

The Flowering Desert

Libretto by Roxanne Korda

Composed by Daniel Blanco Albert

*This piece is written ideally for performances in a planetarium space
but can be adapted for stage.*

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Overture

Pre-recorded voice and the main text to be used for the overture.

The Measurer:

Though it seemed dead,
The ground tonight is now a purple field.
Our atmosphere's chaos made a flowering spread.

We are watching
Through a robotic eye to chart things hidden. They may
lie in plain sight but at first glance we never see
them.

As I lie
Facing the Atacaman sky,
The stars like the data on the screens of La Silla.
Which new worlds might we explore? The stargazed
Aquarius constellation brings us the dim glow of
Trappist 1.

It is
Nothing like our sun.
Turbulent and destructive enough
To create an active world, the desierto florido I lie
on.
A red dwarf could never make a world like ours. There
is little hope for life.

Yet,
I will search
Like all good astronomers should.

*The poems introducing each character can be read by the performers
from behind the audience at various points during the overture.*

Pantele

*Pantele has two voices: the "shadow" and the "self". The "shadow" is
Pantele's subconscious, and the "self" is Pantele's projection of how
other things should see it. Pantele is pronounced pan'ti:lɪ (pan-tee-
lih):*

Pantele:

I the planet Pantele,

(self) One side never night,
(shadow) One side never bright,

With a shadow as strong as my self.

(*shadow*) Formed just as my mother star
 (*self*) From the rubble of her welding parts.

With a shadow as strong as myself.

(*shadow*) Every three years I see my neighbour twice,
 (*self*) Every two years I see my neighbour thrice.

I the planet Pantele
 With a shadow as strong as my self.

(*self*) A dusky cage of persistent sunrise,
 (*shadow*) The terminator where light dies.

I the planet Pantele.

Mother Star

Together this SATB chorus is the character - Mother Star.

Mother Star:

I the Mother Star.
 Parent, child, and carer.
 Kind and endless source.
 An axis of the eternal.
 Young but older than most,
 Common but barely observed.
 I the Mother Star.

Xoe

Xoe is pronounced 'ʒə:ɛ' (zhoh-ay)

Xoe:

I am the comet, Xoe.

I am the two tailed trickster.
 Dropping via counter steered descent.
 To a mother star skirt's brim.

Frozen stone exterior
 Radiate rays effervescent,
 Excitement - begin.

I am the comet, Xoe.

I am the two tailed messenger.

Travelled far beyond this system's edge,
In an ever-wiser spin.

With a motion pendular.
Path perturbed by planetary dredge,
Secret's I've within.

Scene 1

Xoe is flying towards Pantele and the system. It is moving steadily towards the system but still not next to Pantele. It will move faster as it gets closer to the Mother Star. Pantele hears Xoe.

Recitative

Xoe:

Pantele!
Someone is watching you Pantele!

Pantele:

Xoooooooooooo! *(Pantele sings in a windy fashion)*
Good day Xoe.
You are back from your wanderings,
What news did you bring?

Xoe:

Great and mysterious news!
I think that something watches from afar.
It searches a sky for discoveries,
And now it searches for you Pantele!

Pantele starts to fight with itself and become more and more excited.

Aria for two halves of the self

Pantele:

(self) What does Xoe mean?
(shadow) What does Xoe mean?

(shadow) I can see the world outside,
Kaleidoscopic distant eyes.
I spied to them and now it seems
That one is spying back on me.

Dark winds blow to wake my soul,
And carry thoughts to make me whole.

(self) These smarting Coriolis winds
Whip up the sands, make thoughts spin.
I never dreamt I'd ever be
Known out there in the galaxy.

Another star-bound family?
Someone there is watching ME!

Throughout the aria Xoe has moved much closer to Pantele as it flies towards Mother Star in an arc. By the end of the aria Xoe is next to Pantele on the stage.

Recitative

Xoe:

Steady on now Pantele . . . Couple of setbacks deary.

They seek a life like theirs, and that cannot be you.
Soon their gaze will drift, you are not one of few.

Cheerio, tally Ho, out I trot, off I pop!

After finishing Xoe moves to stage left of Pantele and starts the journey towards the mother star, moving faster now than before.

Pantele feels like all joy has been suddenly shattered. Its "self" succumbs to a darkness that its "shadow" lives in. Its "shadow" however has been given some hope.

Recit

Pantele:

(self) Silly Pantele! Nothing could look upon you.
What could they see? One side scarred another side
bruised.

(shadow) But no . . . Maybe I can change, project some
majesty - become the things they want to see!

Mélodrame 1

The Measurer:

My eyes now closed,
Covered by an Atacameñan blanket.
Stars pricking underneath my eyelids.
Cold air currents inspire through my nose.

(the measurer inhales sharply, opens their eyes and pauses briefly)
 Why do we search for life at all?
 Is that all the universe is there for?

Scene 2

Mother Star sings but never answers. It exists in a different realm to Pantele and so struggles to understand or take notice of Pantele. However, Mother Star is always both giving to and attacking Pantele, through heat and radiation.

Brutal mother and forgotten child duet

Here the Mother Star chorus represents the fusion and metallicity of the star. It sings about the hydrogen fusion in a self-obsessed and conversational manner.

Mother star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

If they find their reflection,
 They flee in the other direction.

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Oh, Iron I say,
 You look feral today.

