

# Selkie, a sea tale



## divergence vocal theater

### A note from Misha on the making of Selkie...

Selkies are half-human, half-seal creatures, who sometimes shed their seal skins and dance as humans, on beaches. It is easy to steal their skin while they're under the spell of the moon. Then they cannot go back to the sea (most Selkie tales originate from the Orkney Islands) This story, my story, is a memory, a dream, a monologue, a character split into to several facets: Sea Wife, Siren, Fate, Ocean Elementals, Selkie, Sailor's Lover and Keeper of his Selkie Skin. The staging is part concert, part drama. We make collaborative, hybrid arts, so sometimes I don't know what it is going to be until very close to sharing it with you. Explaining how a Divergence project comes together is sort of like explaining what it is like to bake a cake with a group of friends. Basically, my exceptionally talented artist friends help me bring my ideas to fruition and the result is really cool.

I wrote the libretto (fancy-schmancy Italian word for lyrics), as a dream-poem with flashes of images, texture, rhythms... this evening is a non-linear voyage. My advice in hearing us? Relax and let Elliot Cole's extraordinary music: haunting, sensual, tumultuous, plaintive, aching...wash over you.

### Synopsis. Spoiler alert! Spoiler alert! Adventurous fans: read later, or not at all

If a dream could have a satisfactory synopsis, I'd be happy to give you one... but since that is not possible, here are a few thoughts, clues, insights, etcetera: all the characters are facets of my principal character, the Selkie's wife. The Selkie is her lover and he has stayed on land with her and given her his seal skin, so that he may remain human... but as a human, he is also a sailor and a navigator, and there are those that would steal him away to sail their ships for fortune and opportunity. She can set him free from forced treachery, forever, by returning his seal skin to him and releasing him to the sea...

<b>Cast</b>	
Selkie Sailor's Wife.....	Misha Penton
Fate, Psyche, Siren.....	Natasha Manley
Sea & Sand Elemental.....	Meg Brooker
Sea Sprites.....	Miranda Herbert & Melissa McEver
<b>Creative Team</b>	
Artistic Director, Concept, Lyrics.....	Misha Penton
Composer.....	Elliot Cole
Piano.....	Jeremy Wood
Cello.....	Oliver Chen
Lighting.....	Megan M. Reilly
Staging.....	Misha & Cast
Choreography.....	Meg Brooker
Set Design.....	David A. Brown
Set Construction.....	David A. Brown & Michael Crowder
Media.....	Megan & David
Costumes.....	Sarah Mosher
Stylist.....	Serret Jensen
Theatrical Consult.....	Amy Guerin

*Meeelo go enslow eehak noeeehom chaymah dayko zah Zhi lo cah ma dah eh ha day Oh hay sah may lah lo may ah zah*

Zephyrus through my whipping hair Boreas cross my frosted red lips Eurus trace my shadow place Notus bring the Southern Cross Verglas hold the farthest clouds in still remembrance I cannot wake without you Cassiopeia, Monoceros, Circinus, Delphinus, Argo Navis... Star Hunter... When you came ashore I thought we'd see unbound days and coastal evening sea grass stars sand smoothed out like honeyed silk... you know all our stars by heart: Cassiopeia, Monoceros, Circinus, Delphinus, Argo Navis... Orion lighting midwinter ices you sail by the the brightest and easiest by the quietest by the dimmest by sun and under cloud in mist and in storm and they come for you... 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 I thought you were an ordinary sailor I took your seal skin You'd given me Given me all wrapped in linen and tears sea grass stars slide through my fingers Sand smoothed out like honeyed silk Zephyrus through my whipping hair Boreas cross my frosted red lips Eurus trace my shadow place Notus bring the Southern Cross Verglas hold the farthest clouds in still remembrance I cannot wake without you Cassiopeia, Monoceros, Circinus, Delphinus, Argo Navis... Star Hunter... When you came ashore I thought we'd see unbound days and coastal evening sea grass stars sand smoothed out like honeyed silk... you know all our stars by heart: Cassiopeia, Monoceros, Circinus, Delphinus, Argo Navis... Orion lighting midwinter ices you sail by the the brightest and easiest by the quietest by the dimmest by sun and under cloud in mist and in storm and they come for you... Pleiades light long

