

# Selkie, A SEA TALE

MUSIC by ELLIOT COLE

Concept & Lyrics by Misha Penton



Misha Penton, Artistic Director

divergence vocal theater

*Selkie, a sea tale* is ELLIOT COLE's lush musical setting of fairytale poetry by soprano Misha Penton

CAST: Misha Penton, soprano. Patrick Moore, cello. Kyle Evans, piano. Meg Brooker and Yelena Konetchy/Thel Dance Theatre

*Seduction to dive below the waves... Worlds wholly imaginary, intangible, just-out-of-reach; a place and time, outside of place and time...an almost afternoon...a walk through a church belled town, its paths all tiger lily for spring, you stand by a market stall, leaning on a splintered cross beam railing...I dreamed a sea gabled house with widows walk, my skirts all rustle whisper, rustle whisper, rustle whisper...sand smoothed out like honeyed silk...*

*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 a her selkie love, and culminates in her willingness to release him back to the sea...*

*Dear Gentle Listener,*

Firstly, I'd like to introduce the excitingly diverse composer, Elliot Cole, whose music will permeate our evening together. Tonight we will share in his neo-Romantic opera, *Selkie, a sea tale*. It is a work evocative of wild nature, desire, un-reason, and the magic of the indefinable, between-places at the edges of dreams and the boundaries of logical knowing. It is a transliteration: a breaking-apart-and-putting-back-together-again of a very old tale. My hope is that its intangible and multidimensional quality is revealed through Elliot's dynamic rhythms and wave-like melodies woven with whispers, fleeting images, and swirling dances. So, I might ask you to consider suspending for a moment, reason. Suspend of a moment, a desire to order, to know, to understand, and articulate. Instead, allow words, music, movement and images to play like light on water... to wash over and to flood forth...

I initiated this project with Elliot in the spring of 2010, I simply asked him if he'd like to set some of my poetry and he said yes. The concept and libretto was inspired, variously, by the half-human/half-seal Selkie creatures of northern British Isle myth; the wild remoteness of the Pacific Northwest, so far removed from our Southern cityscape; and my personal, seemingly ever-present pang of longing and loss for an idyllic, non-existent home. The work premiered as a staged chamber opera in the fall of 2010 here in Houston, and its professional recording launched in 2012. I'm excited to share the music video I produced and directed, *Softly over sounding waves*, with the stunning photographic work of Raul Casares and Dave Nickerson. The video was filmed on the coast of the Pacific Northwest and here in Houston.

Thank you for bringing the energy of your presence to share in this music and to celebrate the full flowering of *Selkie, a sea tale*. Many heartfelt thanks to my collaborators on this project from its inception to this eve— their commitment and the beauty of their work is cherished. Tonight is the icing on the cake and the bow on the box. And a big thank you, Elliot, for allowing me to borrow your beautiful music for a time, and for your generosity in gifting me complete artistic freedom in its interpretation. — Misha

**Song & Scenes** ~ the performance is approximately 60 minutes (no intermission), then please joins us for a meet & greet after-party celebration!

- i. *Overture*. You know all our stars by heart: Orion, Cassiopeia, Monoceros, Delphinus, Argo Navis...
- ii. *Almost afternoon*. A walk through a church-belled town, its paths all tiger lily for spring...
- iii. *My door shadows open*. The air from the waves swish-swishy-swishes in, to tousle ever so almost not there curtains...
- iv. *Night lifts the moon*. I dreamed a sea gabled house with widows walk...
- v. *Softly over sounding waves*. A seal bobs her beckoning head for us; seduction to join the fearless sea
- vi. *When you came ashore*. Sand smoothed out like honeyed silk; I'd keep you wrapped up in linen and tears
- vii. *Evensed out days*. Heaven's second hand ticks, years charmed by Selkie time
- viii. *Dark night, long night*. A heavy and stubborn nocturnal creature, all mutiny on my chest, breathing my small terror breaths—
- ix. *Ordinary sailor*. When midnight came, I took the seal skin you'd given me...and tiptoe over open night waves...
- x. *Music video: Softly over sounding waves with Meredith Harris, viola*. What this world looks like to me...

