser, percussion and cello, with certain sounds associated with certain characters or ideas.

Medea is a woman who has betrayed her family in order to help the man she loves avoid certain death. She uses her powerful magic to help Jason win the fabled Golden Fleece, which is her father's most important possession in the kingdom of Colchis, and escapes with Jason and the Argonauts. She murders her young brother and scatters his remains, knowing that her father will have to stop and give the boy a proper burial, thus slowing his pursuit. The fugitive Jason and *Medea* arrive in Corinth where the king, Creon, offers Jason (and his and *Medea's* two young sons) protection from the pursuing armies if Jason will marry the Corinthian princess, Creusa. *Medea*, though, will be banished.

It is here that Euripides and Seneca begin their plays. But in Euripides' more familiar version, *Medea* is talked about before she appears on stage. In Seneca, by contrast, she is there right from the start: she has just heard that Jason and Creusa are to marry, and is determined to take revenge for this betrayal through her considerable magic powers. She is, in our version, already so angry she can barely speak. *Sprechstimme* replaces singing at first, except where the name

of Jason appears, and draws from her, almost unwillingly, a long and ornate vocal line. In a Verdi kind of way, her vocal line gains power and hysteria against the more formal rhythms of the chorus singing the wedding hymn (in Seneca's Latin) off-stage. Her nurse – a mezzo, naturally! – tries to calm and caution *Medea* (and here Latin represents the 'foreign' tongue of *Medea's* homeland), but to no avail. Creon, represented by a strutting bitonal march on synthesiser, appears to pronounce exile on this witch whom he fears, but foolishly allows her 'one more day to say goodbye'.

Medea's hatred continues to build, and her plans to mature, especially in her scene with Jason, who is, of course, a tenor and with whom she has a kind of anti-love duet. Jason's dilemma is that in order to save himself and his sons he must betray *Medea*, whom he still loves. His moral constriction is represented in a web of twelve-note patterns; his admission that he loves their sons gives *Medea* the idea for her final revenge. Creusa will die when she puts on a hexed robe, but Jason's punishment will be worse: 'Let him live.' Jason will have to live with the memories of seeing his bride burned alive, and his children murdered by their mother. So, when we finally hear from the chorus that the Princess and King have perished, Jason appears, exhorting a mob to kill 'this foreign witch'. *Medea* has already killed one child, with a prayer to the shade of her murdered brother that he might now

rest in peace; in front of Jason she kills the other and disappears, leaving him and the chorus singing 'that where *Medea* is, there is no god.'

Seneca was close to the centre of power in Nero's Rome. Being at one stage tutor to the young emperor, he had first-hand knowledge of how gratuitously destructive untrammelled power could be – indeed he himself was ultimately a victim of it. He was also a Stoic, and had a philosophical thesis to explore in this work, namely, what are the cause and effect of extremism? *Medea* is, after all, a woman and a foreigner, so has no legal rights to protect her from exile, or having her children taken from her, or seeing her husband marry another woman. His play is about the inexorable increase of energy in *Medea's* hatred: she herself boasts she 'will storm the gods and shake the universe,' and that – morally, if not literally – is precisely what she does. In our opera this process is enacted by the way in which her music goes from being inchoate and hysterical to becoming tonally stable, majestic and long-breathed – 'I have regained my royal state' in Scene 5 is in an unambiguous C major. She is, as Seneca takes pains to show us, a witch right from the start. But he also shows how she is pushed into a position in which her anger, rage and power feed on, and take an almost erotic delight in, themselves. Sadly, it's an all too familiar story.

Gordon Kerry

Gordon Kerry

Gordon Kerry's catalogue includes orchestral music commissioned by the ABC, BBC, Symphony Australia, Ars Musica Australis and the Australian Youth Orchestra; chamber music for Musica Viva Australia, as well as independent



ensembles in Australia, Britain, Germany, the USA, Sweden and Russia, and choral works for ensembles including Gondwana Voices, Sydney Philharmonia Choirs, the Prague Chamber Choir and the Royal Melbourne Philharmonic. Recent works include a completion of Mozart's Requiem commissioned by ABC Classic FM for the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth and string quartets for ensembles in the UK and the Netherlands.