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Misha Penton's diverse performing career includes opera and multidisciplinary performance projects. Most recently, she sang the role of Leah in Ofer Ben-Amots' contemporary multimedia chamber opera, The Dybbuk, presented by the Jewish Community Center Houston's Maurice Adamo Music Foundation Residency. She has also created the roles of Isabelle and Brooklyn in the world premieres of The Masque by Roger Keele for Lone Star Lyric Theater Festival and James Norman's opera Wake with Opera Vista, respectively; and Marguerite in Norman's Incline, O Maiden, a monodrama for soprano and chamber ensemble, with Audio Inversions, a new music ensemble in Austin, Texas. Misha is the founder, artistic director, and ensemble lead artist of Divergence Vocal Theater, a Houston-based opera and multidisciplinary performing arts company. In 2008-09 she sang Ottavia in Divergence Vocal Theater's The Ottavia Project, Sapho in The 10th Muse, and was a featured soloist in Autumn Spectre. Each production was a collaborative, multidisciplinary, theatrical fusion of classical vocal pieces, text, dance, piano works, and multimedia. Upcoming Divergence Vocal Theater projects include the world premieres of the new opera-theater work, Selkie, a sea tale, composed by Elliot Cole and the new dramatic song cycle by composer James D. Norman, both settings of words by Misha. Misha has released original music recordings and composed music for contemporary dance performances at DiverseWorks Arts Space (Houston), the University of Houston Center for Choreography, and for New Orleans contemporary dance company, Happendance. She has also sung in Mercury Baroque's productions of Pygmalion and Armide; is a member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus, and a Teaching Artist in the schools with Houston Grand Opera's Educational Outreach community engagement wing, HGOco. She is a featured guest artist on the 2007 release of On the Strings of the Rain with pianist and composer Roger Keele and members of the Houston Symphony and Houston Grand Opera Orchestra. [www.mishapenton.com](http://www.mishapenton.com)



### Elliot Cole, composer

Elliot Cole (b.1984) composes music that cuts across traditional, social and institutional territories. Skeptical of traditional concert spaces, he performed his chamber-pop opera Babinagar in living-rooms across Texas. His interest in re-imagining the music drama also led him to co-found the NY-based avant hip-hop trio The Oracle Hysterical, who, in collaboration with the Metropolis Ensemble, will present their hip-hopera The Rake's Progress with orchestra at the 2011 MATA festival. Raised in Austin, he spent seven years in Houston, collaborating on theater projects with Mildred's Umbrella, Main Street Theater, the UH Center for Creative Work, Rice University and the Parnassus Performance Band. He has degrees in both cognitive linguistics and music composition from Rice, and is presently a doctoral student at Princeton University. [www.elliottcole.com](http://www.elliottcole.com)



### Misha Penton, Artistic Director, Soprano, concept, lyrics

Misha Penton's diverse performing career includes opera and multidisciplinary performance projects. Most recently, she sang the role of Leah in Ofer Ben-Amots' contemporary multimedia chamber opera, The Dybbuk, presented by the Jewish Community Center Houston's Maurice Adamo Music Foundation Residency. She has also created the roles of Isabelle and Brooklyn in the world premieres of The Masque by Roger Keele for Lone Star Lyric Theater Festival and James Norman's opera Wake with Opera Vista, respectively; and Marguerite in Norman's Incline, O Maiden, a monodrama for soprano and chamber ensemble, with Audio Inversions, a new music ensemble in Austin, Texas. Misha is the founder, artistic director, and ensemble lead artist of Divergence Vocal Theater, a Houston-based opera and multidisciplinary performing arts company. In 2008-09 she sang Ottavia in Divergence Vocal Theater's The Ottavia Project, Sapho in The 10th Muse, and was a featured soloist in Autumn Spectre. Each production was a collaborative, multidisciplinary, theatrical fusion of classical vocal pieces, text, dance, piano works, and multimedia. Upcoming Divergence Vocal Theater projects include the world premieres of the new opera-theater work, Selkie, a sea tale, composed by Elliot Cole and the new dramatic song cycle by composer James D. Norman, both settings of words by Misha. Misha has released original music recordings and composed music for contemporary dance performances at DiverseWorks Arts Space (Houston), the University of Houston Center for Choreography, and for New Orleans contemporary dance company, Happendance. She has also sung in Mercury Baroque's productions of Pygmalion and Armide; is a member of the Houston Grand Opera Chorus, and a Teaching Artist in the schools with Houston Grand Opera's Educational Outreach community engagement wing, HGOco. She is a featured guest artist on the 2007 release of On the Strings of the Rain with pianist and composer Roger Keele and members of the Houston Symphony and Houston Grand Opera Orchestra. [www.mishapenton.com](http://www.mishapenton.com)

Natasha Manley, is an artist who received her master of music degree from the New England Conservatory of Music. She was a member of the NEC Opera Studio Program under the direction of John Moriarty. In June of 2010 she premiered her first production as part of the HopeWerks Emerging Artist Residency Program entitled Stand by...and go. The production incorporated original music for voice, cello, piano, and percussion as well as modern/contemporary dance. Other recent collaborative efforts have included voice over work for choreographer Jhon r. stonk's Swinging \_\_\_ in the Dark, vocal soloist for choreographer Anneke Hansen's We Should Call it Many Things and voice and movement for choreographer Leslie Scates' The Billies. She is the soprano soloist at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church and has been teaching private voice for 14 years.

