

The Goddess' People: a mini-opera in four scenes, for
Inion, Priestess-----soprano, Dawna Rae Warren.
Sanbin, old woman-----soprano or mezzo, Alice Del Simone,
Iora, young woman-----soprano or mezzo, Alice Del Simone,
Graw, former Priestess, and mother of Inion--mezzo or contralto,
Wendy Silvestir,
Fwath, "The Bear", and father of Inion-----baritone, or bass-----me,
and midi piano.

Scene and Situation: the Sacred Hilltop, there is a Holy Tree, with a Sacred Oracular Tripod. The "Goddess' People" are an older, matriarchal people under subjugation to a newer, patriarchal Empire. It is the evening of their spring celebration. Some time ago some Imperial soldiers, drunken, murdered two babies belonging to the older group, Graw and Fwath's two babies.

The mini opera portrays the yearly Spring Rite by recounting the Sun's (Goddess') annual journey through the zodiac (as perceived from Earth). The Rite begins at sunset, and culminates at sunrise, with a ritual sexual union between the Priestess and her boyfriend (don't worry, the rite is interrupted before this occurs).

The mini opera is about the two different reactions to criminal tragedy (the murder of Graw's and Fwath's two babies): Fwath (and his rebel group) is obsessed with retaliation, which leads to never ending fighting back and forth with the Empire. Graw has tried to accept the tragedy and live with it (and their daughter).

Scene 1:

Fwath: [quoting from the religious rite sung by Inion in Scene 3] "Oh the world can be a cold, the land an empty place, the mountains and the plain by the sea--"

[enter Graw]

Graw:

"Deserted?" Fwath?

Fwath:

Graw. I thought I might find you here. I'm glad to have found you here.

Graw:

You knew I would be here. It is the Holy Day. This is the Sacred Place.

Fwath:

Of course.

[pause]

Graw:

I've missed you as well. We hear of you at times. Your fights, your victories.

Fwath:

Victories need battles. We are hardly capable of mounting those. Still we do what we may.

Graw:

Your fights, your battles, even your deaths, [with a little humor] to hear it from the Empire you've died yourself several times!

Fwath:

[with a little humor] Not I, but women and men every bit as good, and the enemy shall pay for them!

Graw:

You should come to the Ceremony, gain the Goddess' forgiveness.

Fwath:

Forgiveness for what?

Graw:

For your sins against your people!

Fwath:

I have only ever fought FOR my people!

Graw:

You kill them, and they kill us. Don't you see? It never ends!

Fwath:

I cannot control them! Priestess, you know that!

Graw:

You're mad!

Fwath:

How can you say that? After what you've seen? When you see wrong clearly before you, you have a duty: to make it right! I have seen it!

Graw:

It goes on and on, first them then us. It never ends. If you think it will, you're a mad man.

Fwath:

No Graw, I'm not mad, neither do I think are you. It is your own will that sustains your dreaming!

Graw:

Dreaming? Or living? I have not forgotten. Some times at night my body in a cold sweat, I have to go to that cold, accursed place where we found them, still in their bundles. I died that night. I die there every night. But Fwath, there are also good, and beauty. I have chosen to live with them. [motioning off-stage] Your daughter.

Fwath:

Then I go.

Graw:

No, stay.

Fwath:

I--must go. [exit Fwath]

Scene 2:

[Enter Inion]

Graw:

What? You without your young man? Will the ground open up? Will the sky fall upon us?

Inion:

Mom, you know Bwachil can't come! At least not yet.

Inion + Graw:

At least not yet. [etc.]

Inion:

Mother, I'm afraid. It will be the first time! Oh, my stomach aches! Oh my legs feel wobbly! I don't know how I could sing! Mi, mi, mi, mi, mi! Mi, mi, mi, mi, mi!

Graw:

Inion, it will be all right. I know you well. You have studied hard. You're of that age.

Inion:

Mother, I could not sleep a wink! I tossed and turned all night long! [upon further reflection, I've realized "all day long!" works better here] I have not eaten. I could not practice.

Graw:

Inion, settle down, you'll be all right. You always have. Look toward the end.

Inion:

Mother, I must tell you something more. What happens between us, I mean between Bwachil and me, at the end of the rite, well, it's happened before.

Graw:

That's what's bothering you? Didn't you think that I knew? We need to practice that part just like all the rest. All priestesses do so. If you two had not done so then I would have said something.

Inion + Graw:

You [I] need not say anything. [etc.]

Graw:

Now, repeat after me. Mi, mi, mi, mi, mi.

Inion:

Mi,mi,mi,mi,mi,[Embellishing somewhat] Mi, mi. mi, mi, mi. [etc.]

Inion [embellishing somewhat] + Graw: Mi, mi, mi, mi, mi. [etc.]

Graw: [with an askance look] Good, now you're ready, blow your horn!
[They blow their horns, first Inion and then Graw.]