Gordon Kerry studied composition with Barry Conyngham and has held fellowships from the Australia Council, Peggy Glanville-Hicks Trust and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. He lives on a hill in north-eastern Victoria.

For more information see www.gordonkerry.com

Justin Macdonnell

Justin Macdonnell is a graduate of Queensland and New South Wales Universities and has been employed in arts management for the last 40 years in Australia and abroad.

He has been variously General Manager of the State Opera of South Australia and Director of the National Opera of New Zealand, Program Director of the Sydney Festival and Executive Director of Confederation of Australian Professional Performing Arts. He has acted as consultant and provided management services to numerous and varied performing and visual arts organisations across Australia as well as for federal, state and local government.

From 1988 as Executive Director of the Australia-Latin America Foundation he developed an extensive network in Latin America for the promotion of cultural exchange between Australia and countries in that region.

He has contributed to journals throughout Australia and abroad and is the author of scores of studies and reports on the area of national and regional cultural policy. His book *Arts, Minister?* is regarded as a standard reference on arts funding history in Australia in the two decades 1967-87. His *Fifty Years in the Bush* – the official history of the Arts Council in New South Wales appeared in 1997. He is also a published poet.

He has been Artistic Director of the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts in Miami, USA since 2003.



Scene 1

Medea has just heard of her abandonment by Jason, who is about to contract a politically convenient marriage with the princess of Corinth. Medea hears the wedding hymn, in which the Chorus invokes various gods and compares the bride and groom to figures from myth and legend. Medea vows revenge. Her Nurse counsels discretion as the King, Creon, arrives to announce that Medea is banished from Corinth. After a plea from Medea, Creon allows her one day to say goodbye to her lover and children before being exiled.

MEDEA

1 The gods of wedlock are the gods of death. They taste the first blood, the blood of the nuptial bed, they drink the last blood, the blood of the winding sheet. They guide me to consign to hell the woman who usurps my bed.

Let Jason witness my revenge.

And let him live to wander in unknown cities, friendless and alone,
let him live to wander and long for me.

Let him know the sons I bore him, seeds of his dynasty,
planted within me, will be my wild justice.

Let Jason witness my revenge.

The Chorus is heard offstage.

Hear the wedding hymn for Jason and Creusa!
Can I believe he would betray me now?

I killed for Jason, stole the Golden Fleece,
I left my father, fled my homeland.
I slew the monster, slew my brother,
brought Jason safely home from Colchis.
Can I believe he would betray me now?

I blame the harsh tyrant Creon, who for reasons of state rends me,
the mere foreign woman, from her husband's side, the mother from her infants.
But he will pay a terrifying price: like the volcano I will pile with burning ash his evil house and wrap
with flame the towers of his royal pride. And all the world will know Medea's power!

CHORUS

Ad regum thalamos numine prospero
qui caelum superi quique regunt fretum
adsint cum populis rite faventibus.
Primum sceptriferis colla Tonantibus
taurus celsa ferat tergo candido;
Lucinam nivei femina corporis
intemptata iugo placet, et asperi
martis sanguineas quae cohibet manus,
quae dat belligeris foedera gentibus
et cornu retinet divite copiam,
donetur tenera mitior hostia.

Et tu qui facibus legitimus ades,
noctem discutiens auspice dextera
huc incede gradu marcidus ebrio,
praecingens roseo tempora vinculo.

Et tu quae, gemini praevia temporis,
tarde, stella, redis semper amantibus,
te matres, avide te cupiunt nurus
quamprimum radios spargere lucidos.

Vincit virgineus decor
longe Cecropias nurus,
et quas Taygeti iugis
exercet iuvenum modo
muris quod caret oppidum
Et quas Aonius latex
Alpheosque sacer lavat.

