

# *ravens & radishes*

*george heathco* music

*misha penton* lyrics

*misha penton* soprano

*george heathco* electric guitar

*daniel saenz* cello

*Rapunzel is locked in the tower; the witch's granddaughter comes for a wintery garden visit...Little Red Hood, lost in the forest, is relentlessly stalked by a She-Wolf...Snow White's stepmother muses in her mirror....Seven brothers are turned to Ravens and only their little sister can save them...And the Firebird, encountered on a wooded trail, flies free...*

*witch in winter* 6:48

*mirror* 3:57

*october ravine* 1:24

*sheep's clothing* 5:28

*l'oiseau de feu* 6:59

George Heathco, music  
Misha Penton, lyrics and concept

Misha Penton, soprano  
George Heathco, electric guitar  
Daniel Saenz, cello

Produced by Misha Penton and George Heathco  
Recording engineered by Todd Hulslander and George Heathco  
Mastered by Paul Connolly of brightbluebeetle

Recorded at The Geary Performance Studio Houston Public Radio  
Design by Misha Penton



I think I met George on Twitter. No kidding. And yes, we live in the same city, but as it goes, Houston is like that. In the fall of 2011, we launched our first collaboration: I'm artistic director of Divergence Vocal Theater, and George created some deliciously brooding, ethereal and atmospheric live sound design for a Divergence autumn soiree of vocal music, dance, and monologues. The following spring, I approached him again about embarking on *this* collaboration, with a vague idea of wanting to do a song cycle based on my poetry that explored new versions of traditional fairytales. So, off we went!

In George's hands, *ravens & radishes* emerged as an exciting operatic fairytale song cycle. He evocatively and exquisitely set my text with sinewy, lace-like weavings of cello, electric guitar, and voice. It's a wild ride to sing: from whispery-nesses to dramatic high notes. My words are new, twisty, renditions of some favorite Brothers Grimm tales (and one Slavic folktale), with a definite

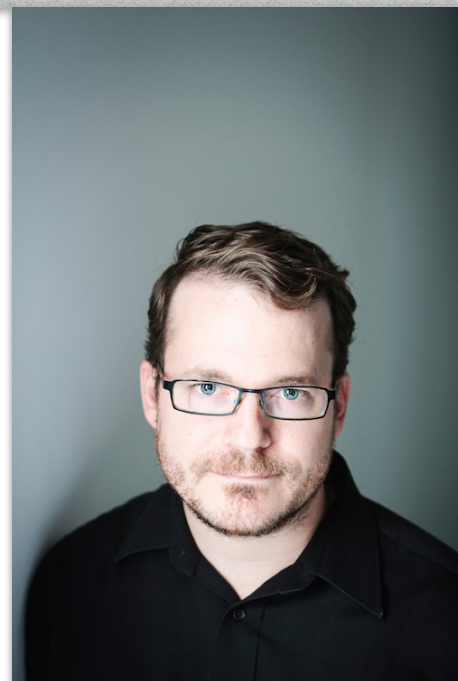
nod or two to Anne Sexton, Angela Carter, A.S. Byatt, and other female revisionists, including inspiration from the 17th century French conteuses. I add my words to a long line of women retelling these tales, and the fascination is unwavering over the centuries. — Misha

My own experiences with fairy tales, leading up to the composition of *ravens & radishes*, were from the perspectives of being both a young child and having them read to me at bedtime, and as a parent reading them to my young daughter. In this light, these stories have had an air of innocence and naivete, more than likely as a result of the revised, glossed-over children's editions with which I had been familiar.

It wasn't until Misha began sending me possible poetry for use in this collaboration that I had given much thought to approaching a subject matter that to me had always felt very distant and artificial. However, with Misha's writing, I was immediately struck by the vivid details in which scenes were described. I could easily sense the flora that painted each landscape; the cool chill in the air read as though it were present in my own home; I felt transported to wherever Misha was envisioning. This of course only set up the thoughts and actions of those characters present, who now were given extra dimensions, where the previous versions I had known were only felt to have one. Misha's poetry offered snapshots into lives that were ongoing and continuous, even if the reader were never present.

Musically speaking, this instantly set off a barrage of ideas and motifs. As could be expected of a multi-song work, each song has its own mood, mode, and focus. While I imagined each poem to be a single panoramic shot of an isolated moment within a single point on a map, there are a few motives and ideas that pop up throughout the cycle. As the characters in Misha's poems exhibited more earthly, human, and sometimes flawed characteristics, I felt free and able to bring in music that touched upon the vernacular I had grown up with, without feeling contrived.

