



# Selkie

## A SEA TALE

Music by ELLIOT COLE / Lyrics by MISHA PENTON

MISHA PENTON, *soprano* PATRICK MOORE, *cello* KYLE EVANS, *piano*  
with MEREDITH HARRIS, *viola* / DIVERGENCE VOCAL THEATER

*Seduction to dive below the waves...*

**Selkie**, *A SEA TALE* is Elliot Cole's lush musical setting of fairytale poetry by soprano Misha Penton.

Selkies are ephemeral half-human, half-seal beings. They are transformative creatures that inhabit liminal spaces; exist at the edge of dusk and dawn; in the between-time of solstice and equinox; and where root meets earth and sea washes sand. When the moon swells to its fullest, Selkies shed their seal skins, reveal their human form, and dance on our northernmost beaches – their skins ready for the taking. **Selkie**, *A SEA TALE*'s poetry is a dreamscape of human fragility, longing and loss, written from a sailor's wife to her selkie love, and culminates in her willingness to release him back to the sea...

ELLIOT COLE is a composer, singer and programmer specializing in vivid and imaginative literary and dramatic work.  
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MISHA PENTON is a contemporary opera singer, performance-maker and writer.  
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SELKIE, *A SEA TALE* music video, media, lyrics, performance history, et cetera:  
[mishapenton.com/selkie/](http://mishapenton.com/selkie/)

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## *Selkie, A SEA TALE*

*Music by Elliot Cole*

*Lyrics by Misha Penton*

- i. Overture
- ii. Almost afternoon
- iii. My door shadows open
- iv. Night lifts the moon
- v. Softly over sounding waves
- vi. When you came ashore
- vii. Evened out days
- viii. Dark night, long night
- ix. Ordinary sailor
- x. Bonus: Softly over sounding waves *with Meredith Harris, viola*

*Produced by Misha Penton*

*Recording Engineered by Todd Hulslander*

*Mastered by Allen Comeau Mastering*

*Recorded at The Geary Performance Studio Houston Public Radio*

*Art Direction by Misha Penton. Graphic Design by Culture Pilot*

*Photos by Dave Nickerson and Raul Cesares*

Divergence Vocal Theater [divergencevocaltheater.org](http://divergencevocaltheater.org)

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*Almost afternoon*  
almost afternoon  
and treacle clouds rush into evening  
pushing us along  
pushing us  
toward each other

a walk through the church belled town  
its paths all tiger lily for spring  
you lean on the market's splintered cross-beam railing  
lilacs spill scented from your hands  
we pick them from pavement  
and with your sailor eyes blue  
even before our first words  
it is too late for me  
and our Only Season seems a forever ahead

*My door shadows open*  
my door shadows open  
wave air swooshes swoosh swishy swishes in  
to tousle ever so almost not there curtains diaphanous  
behind me  
your hands gentle on my waist  
gentle down my arms  
gentle on my shoulders' skin  
and on my cheeks and over lips  
and thighs and back and breath  
and

*Night lifts the moon*  
night lifts the moon just high enough  
off draping sands that exhale hushed and rippled patterns:  
spreading down from the lawn  
I dreamed a sea gabled house with widow's walk  
my skirts held lifted from wild rose briars' snag and snare:  
are all rustle whisper rustle whisper rustle whisper  
smile  
and I meet you at the edge where moon and sand, star and land,  
seagrass and waters' lips kiss our dancing

*Softly over sounding waves*  
softly over sounding autumn waves you sail  
the scent of your neck against my face  
a memory  
of seastars, anemone and shell gathered mornings  
oceanstrand rainforest moss chills our hands - so lightly touching  
we climb marine granite toward an osprey pine aerie  
a seal bobs her beckoning head for us:  
seduction to dash our bodies  
against deceptive stone and join her in the fearless sea

*When you came ashore*  
when you came ashore I thought we'd see  
unbound days and coastal evening sea grass stars  
sand smoothed out like honeyed silk  
I'd keep you wrapped in linen and tears  
for the years  
you relinquish to the land and to me  
you know all our stars by heart: Cassiopeia, Monoceros, Circinus,  
Delphinus, Argo Navis  
Orion lighting midwinter ice

by the quietest  
and by the dimmest light  
by sun and under cloud  
in mist and storm  
they come for you

*Evened out days*  
Evened out days, passing all alike, all the same  
translucent dull suns exhale behind clouds high, impenetrable  
and heaven's second hand ticks years charmed by Selkie time  
days double counted  
I lose our seconds, hours and weeks  
their outstretched arms are taut between us  
press one palm to my breast  
one palm to your chest  
apart  
and when you return  
our moments so brilliant and light, tight with every breath  
ache and heat and scent and sweat  
press us together in a single sigh

*Dark night, long night*  
Dark night, long night  
Pleiades light long midwinter night  
alone under lavender warm white goose down night  
placid fire shimmers low; steady coals turn to ash

eight bells chime a quiet seamist requiem  
my very very early morning-mares  
freeze me  
a heavy and stubborn nocturnal creature  
all mutiny on my chest  
breathing my small terror breaths  
stealing sweat with its tongue cinnamon-like and sweet darting

I cannot wake without you  
I dream a sea gabled house with widow's walk  
my skirts all rustle whisper rustle whisper rustle whisper  
weeping on iron rust railing

Zephyrus through my whipping hair, Boreas cross my frost red lips  
Eurus trace my shadow place, Notus bring the Southern Cross  
Verglas hold the farthest clouds in still remembrance

if I speak aloud will you seep into being?  
if I dream you in soft sighing word-breaths  
will you sweep through a chink in the dawn?  
if I hold my spirit while you are gone will you return?  
I cannot wake without you

*Ordinary sailor*  
I thought you were an ordinary sailor  
not a master mariner  
they came for you to aid their treachery  
they came for you to aid their thievery  
they came for you to aid conspiracy  
taken from me to sail their ships  
and I wish I knew  
your only way - away  
not back to me but back to the long open deep  
it stretches beneath us

when midnight came  
I took your seal skin you'd given me  
all wrapped in linen and tears  
sea grass stars slide through my fingers  
sand smoothed out like honeyed silk

a splash, a dinghy  
heave its creaking wood  
over sands scraping sands scraping sand and frothy seastand  
my skirts wet with salt and sweat and tiptoe over open night waves  
to the sailing ship where you slept held captive  
the oak of its hull is slick and black  
oil against my hands  
my tiny boat tied up against the battened masted ship  
I slip up the stern ladder  
I slip over the wale  
I slide with the locus of night  
my skirts all rustle whisper rustle whisper rustle whisper

over spar deck and quarter deck  
past spiritsail, topgallant stay  
bowspirit and royal mast  
near lanteen, mizzen lift and brails  
sea barely swells under my held breath  
I want to shout  
I want to conspire our names  
but I find you  
with no time to reach  
and return you  
not back to me  
but back to the long open deep  
it stretches beneath us

I leave in a hush and a rush  
of linen and tears  
for our years  
released to the land  
I cannot row fast enough  
I cannot row hard enough  
I cannot row skilled enough  
as the dawn storm rises