Si forma velit aspicere
cedent Aesonio duci
proles fulminis improbi
aptat qui iuga tigribus,
nec non, qui tripodas movet,

*May the high gods of heaven and the sea
attend the marriage of our princess
with gracious divinity amid the people's praise.
First let the shining white bull raise its throat
in offering to the sceptre-bearing thundergods;
let Lucina, goddess of childbirth, be appeased
by a snow-white heifer, untouched by the yoke,
and to the mild Goddess who restrains the bloody hands
of Mars, bringing peace to warring nations,
she who holds plenty in her rich horn,
let a tender victim be given.*

*And you, guardian of the torches of marriage,
dispelling the darkness of night,
come with drunken steps,
binding your head with roses.*

*And you, O star of evening, herald of the twilight,
whose arrival always seems so tardy to lovers:
mothers and brides eagerly await you
as you scatter your beams of light.*

*Our maiden's beauty excels
that of the brides of Athens;
she surpasses in beauty those
trained like men
in the unwall'd city of Sparta,
and those who bathe in the waters of Aonia
and the sacred stream of Alpheus.*

*If he wished his beauty to be judged,
all would yield to Aeson's son:
even the son of ruthless lightning
who yoked the tigers,
and the stern virgin's brother*

frater virginis asperae,
cedet Castore cum suo
Pollux caestibus aptior.

Sic, sic, caelicolae, precor,
vincat femina coniuges,
vir longe superet viros.

NURSE

2 Be cunning, lady. Confide your pain to silence or the ancient tongue.

MEDEA

The pain of little people may be swept into the corners of their mind.
My agony is vast and needs the universe for its expression.

NURSE

Siste furialem impetum alumna
Vix te tacita defendit quies.

MEDEA

Fortuna fortes metuit, ignavos premit.

NURSE

Tunc est probanda si locum virtus habet.

MEDEA

Numquam potest non esse virtuti locus.

NURSE

Spes nulla rebus monstrat adflictis viam.

MEDEA

Qui nil potest sperare, desperet nihil.

NURSE

Abiere Colchi, coniugis nulla est fides

nihilque superest obipus e tantis tibi.

*who makes the tripod tremble;
Castor and his twin Pollux,
so skilled at boxing, would both concede defeat.*

*So then, ye inhabitants of heaven, we pray you:
let this bride surpass all brides,
this husband far excel all husbands.*

*Keep this fury concealed, my child;
even calmness may not save you.*

Only the daring will endure, the craven perish.

If there is a place for courage, it should be approved.

Never say that there can be no place for courage.

There is no hope of a way out of our dire predicament.

Once I had great hope, I must not lose it.

*The Colchians have abandoned you, your husband
has betrayed you
and you are left with nothing of your wealth.*

MEDEA

Medea superest – hic mare et terras vides
ferrumque et ignes et deos et fulmina.

NURSE

Rex est timendus.

MEDEA

Rex meus fuerat pater.

NURSE

Non metuis arma?

MEDEA

Sint licet terra edita.

NURSE

Moriere.

MEDEA

Cupio.

NURSE

Profuge.

MEDEA

Paenituit fugae.

NURSE

Medea,

MEDEA

Fiam.

NURSE

Mater es.

MEDEA

Cui sim vides.

Medea without end, in me behold the land and sea
and fire and steel and heaven and hell.

Beware of Creon.

My father was a king.

Beware his power.

His power sprang from the earth.

You'll perish.

I crave it.

Take refuge.

I lack the will to flee.

Medea –

I am.

You are a mother.

By whom, you see.

NURSE
Profugere dubitas?

You mean not to leave now?

MEDEA
Fugiam, at ulciscar prius.

Flee I may, but take my vengeance first...

NURSE
Vindex sequetur.

The avenger will pursue you.

MEDEA
Forsan inveniam moras.

Perhaps I'll find a way.

3 NURSE
But see now, Creon comes.

CREON
Why is she still here? I know her well, I know her power, and though I have granted the Colchian witch her life, she must depart, tonight.

MEDEA
Why am I banished, what is my crime, great King?

CREON
You are malign.

MEDEA
Then at least let me take Jason with me, and rid you of the man who brought me here.