Pantele:

Mother, can you hear me?
 Something happened to us.

Mother Star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Lithium is missing.
 Hydrogen is kissing.

Pantele:

Mother I'm ecstatic,

There's something so fantastic!

Mother Star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Out struts Titanium Oxide,
The cool M Dwarf guide.

Pantele:

Mother, can you listen?
I discovered my ambition.

Mother Star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Vanadium Oxide - so amorphous,
Rather dense and rather formless.

Pantele:

Mother, can you hear me?
This might be momentous!

Mother Star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Good evening mistress silicon.
You've almost reached the central dome.

Pantele:

Mother listen to me!
You're being so unruly.

Mother Star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Such metals make a chill,
Through round rouge ruddier fill.

Pantele interrupts with increasing frustration

Mother Star:

Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Pantele:

Mother don't ignore me!
Your child has so much anxiety -
Mother, for once - please hear me!

Pantele collapses with exhaustion over its attempts to communicate with Mother Star.

Mélodrame 2

The Measurer:

Screaming? No cheering!
Really I must go back.
It's coming from the observatory.
Let me experience this moment a little longer.
(measurer breaths in and out)
This desert smells nostalgic.
Millennia of worlds who stood here before.
We humans are small - the flowers showed me that.

Scene 3

Xoe is about halfway between Mother Star and Pantele on its return. In its frustration Pantele suddenly hears Xoe singing about its return.

Recit

Xoe:

Back I trot, out I pop.

Pantele:

Xoe, can you help?
Send me some advice?
How can I be life, like them?

Xoe:

I'm so glad you asked.
But it will be hard to do,

Xoe's tone intensifies to signify an important message:

First -
 Your mother's grasp is strong
 She holds and governs you.
 But you can start to tame her-
 Turn her weaponry to armour!
 Second -
 Alone you cannot manage.
 You need some added magic,
 That only comes with luck.

Returning to a lighter tone:

Habitability is hospitality and so far, you have none.

Pantele:

I have neither one?

Tidal Heating Trio

Xoe:

Your mother has been tugging
 Within you is a friction
 The outward eccentricity
 Now dissipates internally
 And caused a deformation
 While underneath a bubbling

The Mother star like an irritated teenager is suffering a constant convection and burning. It laments its spot covered surface. This makes the cries and anxiety from Pantele, and the meddling of Xoe, even more frustrating. It lashes out by releasing a bombardment of protons on Pantele.

Mother Star:

Look there, and there and there -
 Another spot!?
 A darkish flare?
 This mournful magnetic mass
 In constant repair.

Pantele:

(Self)
 As I let my mother pull me,
 My skins crack to release a moan.
 Active and sore to my core,
 A heated tidal bulge.

Mother Star:

Now what is that I hear?
 Something buzzing at my ear?
 This proton punishment you'll see
 For failing to just leave me be!

Mother Star choir the directs a painful bombardment at Pantele.

Paaah ha ha ha
 Pohhh ho ho ho
 Peeee he he he

During this proton bombardment a magnetic field starts to be generated around Pantele. As this happens the protons flying into the field are deflected and cause an aurora (glow) at the top and bottom of Pantele.

Xoe:
 Your shield is glowing.
 A veridian glow is humming.

Pantele:
 (shadow) Aurora's at my rim
 (self) My mother's glare gets dim

Recit

Pantele:
 (shadow) Let me be known I want to bloom.
 (self) Xoe wait! Help me with the second task.

Freeze as the lights go off

Mélodrame 3

The Measurer:
 It smells dusty in here.
 Everyone crowds at the screens.
 Waiting my turn, then at last I see them -
 Transits.
 I don't dare to blink.
 A system and planets b to g.

Scene 4

Recit

Xoe is suddenly filled with sadness and mild panic.

Xoe:

The second task is harder.
More dangerous and painful than the first.
It is not just you who will be hurt.

Pantele:

(self) You've made me so afraid,
(shadow) But this coloured peripheral vortex
Is soothing all my scars.

Xoe's triumphant aria

Xoe:

Be brave Pantele.
You are seeing clearly.

At last you found your magnetism,
I am so proud of how you listened.
This final journey past Mother star,
I noticed my tail burning out fast.

I cannot brightly shine forever.
There's more that we can do together.
And so it is with this last plunge,
My adventures all will be expunged.

All elements for life can form.
Though first they may seem toxic,
Embrace your star and be transformed,
Once inert now biotic.

With these words Xoe flies on a collision course into Pantele.

Recit

Pantele:

Xoe don't come so close,
Be careful - slow down
Xoe!

Xoe:

And now for the final wound.
I'll meet you on your winds.
It's time for life to begin!

As it dives it breaks into many tiny pieces, some of which burn up on entry and some of which eventually smack into the surface of Pantele. When they do this, they cause huge plumes to rise from the surface of Pantele and spread across the surface from the bright side of the "self" to the dark side of the "shadow".

Pantele:

Aaaaaaawhoooooooooooo
Whooooooooohaaaaaaa

Xoe:

(hum) Z-O-E

Hymn

Pantele:

The airs I blow have hope.
A field protects my face.
Thank you Mother,
Thank you Xoe.

Mélodrame 4

The Measurer:

Through smarting eyes I have to blink,
I think I've seen it all.
My mind has found how life could be so strange and
full in other worlds.
Thank you Xoe
You reminded me - I believe
In life after all.