### Natasha Manley, soprano



### Jeremy M. Wood, piano (Jeremy's performance is sponsored by Birdhouse Productions)

Originally from the St. Louis, Missouri area, Jeremy M. Wood came to Houston, Texas in 2001 to accept a position on the Music Faculty of Houston Baptist University. In 2002, he accepted the position of Associate Director of Music at St. Agnes Academy (Houston) and became the Director of Music at First Christian Church of Houston. While continuing to serve in both capacities, he has also enjoyed a successful freelance career that has included adjunct positions on the Music Faculties of Houston Community College, McLennan Community College (Waco, Texas), and Southwest Baptist University (Bolivar, Missouri), and was previously the Director of Music for the Waco Children's Theater, Waco Civic Theater, Head Accompanist for the Waco Symphony Chorus, and the Waco Lyric Opera. More recently, he has served as a Music Director for the Lone Star Lyric Theater, and accompanist for the Divergence Vocal Theater both in Houston, Texas. Mr. Wood studied Piano, Voice, and History at Southwest Baptist University, and earned a Master of Music Degree in Collaborative Arts from Baylor University.

Some of Mr. Wood's favorite music directing/accompanying credits: Opera and Operetta—La Traviata, Falstaff, Carmen, Marriage of Figaro, Die Fledermaus, Roman Fever, Face on the Barroom Floor, Amahl and the Night Visitors, Die Operette Mit Schlag!, Mikado, Gondoliers, Pirates of Penzance. Musical Theater—Oklahoma!, My Fair Lady, Bye, Bye Birdie, A Little Night Music, Kiss Me Kate, Godspell, Annie, Into the Woods, Merrily We Roll Along, City of Angels, Les Miserables, Charlie Brown, I Do, I Do. Director/Music Director: Working, Lucky Stiff, Birds of Paradise, Curtains(Houston premier). Recent: Music Director for the Premier of Michael Remson's Sorry, Wrong Number (June 2010) and Music Director for Old Maid and the Thief (June 2010) with Lone Star Lyric Theater. Upcoming: Directing/Music Directing the Texas premier of Striking 12 at St. Agnes Academy (September 2010).

### Olive Chen, cellist

A native of Taiwan, cellist Olive Chen received her master's degree from Rice University, Shepherd Music School in 1993. Ms. Chen has performed as soloist, chamber player or principal cellist of several orchestras in many countries in Asia and major cities in the United States. She is also recognized as an outstanding cello teacher in the greater Houston area where she teaches at Houston Community College, for the Houston Youth Symphony and in her private studio.



### Megan M. Reilly, lighting & media

Megan M. Reilly is a lighting designer and visual artist whose work explores the intersections between installation art, new media, performance and theatrical design. Megan received the 2008-2009 B. Iden Payne award for Outstanding Lighting Design for her work on Ophelia with Tutto Theatre Company in Austin, Texas. Her performance art piece Rapunzel, created with Los Angeles designer Kim Gritzer, received recognition for Excellence in Design as Performance from the United States Institute for Theatre Technology, and an invitation to be performed at the 2007 Prague Quadrennial in the Czech Republic. Her additional Austin design credits include Machinal (Paper Chairs), Murder Ballad Murder Mystery, Black Snow and Ophelia (Tutto Theatre Company), A Brief Narrative of an Extraordinary Birth of Rabbits (Salvage Vanguard Theater), Orestes and Transformations (Cambiare Productions), Biography of Physical Sensations and Mister Z Loves Company (Rubber Repertory and the Fusebox Festival), Trouble in Tahiti and The Impresario (Butler Opera Center), Well Suited (Kathy Dunn Hamrick Dance), The King and I (Forklift Danceworks), Minus Tide (Bayou Radio Theatre), and Portrait (David Mark Cohen New Works Festival). In Houston, Texas, Megan created lighting design and multimedia for Divergence Vocal Theater's site-specific opera, Autumn Spectre, and she is currently collaborating with DVT artistic director, Misha Penton, on a new opera based on Selkie mythology. Before receiving her MFA in Theatrical Design at The University of Texas at Austin, Megan studied in the UT Austin ACTLab under pioneering new media artist, Allucquere Rosanne Stone.