CREON
You ask too much, too late.

4 You go, alone.

MEDEA
When I was the daughter of the sun-god
in far-off Colchis,
and all the princes of your race
bowed low before me,
I wanted only Jason
and for his embrace I left my home,

left the sweet waters of Pontus
sowed the children of the dragon's teeth
and followed Jason.

And with my lust and magic arts
I brought to Greece one prize
that all those princes could not win:
the safe deliverance of Argo.
I gave you Orpheus, I gave you Castor
and all the Argonauts;
for you I brought back all the rest;
Jason for myself alone.
If you accuse me now of witchcraft,
I confess it.
If you now say I murdered,
I confess,
but add to these, my foreign sins,
that I brought back your heroes.
If that was sinful, give me back my sin.

5 CREON
I am no tyrant. I am not a ruthless man but your malificence infects my land, my people fear you, your foreignness and your power.

MEDEA
Must I go alone?
If I am guilty, so is he.
All I did, I did for Jason.

CREON
Jason is blameless. You blinded him with lust. You go alone.

MEDEA
At least do not send my guiltless sons into exile.

CREON
I promise you: I will take them in and raise them as my own.

MEDEA
Then give me one more day to say goodbye.

CREON
To work your treachery, you mean.

MEDEA
What damage could I do in just one day?

CREON
One day. No more. My daughter's wedding calls – I must go. One day. No more.

Scene 2

Medea urges her heart to bring her hate to the same pitch of intensity as her desire for Jason; the nurse sees 'madness in her face' and fears the worst. The Chorus sings of the boldness of the 'first sailor' (identified with Jason) who trusted to the fragility of a timber ship and opened the world to the possibilities of travel and exploration, but thereby rendered it unstable; a solo voice laments the current state of the world as Medea vows to supplant the gods and conquer the universe.

MEDEA
If you seek, poor little heart,
what limit you should set to hate – copy your love.

NURSE
Vultum furoris cerno. Di fallant metum.

I see madness in her face. Gods, prove me wrong!

MEDEA
No flood or tempest out at sea or raging forest fire could be the pattern for my hate – only my love.

CHORUS
Audax nimium qui freta primus
rate tam fragili perfida rupit
terrasque suas post terga videns
animam levibus credit auris
dubioque secans aequora cursu
potuit tenui fidere ligno
inter vitae mortisque vias
nimium gracili limite ducto.

*Too bold was the man who first
took to the sea in a fragile boat,
looking back once at his homeland
and entrusting his life to the fickle winds
as he ploughed the waves on an unknown course
stretched between
life and death
on a slender beam.*

7 Candida nostri saecula patres
videre, procul fraude remota.
Sua quisque piger litora tangens
patrioque senex in arvo,
parvo dives, nisi quas tulerat
natale solum, non norat opes.
Nondum quisquam sidera norat,
stellisque quibus pingitur aether
non erat usus, nondum pluvias
Hyadas poterat vitare ratis,
non Oleniae lumina caprae,
nec quae sequitur flectitque senex
Attica tardus plaustra Bootes,
nondum Boreas, nondum Zephyrus
nomen habebant.

Nunc iam cessit pontus et omnes
patitur leges.
Terminus omnis motus et urbes
muros terra posuere nova,
Nil qua fuerat sede reliquit
pervius orbis:
Indus gelidum potet Araxen,
Albin Persae Rhenumque bibent.
Venient annis saecula seris,
quibus Oceanus vincula rerum
laxet et ingens pateat tellus
Tethysque novos detegat orbes
nec sit terris ultima Thule.

MEDEA
Faciet hic, faciet dies
quod nullum umquam taceat. Invadam deos
et cuncta quatiam.

Far better days our parents knew,
when evil deeds were rarely known
and no-one ventured far afield,
but dwelt from birth to death content
with what his native soil might yield.

Men had not learned to calculate sky
or navigate by using stars
nor had they given strange and magic names
to wind and rain from frozen north
or hardy east to fill their sails or steer their destiny.