**Music Video: Softly over sounding waves**

Performed by Misha Penton, Meredith Harris, Kyle Evans, and Meg Brooker

Directed & Produced by Misha Penton

Director of Photography, Raul Casares

Second Camera, Dave Nickerson

Edited by Cliff Davis

Audio recorded by Todd Hulslander at The Geary Performance Studio Houston Public Radio

Video on Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/61747305>

*Selkie, a sea tale* media, notes, lyrics, performance history, et cetera: [mishapenton.com/selkie.html](http://mishapenton.com/selkie.html)

## Artists...

**Misha Penton, Artistic Director, Concept, Lyrics, Soprano.** Soprano, Misha Penton is a contemporary opera singer, theater and media artist, and writer. She creates collaborative, theatrical and immersive performance ecologies infused with sound and visuality, where audiences harvest meaning from their personal experiences of the work. In her practice, Misha explores feminist myth and fairytale; intuitive creative practices that are expressive of the ephemeral and inarticulate-able; and a broad range of the dynamics of beauty. She is founder and artistic director of Divergence Vocal Theater, an opera and new music multi-performing arts ensemble, where she delves into the role of the conceptualist-creator-performer in collaborative contemporary opera and new music-theatre creation. Misha has sung world premieres by composers Ofer Ben-Amots, Elliot Cole, Dominick DiOrio, and James D. Norman (and collaborated as librettist with Cole, DiOrio, Norman, and George Heathco). Misha is one of Houston Press' 100 Creatives of 2011, and was named a 2012 finalist for Best Artistic Director by the Houston Press Theater Awards. Professional affiliations include Houston Grand Opera, Foundation for Modern Music, Mercury, St. Cecilia Chamber Opera, The University of Houston Center for Creative Work, the Jewish Community Center Houston, and DiverseWorks Arts Space. Recent performances included an appearance with Liminal Space Contemporary Music Ensemble; a reprise of the title role in Dominick DiOrio's Greco-Roman inspired chamber opera, *Klytemnestra* (a setting of Misha's libretto), at The Museum of Fine Arts Houston; and a site specific world premiere collaboration with composer George Heathco in a 19th century military bunker at Fort Worden State Park, Washington. Upcoming projects: DiOrio's *Klytemnestra* at the Dallas Museum of Art in May 2013; and the premiere of a new song cycle based on European fairytales set by composer George Heathco. [mishapenton.com](http://mishapenton.com)

**Elliot Cole, Composer.** Elliot Cole is a composer who also uses video art and computer programming to explore liminal spaces in individual consciousness and cultural memory. Mythology resonates through much of his work: the neo-romantic opera *Selkie*, which taps into Celtic lore, recorded by Divergence Vocal Theater (2013); *The Rake's Progress* and *Billy Budd*, two collaborative hip-hop operas, have been produced, respectively, by the Metropolis Ensemble at the 2011 MATA Festival, and the Lucerne Festival, where he was a Spotlight Artist in 2011; he has performed his own *Babinagar*, a song cycle with Afghan roots, in living rooms across Texas and in New York; and he wrote and performed a score to Sophocles' *Electra* with the University of Houston in 2010. He toured a suite of songs inspired by Grimm's folktales around Germany, and he rapped his *Fisherman and His Wife*, another Grimm's tale, with the Brentano Quartet, and with the Franklin Quartet as a presenter at the Columbia University Remixing Opera conference in 2011. *De Rerum*, a hip-hop lecture that synthesizes mythological and materialist cosmogonies, was incubated in an Opera Shop residency in Chicago, and performed by the Chicago Composers Orchestra. His chamber music has been performed by So Percussion, FLUX Quartet with Logan Coale, Dither, Psappa (UK), the Metropolis Ensemble, Brentano Quartet, Ensemble ACJW, members of the Lucerne Festival Academy and Lucerne Conservatory, Shakuhachi master Riley Lee, violinist Tema Watstein, harpist Mollie Marcuson, singers Nicole Rodin, Misha Penton, Caroline Shaw and Alison Fletcher, and the Sissy Eared Mollycoddles. As a programmer, he is developing a composition tool that blends chance, serialism, ear-driven musicality, and plant-modeling formal grammars. In December 2011, he presented this work with members of the Metropolis Ensemble at The Box (NYC). He is a doctoral candidate in composition at Princeton, and also holds degrees in music and cognitive linguistics from Rice University. [elliotcole.com](http://elliotcole.com)

