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The Role of the Instrumental Musician in Theatre

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Abstract

Anna Rushmer examines the role of the instrumental musician in theatre throughout time to uncover both new and old methods of incorporating them into productions in a meaningful way. Rushmer demonstrates that by treating music as a priority alongside dialogue in both communication and construction of the plot, musical works are able to engage and involve audiences in more intimate and unexpected ways. Research led performance practice has informed her own written and directed theatrical work, where the music of a flute player is a key element in the interpretation and understanding of the work. The analysis of this performance adds to the existing research on musicians in theatre. Practice led research advocates the benefits of forging a closer relationship between the two crafts and provides a clearer understanding of how musicians may be utilised effectively in a theatrical setting.

Declaration

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university and to the best of my knowledge and belief contains no materials previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signed 

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Chapter 1

The expectations of the role of the instrumental musician in theatre is often narrowly framed and their ability to engage and contribute to theatrical performances needs to be expanded. Music and theatre have a long, shared history, in a multitude of realms less familiar than the well documented areas of musical theatre and opera. To this end, the role of music in Ancient Greek theatre, Elizabethan theatre and Beckettian theatre will be explored. Through a comparison of historical approaches to modern approaches, an investigation will be undertaken into the different kind of responsibilities current musicians have in creating and communicating the meaning of a theatrical work to an audience.

Research led performance practice has formed the methodology whereby a self-written and directed work has been the focus of the case study, in which a flute player and her music is integral to the plot and interpretation of the story. The analysis of this performance will add to the existing research on instrumentalists in theatrical spaces. The overall findings demonstrate the value in incorporating historical and contemporary examples and observes a clear interest from audiences for further experimentation in this area.

Chapter 2

Instrumental Musicians in Theatre through Time

Musicians have long been used in theatrical productions in various ways. It is helpful to know what has been previously attempted in this space to investigate areas, which may have been forgotten, but remain pertinent to a modern audience. To exemplify these different approaches, the musician's role in Ancient Greek, Elizabethan, and Beckettian Theatre will be explored.

2.1. Ancient Greece

The music of Ancient Greece was considered lost until developments in the last twenty-five years (D'Angour 2018). This was largely due to problems interpreting music notation. All but 60 relics of music notation were destroyed over time, which made attempting to cross reference and prove findings quite difficult. Furthermore, initial attempts to do so, found the Greek's use of quarter tones to sound unpleasant and incorrect to modern ears. However, in recent times, contemporary musicians have become accustomed to both world and experimental music which incorporates these intervals. This has paved the way for a fresh interpretation, in which these quarter tones would have been used as passing notes, thus making the melodic content much easier to follow (D'Angour 2018).

2.1.1. Music and Theatre in Ancient Greek Society

Historians have long known the importance of music to Ancient Greek society, despite these difficulties in understanding the music itself (Antcliffe 1930). Music

was seen to reflect the orderliness of the cosmos and was associated closely with mathematics and knowledge. It was included as one of the four branches of mathematics, and so to complete a 'master's degree' one had to study music (Antcliffe 1930). Theatre too, was an important democratic tool in Ancient Greece, the tragedies, comedies and satyrs performed were often allegorical to the political climate of Athens. So then as a consequence of viewing the play, people would engage in deeper conversations about the state (Bakewell 2011). 'Tragedy' in particular was very much a public forum for important discussion.

Contemporary understanding of the relationship between music and theatre in Ancient Greece has recently been revitalised. The Ancient Greek word 'mousike' refers to that which was given by the mythological muses, and so is a broader translation than just music. Music, dance and acting are all included within this frame (Wilson 1999).

"A crucial reorientation in ... the contextualisation of tragedy, (is) that tragedy itself is mousike; that, as a major form of public performance, tragic drama was conceived of by its performers and spectators as a prime example of that complex mix of song, dance and word which went by the name mousike." (Wilson 1999 p.428)

This is crucial to researching instrumental musicians in theatre, as it acknowledges that in tragedy, one of the major theatrical forms, not only would there have been acting, but also music and dance. Remembering the important social and political importance of tragedies, this puts much more onus on the musical aspects of performance as well as the role of music in engaging with social and political communication (Bakewell 2011).

2.1.2. Music in Theatre in Ancient Greece

Interestingly, despite Ancient Greek mythology attributing the origins of all artforms to the muses, music and theatre are protected by different gods (Hemingway 2004).

Music is the realm of Apollo, who is a frequent companion of the muses and is the god of music, poetry, art, as well as the hunt. In statues and relics, he is often depicted with a lyre – a stringed instrument that was plucked, most similar to a modern guitar. However, Dionysus, best known as the god of wine and revelry, is also the god of tragedy and protector of theatres (Hemingway 2004). The markedly different treatment of ‘the arts’ to the theatre, shows how socially distinct theatre was from the other artforms. Therefore, when examining Ancient Greece, the study of music within theatre should be treated separately to the general study of music.