Though today the sea presents no barrier,

all earth lies free and cities rise in lands they never knew
and people journey where they will.

Races mix and flood like rivers rushing towards the sea.

A time will come when mighty ocean will relax its hold

and all creation will lie bare and there will be
no limit to the world.

*Today I shall do something
that no day shall ever forget. I will storm the gods
and shake the universe.*

Scene 3

Jason appears, explaining that he is trapped by circumstance. He hears Medea's aria 'The dreaming sea' and, after a duet in which he is progressively worn down by her determination to triumph, nearly relents. He extricates himself, but not before Medea has realised that she can punish him through his children and the royal house of Corinth, by hexing a beautiful robe which she will send to the princess Creusa as a present.

JASON

- 8 Fate is hard. Fortune is cruel when she destroys us and when she spares us.
If I betray my wife, Creon will let me live a free man and my sons will live as free men.
If I do not want to die I must repudiate Medea. She must surrender her sons that they may live as free men.
I do not do this for myself but simply for my sons, that they can live as free men when they're grown.
Fate is hard. The king on one side and on the other – Medea.

MEDEA

- 9 The dreaming sea, after a storm, blooms with the faces of the dead. My hand trails in the water, trails to clutch the broken petals of a boy.

The sea is as wide as thought.

Your slimness is a dark fish in the water going before me to Troy, where on the shore the ruined tree of grief stares madly at the sea.

Your shadow is always with me, a moan in the rigging – birds crying like tired children at sunset, birds who will perch on the fleshless arms of the tree and wait for you.

When Troy is dead, her doors and eyes aghast, and wind blows through the hollows of her mind,
I will stand by the river of forgetfulness, and wait for you.

JASON

- 10 When Creon would have killed you, I pleaded for your life and banishment.

MEDEA

I thought it punishment then, now I see that it was mercy.

JASON

Escape, while you still can.

Do not provoke his anger further.

MEDEA

That's the line! Take Creusa's side, get rid of the foreign bitch, the concubine.

JASON

After all this time, you accuse me of crimes of passion?

MEDEA

Yes, murder and betrayal.

JASON

How so?

MEDEA

If I am guilty, so are you!

All I did, I did for you.

JASON

This is the final lie, to top them all: that I am guilty of your sins as well!

MEDEA

They are yours. You committed them as surely as you profited. But though everyone calls me monster, you at least should call me innocent. Let me be guiltless to you, since I am guilty for you.

JASON

I cannot accept life on such conditions.

MEDEA

Then reject life!

JASON

At least agree to exile for your children's sake.

MEDEA

I have no children! I will never let Creusa bear brothers to my sons. She will not live to see the day when the children of the Sun God breed with rank progeny of Sisyphus!

JASON

Why must you drag both of us down? Leave Corinth, I beg you!

MEDEA

Supplicem audivit Creo.

Creon has heard my prayer.

JASON

What can I do, what can I say? The king on one side and on the other – Medea.

MEDEA
Pro me? Vel scelus est –
Et hic maior metus Medea.

*For me? Commit a crime
– and on the other, which is worse: Medea!*

JASON
I'm worn out with your schemes and sorcery.
We have enemies all around us.
What can I do, what can I say?

MEDEA
Fortuna semper omnis infra me stetit.
Proprior est hostis Creio;
His adice Colchos, adice et Aeeten ducem
Scythas, Pelasgis iunge; demersos dabo.

*Fortune has always stood beneath my feet.
Creon is the nearest foe;
add to him the Colchians with Aeetes to lead them,
Scythians, Pelasgians; I will bring them all to destruction!*

JASON
I would gladly give in to you, but I cannot. The children must be saved and Creon is their only hope.
I would sooner part with light and life than put them once again at risk.

MEDEA *aside*
So, he loves our sons! I've got him! Now at last he's shown me where to strike!
To Jason:
Kiss me then, and let me leave you with a memory not of how I am, but of how I was.

JASON
Farewell.

MEDEA
Gone, just like that? Gone? Forgetting as he goes, me and all I worked for?
Never!