The choice of writing for electric guitar, cello, and voice was made somewhat arbitrarily before any text was chosen. This decision proved to be a perfect choice for the duration of the cycle, as I was able to think of the characteristics of the instrumentation as a spectrum that ranged from the natural to the fantastic. At times, the electric guitar acts as the grounding, earthly element, while the cello represents the supernatural world. Other times, it is just the opposite. All the while, the voice remains as the bridging element between the two, never quite stepping fully in either direction. — George



## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

**George Heathco** composes music for a variety of ensembles in a wide range of styles. His music blends elements of contemporary concert music with rock, jazz, and various other pop genres. Ensembles and organizations he has written for include the Moores School of Music Jazz Orchestra, Da Camera of Houston, Houston Grand Opera (HGOco), Scordatura Music Society, Divergence Vocal Theater, the University of Houston's AURA Contemporary Ensemble, and The Ornerly Theater, for their production of Cthulhu: A Puppet Play. In addition, his music has been performed by SOLI Chamber Ensemble and Forecast Music. George composed the music for ReGifting Lions, an evening length dance collaboration with choreographers Toni Leago Valle,

Catalina Molnari, and photographer/ choreographer Lynn Lane, which premiered in October of 2012. He has also contributed string arrangements for singer/songwriter Chris Telfer's MATTOO E.P.. George was a member of the 2010-2011 Da Camera of Houston Young Artist Program, and in 2011 was the graduate division winner of the Sarofim Composition Contest at the University of Houston. He is the Co-Artistic Director and guitarist for Liminal Space Contemporary Music Ensemble, a new Houston-based ensemble founded by George and percussionist Luke Hubley.

As a guitarist, George has performed with various musicians, ensembles, and bands, including: Opera Vista, Divergence Vocal Theater, AURA Contemporary Ensemble, the Free Radicals, and as the guitarist for progressive/math metal band The Pant Factory. He has taught guitar and music theory privately in the Houston area since 2003, has served as a faculty member of American Festival for the Arts since 2010, has taught numerous classes at the University of Houston, and is also a contributor to the contemporary music web magazine I Care If You Listen. George received a B.M. in music business and an M.M. in composition from the University of Houston. Some of the musicians he has studied with include: Rob Smith, Robert Nelson, James Bishop, Jim Vassallo, Noe Marmolejo, Dennis Dotson, and Mike Wheeler. [georgeheathcomusic.com](http://georgeheathcomusic.com)

**Misha Penton** is a contemporary opera singer, new music performer, artistic director, and writer. Her work explores the intersection of new music performance; new opera theater; voicescape composition; and bel canto and extended vocal techniques. She is the founder, artistic director, and ensemble lead artist of Divergence Vocal Theater, a Houston-based opera, new music and multi-performing arts ensemble. Misha is one of Houston Press' 100 Creatives of 2011, and is named a 2012 finalist for Best Artistic Director by the Houston Press Theater Awards. Professional affiliations include Houston Grand Opera; Mercury; St. Cecilia Chamber Opera; The University of Houston Center for Creative Work; Audio Inversions, an Austin-based new music ensemble; the Jewish Community Center Houston; The Olimpias, an international artists' collective and performance research series; and DiverseWorks Arts Space Houston. Misha has sung world premieres by composers, Ofer Ben-Amots, Elliot Cole, Dominick DiOrio, George Heathco, and James D. Norman. Recent performances included a reprise of the title role in Dominick DiOrio's chamber opera, Klytemnestra (a setting of Misha's libretto), in the galleries of The Museum of Fine Arts Houston and at the Dallas Museum of Art; a site specific world premiere collaboration with composer George Heathco in a 19th century military bunker at Fort Worden State Park in Washington State; and the CD and music video release of Selkie, a sea tale, composed by Elliot Cole, and performed, produced by, and with a libretto by Misha. Upcoming projects include directing a new music film of Heathco's ravens & radishes. Misha is a contributing writer for Arts+Culture Texas and Dance Source Houston. [mishapenton.com](http://mishapenton.com)

Cellist **Daniel Saenz** is a member of the string faculty at the Sam Houston State University School of Music where he teaches applied cello and coaches chamber music. As a member of SHSU's Kolonneh String Quartet, he has performed and presented master classes throughout South America and Mexico. He additionally coordinates the annual SHSU Strings Festival, featuring SHSU String Faculty alongside internationally-recognized musicians and young artists such as Mike Block, Darol Anger, and Louis-Marie Fardet. Recently, he was a member of the guest artist faculty of the Schlern International Music Festival (Vols am Schlern, Italy), where he served as the teaching assistant to Prof. Vagram Saradjian.