Scene 3

[The people enter in small groups carrying their gifts, the youngsters cavorting]

Inion:

Hear, oh people of our land, hear oh children of the Sun, most loved of the universe, hear me and come! You by the shores bring your fishes and you of the fields bring your ales! You of the mountain vales bring your bear skins! Hear, oh people of our land, hear, oh children of the Sun, most loved of the universe! Look, my people, to the west! The Goddess cries Herself to sleep. She cries tears of gold for the lover who was lost three months ago, and still She cries. She can see the place ahead, Just six months more upon Her way: the place where he cried out. He was bitten by the serpent [which modern day astronomers refer to as "Serpens Caput", that is "The Head of the Serpent",

just north of and between the Virgin ("Virgo") and the Scales ("Libra")]. This is the story of Her journey: first She passes the Ram ("Aries"), then the Bull ("Taurus"), then the--[At this point Inion continues in mime, while the people separate into small groups and talk among themselves. One of these:]

Sanbin:

Iora, how is your family?

Iora:

We're all right?

Sanbin:

Don't you know me? I'm Sanbin, your mother's old friend?

Iora:

Of course.

Sanbin:

How's your father's back?

Iora:

Not better.

Sanbin:

I'll put a healing spell upon it!

Iora:

Thank you!

Sanbin:

And on your sheep!

Iora:

Thank you! Thank you!

Sanbin:

What about your grandmother's joints?

Iora:

I wish I could say they were better!

Sanbin:

Oh, what a shame! I have no cures for such a--[The people attend to Inion again]

Inion:

--then She passes the Virgin ("Virgo"), and then the Scales ("Libra") and there he is: the serpent who had killed Her lover. Oh, the world can be a cold, the land an empty place the mountains and the plain by the sea deserted! We know the feeling, so does She. But then the serpent says to Her "Look to

Your own womb. Therein a new life waits for You. Remember that You slept one last time there together, by the Sea Goat ("Capricorn")" And amidst great suffering She gives birth--[The people talk again among themselves]

Sanbin:

Iora, have you heard the latest?

Iora:

Latest?

Sanbin:

Yes, on the rebels.

Iora:

No, please tell!

Sanbin:

It was down by Farraige, down by the sea where the road cuts a cleft through the hills--

Iora:

Of course.

Sanbin:

--that I saw them, a hundred women and men strong, some with swords, some with bows, and their leader, the one they call The Bear, he was in front. Soon some Namhuids show up bringing their taxes for the Empire. Then he gives the cry and they're all upon them in the cleft. Twelve Namhuids fall, the rest surrender. The Bear, he takes the gold in the name of the Goddess.

[Fwath enters discreetly. Sanbin notices Fwath and points him out to Iora]

That's him! I could swear it! Iora!--

Iora: Yes?

Sanbin:--that's him! The Bear!

[Fwath is engaged with another small group. Eventually everyone pays attention to him. Inion gives up trying to continue]

Fwath:

Yes, I was one of those who served our lords. Yes, I fought their enemies and ours. Life was good then with wife and children. Life was good then, but now it's spoiled! a murderer's death is not MORE just than the victim's, a murder is wrong, retribution is just! This is no matter of degree! Yes the Bear once served the enemy until he came home from their wars. What he found there he cannot forget: two dead children, slain by his supposed new friends, whom he slew. Would any of you say that he did wrong?

Inion:

Yes! The Goddess would! There is a time to act, and a time to leave well enough alone. Don't you see? Don't you know the Goddess could have killed him, the serpent, whenever She might choose? But then She wouldn't have his wisdom, and would have suffered even more! Come all ye heavily laden, be it with shame or with grief, and receive your Goddess' love and blessing! Hear, oh people of our land, hear, oh children of the Sun, most loved of the universe! [Some go up to the Priestess. She, seated on the Oracular Tripod, hears them one at a time]

Graw:

Fwath! Fwath! Fwath!

Fwath:

Yes? [taken aback]

Graw:

So, are you going up there?

Fwath:

She is my daughter--

Graw:

Yes.

Fwath:

--but I don't know her.

Graw:

Was that her fault? What, are you afraid? The great warrior afraid? The great Bear afraid?

Fwath:

Yes, perhaps. I can't explain it.

Graw:

Perhaps I can. Let me help you. Perhaps it is that you are--human?

Fwath:

What do you mean?

Graw:

What, do you contest it? The great warrior, the great Bear is not human? So, are you part elf, or are you part dwarf, or perhaps half a god?

Fwath:

No, I am not a god, I am barely a human being, certainly not a father!

Graw:

And yet you are.

Fwath:

Did you tell her who I was?

Graw:

She knows.

Fwath:

Does she know that I am here?--I mean, that I am he?

Graw:

I suppose. Everyone else here seems to.