11 I have a robe, a gift of heaven,
the glory of our royal house,
given to my father by the god of the Sun.
I have a brilliant necklace too,
of woven gold and a golden band to bind the hair beside.
I now will send them
to the happy bride, Creusa,

but first I must anoint them
as should a priestess for her future queen.

Vocetur Hecate. Sacra letifica appara;
statuantur arae, flamma iam tectis sonet.

Now, call on Hecate. Prepare the deadly rituals.
Build the altars and let their fires sound throughout
the palace.

Scene 4

As Medea sets up her altar, the Chorus comments about the fury of the spurned woman. Medea casts a spell, invoking the witch-goddess, Hecate and various demons to 'hide the seeds of fire' within her gifts. The Nurse appears in time to see the spell finally wrought.

CHORUS
12 Nulla vis flammae tumidive venti
tanta, nec teli metuenda torti
quanta cum coniunx viduata taedis
ardet et odit;

*No violence of fire, or gale-force wind,
or shocking force of the spear
is like a woman whose love is stolen,
who burns with hatred:*

Non ubi hibernos nebulosus imbres
Auster advexit properatque torrens
Hister et iunctos vetat esse pontes
ac vagus errat;

*not the cloud-bearing north wind
bringing winter rain
nor the flood of Hister, destroying bridges
and covering the countryside,*

Non ubi impellit Rhodanus profundum,
aut ubi in rivis nivibus solutis
sole iam forti medioque vere
tabuit Haemus.

*not the Rhone beating back the sea
nor the snows melting
under strong sun, forming streams
and dissolving Haemus in mid-spring.*

Caecus est ignis stimulatus ira
nec regi curat patiturve frenos
aut timet mortem; cupit ire in ipsos
obvius enses.

*The fire fanned by rage is blind.
It cannot be controlled,
has no fear of death, and will
gladly take on the sword.*

Parcite, o divi, veniam precamur,
vivat ut tutus mare qui subegit;
sed furit vinci dominus profundi
regna secunda.

*O gods, be merciful and gracious
to him that tamed the sea;
but the lord of the deep is angry
that his kingdom has been conquered.*

Ausus aeternos agitare currus
Immemor metae iuvenis paternae
quos polo sparsit furiosus ignes
ipse recepit.

Constitit nulli via nota magno;
vade qua tutum populo priori,
rumpe nec sacro, violente, sancta
foedera mundi.

MEDEA

13 Tu nunc vestes tinge Creusae,
quas cum primum sumpserit, imas
urat serpens flamma medullas.

Ignis fulvo clusus in auro
latet obscurus, quem mihi caeli
qui furta luit viscere feto
dedit et docuit condere vires
arte, Prometheus. Dedit et tenui
sulphure tectos Mulciber ignes
et vivacis fulgura
de cognato Phaethonte tuli.
Habeo mediae dona chimaerae
habeo flammas usto tauri
guttore raptas, quas permixto
felle Medusae tacitum iussi
servare malum.

NURSE

14 O horror! Disaster comes. Her monstrous grief brings forth hidden evils.
Left hand on the altar she calls a brood of serpents from under Libya's burning sands and the everlasting arctic snow.
Their venom she mixes with death-dealing herbs and the blood of unclean birds. To these poison charms she adds
her lethal words in frenzied incantations, hiding the seeds of fire within her gifts. All nature quakes with horror
as she sings.

*The youth who defied his father
and drove the eternal chariot
caught fire himself,
spreading it over the sky in his madness.*

*No one comes to grief on familiar paths.
Tread where it was safe for people in the past,
and do not rashly break
the sacred laws of the universe.*

*Now to poison Creusa's robe
so that when she puts it on,
the flame, like a serpent, will consume her utterly.
Fire hides in the darkness*

*of this gold;
Prometheus – still tortured
for stealing fire from heaven –
gave it to me and taught me how to use it.
Mulciber has given me fire hidden in sulphur
and I have lightning bolts of living fire
from my cousin Phaethon.*

*I have gifts of fire from the Chimaera
and flames from the bull's
throat, mixed with
gall from Medusa, which hide
their evil at my bidding.*

MEDEA

Adde venenis stimulus Hecate
donisque meis semina flammae
condita serva. Fallant visus
tactusque ferant, meet in pectus
venisque calor, stillent artus
ossaque fument vincatque suas
flagrante coma nova nupta faces.