**Patrick Moore, Cello.** Cellist Patrick Moore is a musician of diverse interests who has performed as a chamber player, soloist, orchestral musician, and new music enthusiast throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe. As an orchestral musician, he has performed with the River Oaks Chamber Orchestra, and is the assistant principal cellist with the Beaumont Symphony Orchestra and Opera in the Heights. He has also collaborated with new music groups such as Aperio New Music Ensemble, Musiq, Divergence Vocal Theater, and the International Contemporary Ensemble. An avid chamber musician, Patrick is also a founding member of the Axiom Quartet. Patrick's principal teachers were Lynn Harrell, Jeffrey Noel Lastrapes, Alex Ezerman, and Barbara Haffner and he received a Bachelors degree from Roosevelt University, and a Masters degree from Rice University. He has also participated in several prestigious festivals including the Round Top Music Festival, the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan, the Manchester Music Festival, and the American Institute of Musical Studies in Austria.

**Kyle Evans, Piano.** Kyle Evans has been heard on KUHA's *The Front Row*, and venues such as The Rothko Chapel, The Miller Outdoor, The Museum of Fine Arts Houston, and The Sage Theatre in NYC. He has performed with Houston Grand Opera's *Opera to Go!* and in numerous educational productions and churches as guest artist. Also known for frequent premieres and thoughtful interpretations of new music, in a recent performance with Divergence Vocal Theater, The Houston Press wrote that he played "with rich insight and emotional wallop." Kyle earned a B.M. from Oklahoma City University where he was winner of the university's concerto competition and an MM from Rice University where he was a pupil of Brian Connelly.

**Meg Brooker, Dancer, Choreographer.** Meg Brooker, Artistic Director of Thel Dance Theatre/Austin, Texas, danced as a member of Lori Belilove & Company/Isadora Duncan Dance Foundation. She has performed, taught, and lectured about early modern dance work in Russia, Crimea, Italy, Costa Rica, and the United States, and is a frequent collaborator with Divergence Vocal Theater. Meg is on faculty at Texas State University and Northwest Vista College. She has presented scholarship for Society of Dance History Scholars and Congress on Research in Dance, contributes to *Dance Studio Life*, and blogs at "Tunics in Texas." Meg also preserves the work of Duncan contemporary Florence Fleming Noyes and serves on the Board of Directors of the Noyes Rhythm Foundation. She holds an MFA from UT Austin and a BA from Yale.

**Yelena (Lena) Konetchy, Dancer.** Yelena (Lena) Konetchy had studied pre-professionally at Bossov Ballet Theatre in Pittsfield, ME and danced professionally with the Illinois Ballet, Charleston Ballet Theatre, free-lance dance, and currently Thel Dance Theatre. She has had the opportunity to have worked and studied under famed dancers such as Amanda McKerrow, Andrei Bossov from the Kirov Ballet (Mariinsky Theatre), Sally Bliss of the Tudor Trust, and Monnette Garcia of Alvin Ailey Company. Yelena Konetchy is also certified in Vaganova ballet pedagogy by ballet master and teacher John White and in Beginner Lester Horton technique under Ana Marie Forsythe. In Austin, she continues to teach, choreograph and perform, and is currently working close with 4th generation Isadora Duncan dancer Meg Brooker as company manager of Thel Dance Theatre.

**Thel Dance Theatre** is a repertory performance company dedicated to the exploration of early modern dance practices and the creation of new works, including technique and repertory of Isadora Duncan and her contemporaries. Upcoming projects include a return to Russia and the first ever Isadora Duncan International Symposium at George Washington University in June 2013.

*Lighting by Frank Vela, Luke Fedell, and Brian Ealey*

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