The form of music in theatre has been widely debated. Ancient Greek music was mostly single melody based (but not exclusively as there are words for harmonies) and voice would be accompanied by a singular instrument (Forbes 1967). In general society, the lyre was widely preferred as its tone allowed the accompanying voice to be heard clearly, and also because the one musician could sing and play at the same time (Hoegnifioh 2022). Despite this, the aulos was the preferred accompaniment instrument in theatre – although the lyre was also used (Wilson 1999). The aulos is a wind instrument with two pipes, both of which use a double reed, similar to the modern oboe. It creates a bright penetrating sound, with which the voice can find it hard to compete (Forbes 1967). The Aulos has the following origin in mythology;

“Athena (goddess of wisdom) created the aulos... [then discarded it for disfiguring her face]. The satyr Marsyas found the aulos and challenged the god Apollo to a musical competition; Marsyas played the aulos and Apollo, the lyre. During the contest, Apollo turned his instrument upside down and played it. Since Marsyas could not do the same, Apollo won and punished the satyr.” (Hoegnifioh 2022 p. 44)

Although Satyrs were seen as base, bawdy figures, they came to be respected as accepted followers of Dionysus. Their ‘inferior’ instrument, the aulos, then too became intrinsically linked to both debauchery and the worship of Dionysus, so its presence in the theatre seems natural (Hoegnifioh 2022). A competitive edge between the music of theatre and music elsewhere is evidenced by Apollo’s seldom

presence in theatre works. When he does appear, he is presented with only a bow, symbolic of his role as god of the hunt, rather than his usual lyre (Wilson 1999).

Dionysus, the god of tragedy and protector of theatres, has a bacchic rhythm which is thought to have been played in most performances in deference to him (Forbes 1967). The rhythm is termed 'bacchic' as it is associated with Bacchus, an alternate name of Dionysus given because of a frenzy he would produce called *Baccheia*. While in some plays it was only alluded to, the rhythm would definitely occur if Dionysus appeared as a character on stage and worked as a type of leitmotif or theme song. It is known as his theme, since outside of theatre the same rhythm was also used in worship. Dionysus was unique among the gods in being given a leitmotif, so it can be interpreted that this was a particular way of respecting the theatre god in the theatre context. His personal rhythm is described as "measures of five time counted in terms of two plus three beats or three plus two and are appropriately designated 'limping meters'" (Forbes 1967). This rhythm is also attributed as the Baccheios - 12(3)4(5) – where accents apply to numbers without brackets. It consists of one short syllable and two long syllables, "This metrical foot is designated to the Ancient Greek god Dionysus... also dedicated to Mimalones, Vassares and all the Bacchides" (Chatzis 2017) While it was generally thought there was little percussion used in theatre, this implies there was at least some, suggesting a number of instrumentalists present (Wilson 2000).

2.1.3. The Aulos in Ancient Greek Theatre

The aulos was designed to play in the Ancient Greek Phrygian mode (West 1992). Interestingly, due to a mistranslation sometime in the Middle Ages, the ancient Greek Phrygian mode equates to our modern Dorian mode, and the Lydian mode attributed to the ancient lyre, would actually have played predominantly in our same major scale (Ionian mode) (West 1992). It is now understood that Ancient Greek tone and semitone intervals were transcribed originally from top to bottom of the scale, but researchers in the early enlightenment assumed it would be in reverse and

translated them from bottom to top, leading to the misperception (West 1992). This perhaps implies there was a stronger emphasis on descending lines in ancient composition. The aulos was a double pipe instrument designed to play in the modern Dorian mode. There would be notes on one pipe which would not appear on the other pipe, so the player would be constantly choosing which pipe to blow air down. This also means that certain notes would be impossible to harmonise with specific other notes, but some harmonies across the two pipes were possible (West 1992).

There is debate on how to interpret the widespread use of the aulos in theatre. From a practical perspective, the two double reeds have a bright penetrating sound, which could carry well over a large audience (Hoegnifioh 2022). However, as mentioned, it does make it hard for the voice to compete. Some theorists, like Forbes (1967) have considered whether this meant the music sometimes took precedence in communication over the words that were being spoken. In contrast to this view another theorist, Knox (in Dunn 1986) articulates that the presence of music in tragedy likely would have begun as quite simple accompaniment and then increased in the mid-5th century BCE as noted by the changing level of dialogue designated to the chorus. In many of the plays of Euripides (a 5th Century tragedian), the chorus dialogue is more simplistic than that of earlier playwrights, which originally led to him being classed as just a mediocre playwright (Bakewell 2011). This thinking, however, has shifted since it has become better known that the style of tragedy was changing. More emphasis was being put on the complexity of the music the chorus was singing, and heavier dialogue was given to the leads. This once again implies that the aulos could not have been drowning out the words in earlier plays, since if that were the case, the words would likely have been simplified to get the message across (Knox in Dunn 1986).