Daniel's engagements as a concert artist have taken him to internationally-renowned venues throughout the United States, Europe, South America, and Asia. His performances have been broadcast live by NPR affiliates nationwide. As a concerto soloist, he has performed with orchestras in the United States, France, and Bolivia. An advocate of the music of our time, Daniel's has performed under the auspices of Aperio: Music of the Americas, The Foundation for Modern Music, the UMKC Musica Aestas Composition Festival, and recently completed a guest artist residency at the 2011 SoundSCAPE Composition and Performance Exchange in Maccagno, Italy.

A graduate of Rice University and the Eastman School of Music, Daniel maintains a highly active studio at his home in Spring, TX, where his students are regularly chosen for the Texas All-State and Regional Orchestras. His summer festival "SaenzCello", presently in its second year, has successfully prepared over 100 young cellists for their Texas All-State auditions. Presently, Daniel is completing his Doctor of Musical Arts degree at the University of Houston.

## LYRICS

### *witch in winter*

wind whooshes through fissures in darkhour shingles  
something on the evening stairs sounds december  
and my porch, a tundra of bone chimes, *crackssnaps*  
through seaglass casement curtains  
my heart a tangle in their filaments  
I watch grandma's fingers weave  
winter kitchen incandescence  
readying silk for the telling of stories  
she leaves garden radish tending for spring  
when duranta blooms and hollyhock cultivate the land for  
moth-tide:

the season of air shaft whimsy  
and spin-past-on-the-breeze wings  
when digging 'round the little plants' sproutgreens,  
their iron tangy fleshy folds red lipped, bundled  
oozing a low ache  
earth blood beneath her fingernails  
between the tiny plot's molting ash wood fence stakes  
up to their shoulders high with snows  
and iced barbed wire keeps the love inside

### *mirror*

my looking glass, its edges a tangle of serpentine tresses  
a frame carved in deep sanguine sleep  
a breath in  
a breath out  
frosts my likeness  
a reflection of dark lashes and lips,  
fingertips and speckled brown iris  
evening wishes its images cast behind me:  
of Night carrying stars,  
Her baskets high above hills  
the wind at Her back  
delicately transporting clouds upon her apron  
reflected moments ripple and whirl  
what if I shatter? in shards?  
and each fragment spun out across distances of forest  
and dream:  
and each is myopic, illusion-inducing  
and stabs its way into every heart  
everywhere  
and laid bare  
all our delusions?  
who, then, to heal us?

### *october ravine*

Ah! so here is where I left it!  
a little grotto nestled in the wet greens  
of an october ravine  
open to me, rock agape  
its sacred seeming granite edge laced in winter-nude wisteria  
I shake and shudder

as I pull my expansive feathered cloak close  
its warmth at last! an ebon-aubergine of quills  
that shimmer and ruffle and weave  
enfolded in my lost skin  
I walk out and into the winds  
at my back, the Glass Mountain sings its  
*bluegreenbluegreenblue* iridescence  
translucent against firmament  
unnoticed, six ravens rise  
black wings beat a dissonance against mists  
whitened by moonlight  
and I? I am the seventh

### *sheep's clothing*

a vein of yarn leads a passage  
over forest floor branches, a-tangle  
a last leaf hangs iced in *orangebrownredblack*  
*cracksnap!*  
an inky ash  
slippery slate path peeks through midwinter snows  
all the better to step upon –  
all the better to –  
children wait  
growing like greenwood fiddlehead ferns unfolding  
scent of curls and chocolates  
laced skirts and frock shirts swirl past:  
a blur of ball-toss and hide-and-seek  
their shout in the night nightmares catch on breeze and briar  
all the better to –  
all the better to stalk –  
forepaws, hind paws, tail  
my breath along the trail  
fang and claw, expectant

### *l'oiseau de feu*

his hooves run clap ring  
sprint clop zing over Sky's grasses  
his breath is chervil and dandelion, fennel, and hyssop  
birches and bamboo, tall tangled twisted:  
a tempt – a blur – we dash  
my quiver arrows speak sharp and true across my bow  
star trails smear and slash:  
whips across emblazoned firmament  
glisten, flash! splash!  
he rears and the muddied road reaches up  
shhh! wait!  
I hear the swoop and swoosh, whirl and whoosh  
the dive of the Firebird alights upon the path  
feldspar eyes, plasma plumage  
as quickly as she graced us, she is gone:  
in a whisper and a rustle she gifts a single tail feather:  
I resist the glint of its lightning barbs  
the steely cut of its vane  
the melisma of its lava quill  
I will not possess her