Fwath:

She must have asked you, I mean, why her father never visited his child.

Graw:

Yes.

Fwath:

What did, what did you--tell her?

Graw:

That her mother would take good care of her regardless!

Fwath:

Thank you, Graw, I owe you so much! Can it be that you forgive me?

Graw:

Perhaps.

Fwath:

But can it be that she'll forgive me?

Graw:

Go and see!

Scene 4:

[Inion is speaking with Iora, the last suppliant. Fwath slowly makes his way toward her]

Inion:

What do you wish to ask of the Goddess? She is here!

Iora:

Will my heart ever heal?

Inion:

Tell Me your story!

Iora:

I also had a child, he was the most precious part of my life. He lived with me after his father and I went our separate ways. I would give anything if he could be here now. But that is selfish. Everyone here has lost loved ones, yet if he could be here right now, safe in my arms, I could be happy, I would be happy now.

Inion:

You are a gentle soul. You have been deeply hurt, but you will heal. [Iora leaves Inion, sneaks offstage. To Fwath:] What do you wish to ask of the Goddess? She is here!

Fwath:

I am most--ashamed!

Inion:

Tell Me your story! [uncomfortable silence] You must tell me your story if you hope for the Goddess' help, my child!

Fwath:

Yes, my child! You know who I am?

Inion:

Yes.

Fwath:

And yet you speak with me!

Inion:

The Goddess loves all Her people.

Fwath:

And now that I've seen you, and heard of your wisdom, I love you too! I am sorry my Goddess! I mean I love my daughter. Can You forgive me and take away my shame? [Inion leaves the tripod, and stands with Fwath]

Inion:

There was a time that I was angry, a time that I hated you. Now I think I'm past that.

Fwath:

Thank you!

Inion + Fwath:

I (you) think I'm (you're) past that. [etc.]

Fwath:

Let us get some bear skins, fish and ale to sup! Shall we call your mother?

Inion:

Why not? [Fwath motions to Graw, who joins them]

Fwath:

Here we shall lie beneath the stars, lie here upon the Sacred Hill, beneath the Holy Tree, in the Goddess' embrace!

Inion:

My embrace!

Fwath:

Here and now I am free of worries and fears thanks to you (Inion), and you (Graw), and Her (The Goddess). Away, away my worries go!

Inion + Fwath:

Away, away your (my) worries go!

Inion+ Graw +Fwath:

Away, away, our worries go! [etc] But we are forgetting!

Inion:

We are forgetting?

Graw:

You are forgetting!

Inion:

We are forgetting!

Inion + Graw + Fwath:

Forgetting! [etc.]

Fwath:

What?

Graw:

We are forgetting the third invocation. [She nods to Inion]

Inion:

Hear, oh people of our land, hear, oh children of the Sun, most loved of the universe, hear, and rejoice! I thank you from the shores for your fishes and you of the fields for your ales! And you of the mountain vales for your bear skins! Hear, oh people of our land, hear, oh children of the Sun, most loved of the universe!

Fwath:

Graw?

Inion:

Look my people to the east! [oblivious of Graw and Fwath]

Graw:

What?

Fwath:

Graw?

Inion:

The Goddess lights the eastern sky!

Graw:

No! Not now!

Inion:

The light grows and who knows what it portends?

Fwath:

Why not?

Graw:

Because!

Inion:

I must wait and watch.

Graw:

You know the ceremony!

Fwath:

Oh, the ceremony.

Inion:

You may sleep now while I watch.

Graw:

Yes, the ceremony!

Inion:

Have no fear nor worry now!

Fwath:

We must wait?

Graw:

Yes we must wait.

Fwath:

Oh!

Graw:

Now be quiet and go to sleep!

Fwath:

Oh! [Everyone is lying on the bear skins on the ground, asleep]

Inion:

Who knows what the morn shall bring? Ha, already asleep! Soon it will be dawn. Soon Bwachil will come! [All are asleep, except Inion. Iora enters, behind her, touches her shoulder, almost a caress. Inion turns. Iora carries a knife]

Hey! What! Who are you?

Iora:

Iora. Don't you know me Priestess?

Inion:

Yes, of course.

Iora:

And I know you. I have always liked you. That is why I'm going to save you.

Inion:

Save me--from what?

Iora:

A whole Imperial cohort just behind that hill.

Inion:

You've betrayed our people!

Iora:

I betrayed the Bear, and will be well payed. Come!

Inion:

Not by me! [Inion draws a knife from her cloak and stabs Iora]

Iora:

[mortally wounded, finally:] Since when do you carry a blade?

Inion:

All priestesses do so.

Iora:

Oh! [expires]

Inion:

Arise! Arise! [Inion blows her horn] Arise, my people! The enemy is here!

Arise and fight! [the people arise, many of them producing previously concealed weapons, and exit the stage.]