In a close examination of Euripides' *Herakles*, Wilson (1999) makes some interesting findings with regard to the role of music in the tragic genre. There is an early scene

where the spoken words are calm and positive, but the description of the music coming from the aulos is ominously contradictory and foreshadows future strife. It plays a perverted kind of bacchic mousike that “is often a trope for wider ritual and social disorder” (Wilson 1999 p. 433). Later, another aulos plays a supernatural role in which its music drives the hero Heracles into a frenzy during which he murders his entire family. Unusually, in this tragedy, there are two auloi, one being the aulos the chorus play as followers of Dionysus, and another very specifically bacchic aulos – being the one that sends Heracles into a frenzy. Interestingly, this second aulos is actually played by the character Lyssa (personification of madness) who was sent unwillingly by Hera. She voices her disapproval of the act and argues unsuccessfully to avert it, before commencing her playing (Wilson 1999).

Instrumental musicians in Ancient Greece clearly had a multitude of responsibilities in communicating the meaning of the play to the audience. The aulos player in particular would have doubled as a lead actor or chorus member, a worshipper of Dionysus, and was also tasked with symbolically conveying the social order or disorder of the time.

2.2. Elizabethan

The Elizabethan period occurred during Elizabeth I’s reign in England in the late 16th Century. Theatre of the Elizabethan period, is most well-known for the works of William Shakespeare. He was one of a number of playwrights at the time, but his enduring success is arguably due to the publication of his First Folio seven years after his death (Smith 2023). This book contained his complete works in one edition, many of which had previously been unpublished or the authorship in the original publication had been unclear. “The convenience and ready availability of the First Folio as a repository for Shakespeare’s plays was a significant practical factor in getting him back into the theatres when they reopened at the Restoration of Charles II in 1660” (Smith 2023). Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the music of

Shakespeare, which overall has been lost. The presence of music in his works, however, is clear given the musical characters as well as musicians present in the plays. Many of the leads also sing ballads, which are presumed to have been accompanied by music (Ortiz 2021).

2.2.1 Music in Elizabethan Society

Music in the Elizabethan era coincides with what we think of as the late renaissance period of music. This style of music is reasonably well documented, but in short summation, music that had been preserved by the church evolved at a greater speed alongside the enlightenment (Arkenberg 2002). Greater exchanges of ideas across countries in Europe led to major changes in the style of composing; new musical genres and the introduction of new instruments such as the viola da gamba. This was all heavily assisted by the invention of the printing press, which made the reproduction of music and information far more accessible for amateur musicians of some means (Arkenberg 2002). Resembling the status of music in Ancient Greece, music was a regular field of study in European schools of the time and was more commonly treated as a mathematical subject (Ortiz 2021). It was most commonly grouped with arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy, because of the “quantifiable nature of harmonic relationships” (Ortiz 2021).

2.2.2. Music in Elizabethan Theatre

Plays in Elizabethan times would usually be performed by travelling troupes, who would play for towns, or if successful, at the invitation of noblemen and royalty, as well as at larger venues like The Globe (Archer 2024). There is still discussion around the number of musicians expected to travel alongside the troupe. Likely it would have been one or two for travelling shows and additional musicians would be provided on the day for more notable performances (Archer 2024).

Joining the audience of a large theatre in Shakespeare's time was open to anyone with a penny and the experience was much rowdier than what we expect when seeing his plays today.

"Elizabethan audiences clapped and booed whenever they felt like it. Sometimes they threw fruit. Groundlings paid a penny to stand and watch performances, and to gawk at their betters, the fine rich people who paid the most expensive ticket price to actually sit on the stage. The place was full of pickpockets and prostitutes, and people came and went to relieve themselves of the massive quantities of beer they've consumed." (Tichenor 2018)

Theatre had to compete with other entertainment such as bull fighting, and it did so with larger-than-life characters; violence/ action scenes and music (Tichenor 2018). To this end, Shakespeare's characters often sing or quote ballads and songs that his audiences would have recognised (Ortiz 2021). "Shakespeare showed his confidence in music as a dramatic device of the highest order by employing it at the very close of many of his dramas" (Von Ende 1965 in Herma et. al. 2011). The fact that music was banned at the Fortune Theatre in 1612, due to invoking excessive dancing and revelry, highlights the role music played in attracting and entertaining audience members (Shakespeare Globe Trust 2024).