Vota tenetur, ter latratus
audax Hecate dedit et sacros
edidit ignes face lucifera!

NURSE

Her prayer is answered – all nature quakes with horror as she sings.

Scene 5

The Nurse and Chorus announce that the princess has been consumed by flames after putting on the garment. The King has died trying to help her, and the city is in flames. The Nurse tells Medea to flee. Medea expresses her sorrow at having to kill her children, but waits until Jason arrives before doing so in his sight – the worst possible revenge. As Medea disappears, Jason sings that wherever she goes, there can be no god.

NURSE

15 It is done. Father and daughter lie in the ruins of their house.

CHORUS

Fire eats through the bones of mighty Creon,
Fire eats through the flesh of beautiful Creusa.

NURSE

Fire eats through the entrails of the golden palace.

ALL

Water only feeds the flames, soon they will fall upon the town!

NURSE

16 Go now, Medea, while you still have time.

*Give strength to my poison, Hecate,
keep the seeds of fire hidden in these gifts.*

*Let them not be seen
or felt. Let fire burn
her heart and veins, melt her limbs
and turn her bones to smoke so that she, burning,
outshines the wedding torches.*

*My prayer is answered! Bold Hecate
has bayed three times and raised her fire
with its fearful light.*

MEDEA

Go now? If I had gone already, I would have come back for this sight!
These are indeed exotic wedding rites.

Iuvat, iuvat rapuisse fraternum caput;
artus iuvat secuisse et arcano patrem
spoliasse sacro, iuvat in exitium senis
armasse natas. Quaere materiam, dolor;
ad omne facinus non rudem dextram afferes.

But can I kill my sons?

What is their sin? That Jason is their father, Medea their mother?

They are innocent I know, but so was my little brother, whom I slew.

Let them be lost to Jason, as they will be lost to me.

Discedere a me, frater, ultrices deas
manesque ad imos ire securas iube;

Mihi me relinque et utere hac, frater, manu
quae strinxit ensem – victima manes
placamus ista:

She kills the first child.

Non in occulto tibi est

perdenda virtus; approba populo manum.

Now let all see Medea's handiwork!

JASON

17 Assist me, citizens, to avenge your princes' death.
Destroy this witch, this foreign harlot in her den.

MEDEA

I have regained my royal state
and Colchis has regained its Golden Fleece.
These nuptial fires will celebrate my new virginity!

Now Jason comes to witness for himself my pitiless sacrifice.

It is your sons' funeral pyre you raise;

your would-be wife and father are already laid on theirs.

How I rejoice that I murdered my own sweet brother,
rejoice that I stole the treasure from my father,
rejoice in all my other acts of horror.

But now I have new scope for pain

and all my history will be a backdrop for today.

*Dear Brother – tell the avenging goddesses
to depart from me; now you go in peace to the
land of ghosts.*

*Leave me to use this hand, brother,
with drawn sword – this victim
shall appease your ghost.*

This great deed must not be lost in secrecy.

Now let all see Medea's handiwork.

NURSE

Medea, praereps quaslibet terras pete.

Medea, quickly go, seek any other land.

MEDEA

One son has embraced his fate
and this one dies before your very eyes!
She kills the second child.

JASON

Kill me instead!

MEDEA

Lift up your eyes, Jason,

lift up your eyes to my face and look at me, your wife.

And now for your fidelity, devoted father,

take back your sons.

Recipe iam natos.

Take back your sons.

CHORUS

18 Per alta vade spatia sublimi aethere;
testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos.

*Go on through the lofty vaults of high heaven
and bear witness that where you go, there is no god.*

JASON

Go on forever through the wilderness of time
and bear witness where you go
that where Medea is
there is no god.

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