Megan is currently collaborating with theatre artist Katie Pearl on a series of installations entitled, FORESTS-IN-STORAGE. Nationally, her work has been seen at the University of New Hampshire, Lakes Region Summer Theatre (Meredith, NH); New Conservatory Theatre Center, The Actor's Collective, Lunatique Fantastique, and the EXIT Theatre (all in San Francisco, CA). [www.meganreillydesign.com](http://www.meganreillydesign.com)

### Sarah Mosher, costumes

Sarah Mosher received her MFA in theatrical Design from University of Texas at Austin where she produced her thesis, The Fiber of Being: an exploration of the way clothing is used in fairy tales to control, protect and liberate women. Sarah has designed costumes for Ashes, Ashes a new play by Eve Turlbert, directed by Dustin Wills for which she was nominated by the Austin Critics Table for Outstanding Costume Design 2008 and The Way of the World, directed by Jesse Berger, for which she won the 2006-7 Austin Critics Table Award for Outstanding Costume Design. Sarah's credits also include: Plump Jack, an original opera, The Cinderella Factor, produced at Tacoma Museum of Glass and J.B. among others produced in Seattle and Austin. Sarah is thrilled to be working with the imaginative and talented artists at Divergence Vocal Theater.

### David Brown, set design (David's work is sponsored by Triple S Steel)

David Brown is husband, father, photographer, entrepreneur and adventurer. He studied at the University of Houston under Paul Kittleston and Luis Jimenez, and he received his BFA in 2001, graduating Magna Cum Laude. IN 2010, Houston Business Journal Honored him with a 40 Under 40 Award. David is the founder of Spacetaker, a 501(c)3 professional organization and Artist Resource Center located in Houston's First Ward whose mission is to provide artists and small non-profits access to economic development, continuing education, and networking opportunities to support their professional growth. His works have been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions at DiverseWorks, Fotofest, space125gallery and Darke Gallery. David received an Individual Artist Grant Award in 2009. [www.dabfoto.com](http://www.dabfoto.com)

### Serret Jensen, stylist

WigWitch extraordinaire. She's also one of those "I don't do bios" artists, mysterious diva that she is. She has done fantastic work with Houston Grand Opera, Alley Theatre, Houston Ballet, and Lion King on tour. 'Nuff said.



### Meg Brooke, dancer & choreography

Meg Brooker is a multi-disciplinary performing artist and choreographer whose background ranges from Isadora Duncan dance (Lori Belllove & Company) to avant-garde theatre (Richard Foreman's Ontological-Hysterical Theatre). Credits include numerous New York City venues as well as international festivals in Moscow, Amsterdam, Vienna, and Ukraine. Located in Austin, Texas, Meg is a sought-after guest artist, specializing in early modern dance history and techniques ([www.mb-arts.com](http://www.mb-arts.com)). Meg has presented scholarship on early modern dance for the Congress on Research in Dance, the Society of Dance History Scholars, and Moscow State University. Meg also collaborates with musicians, visual artists, and other contemporary choreographers and was nominated for a 2008 Austin Critics Table award for performance of "Isabella." Meg is currently working with painter Linda DeHart on a dance video project designed for large-scale projection in public architectural spaces ([www.colorsinnorm.com](http://www.colorsinnorm.com)). She is on faculty of Tapestry Dance Academy and Sundara Yoga Therapy in Austin, and she has taught on the faculties of the Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation and the School at Steps on Broadway in New York. She holds an MFA in Performance as Public Practice from UT Austin and a BA in Theatre Studies from Yale.



### Miranda Herbert, actor

Miranda Herbert is a graduate of The American Musical and Dramatic Academy - NYC (CPT-1996), Loyola University Chicago (BA-2006) and the University of Houston (MFA-2009). She was most recently seen in the Fan Factory's production of The Stronger as part of their August in August festival. During the day, Miranda leads the Student Affairs Dept. at the Art Institute of Houston-North, is adjunct faculty for Lone Star College - CyFair and a teaching artist for HITS Theatre. Many thanks to Misha for this incredible opportunity and Mom, Dad, & Leo for your constant love and support.

### Melissa McEver, actor

Melissa McEver is a public-relations writer by day and actress and singer by night. She's performed on stages in Houston, the Rio Grande Valley and the Texas Hill Country. Favorite roles have included Woman 1 in "I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change," Miss Sandra in "All Shook Up," Belle in "Beauty and the Beast" and Winnifred in "Once Upon a Mattress." She also sings with the Houston Masterworks Chorus. She's immensely grateful for the chance to work with such talented people at Divergence Vocal Theater. Thanks, Misha!

### In gratitude...

For my muse, Dave. Elliot, thank you, thank you, thank you, for your beautiful music and helping me make this dream a reality. The production of *Selkie, a sea tale*, is funded by PowerBarge LLC, Triple S Steel, Birdhouse Productions, Lynn Birdwell, Raul Cesares; and is supported by KUHF 88.7, Opera America, Forshey Piano, Copydotcom, CultureMap, The Feldenkrais Center of Houston, and Houston Grand Opera. Thank you to the cast, musicians, and creative team for their amazing talents. More thanks to Dave Nickerson, Michael Crowder, Gary Stein, John Bathe, Lois Alba, Frank Vela, Michael Walsh, Alison Greene, Joel Luks, Culture Pilot, and Divisi Strings.



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