The status of music in Shakespeare's time has a clear impact on his decisions around incorporating music.

"Shakespeare's audience firmly believed that music needed to be seen as well as heard to be experienced properly. They had an extremely high opinion of music's connection to the celestial and the supernatural and therefore its power over body and soul, to the degree that it was considered physically impossible not to listen when harmony sounded." (Smith 2018)

While music of today is often incidental – heard by the audience but not the characters, all music in Shakespeare’s time was diegetic – experienced by audience and characters alike. Understanding the belief that music was needed to be seen to be experienced correctly also informs the approach to using music in theatre. The positioning, appearance and harmonies of the musicians would all have contributed to the experience and meaning of the play (Smith 2018).

2.2.3. Musicians’ placement in Elizabethan Theatre

Musicians themselves would play from different places on the stage to symbolise different realms. Music appearing onstage, such as the players in *Hamlet* was from the living realm and occurred in the same fictional place as the actors, while the space underneath the stage traditionally symbolised hell (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust 2013). The hautboy, now known as the oboe (and interestingly the instrument most similar to the Ancient Greek aulos), was often used to symbolise impending doom. In a battle scene of *Antony and Cleopatra*, the music of the oboes comes from underneath the stage and unnerves the soldiers onstage. “They interpret the music as an ill omen, signifying that Antony’s good fortune and success in battle will end” (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust 2013). It is also believed the scene with the three witches in Shakespeare’s Scottish play would have been accompanied by oboes (Shakespeare Birthplace Trust 2013).

In one scene of *Hamlet* there is a single stage direction, “Enter four players with recorders” (Welch 1901). The lack of further direction in the script has caused some debate around whether this refers to the players of the acting troupe, who perform the famous play within a play in *Hamlet*, or whether they are four musicians who come on with the sole purpose of playing for the prince. If the players are implied to be the same as the actors, then it stands to reason that often actors were expected to double as musicians in plays and touring shows, which connects the relationship between musician and actor. However, if this were not the case, then it implies a very strong belief from Shakespeare that these four players are pivotal to the

meaning of the scene, so he places these musicians onstage to portray this meaning in a consequential way (Welch 1901).

2.2.4. Shakespeare's Experimentation with Music

Shakespeare experiments with the traditions and usage of music in a number of his plays (Ortiz 2021). Ballads in the Elizabethan era could be sung to a number of tunes, and all were accepted to be equally valid. In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare is beginning to question (through his character Ariel – a musician) whether there should be more of a concept of the 'right' tune. The same ballad is sung twice in this play, the second time to a different tune. Playmakers only know this since Ariel comments that it is the wrong tune, but none of the other characters mind. Elsewhere, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* comments that the worth of things, such as music is determined by the context in which they are experienced. In doing so she deconstructs music, arguing that composers and listeners project meaning onto the music and then pretend this meaning was inherent (Ortiz 2021).

A number of times, the music in Shakespeare's plays is used for a specific theatrical effect and meaning. While not 'tuned music', he experimented with the placement of words in his blank verse to establish and then disrupt rhythm. Blank verse typically has five strong accents per line, but in this Brutus quote from *Julius Caesar* the final accent is missing, implying a break of one beat between the lines.

“
...I(4) did send(5)
To you(1) for gold(2) to pay(3) my le(4)gions, (5)
Which you(1) denied(2) me. ...” (Shakespeare n.d.)

This scripted silence shows Shakespeare playing with rhythm for theatrical effect. Ariel in *The Tempest* has perhaps the clearest musical role of all the plays, where his

music guides the other characters to find each other on the island. “Literally speaking, the music directs ...[Ferdinand]. It is *instrumental* in the most general sense” (Ortiz 2021) Finally, Ophelia’s singing voice in *Hamlet* is described as “pictures,” by other characters, but its physical sound affects its listeners in ways that cannot be reduced to text or image. “In other words, it is a fully *theatrical* phenomenon that can be performed and manipulated to affect an audience, even if its semiotic meaning cannot be pinned down” (Ortiz 2021).

Instrumental musicians in Elizabethan theatre played an integral role in producing the meaning of performances. Arguably the structure of Elizabethan theatre kept musicians separate from the actual creation of the plays given the practical difficulties of blending the two detached professions (Archer 2024). However, the status of music in the society as well as evidence that Shakespeare was experimenting with the musicians’ role, demonstrates the indispensability of musicians in this style of theatre.

2.3 Beckettian Theatre

Beckettian theatre refers to the theatrical and radio works by Samuel Beckett. His works fit into an overarching bracket of Post-War Theatre, but have been specifically chosen because of his unique treatment of music. It is important to note that a lot of analysis on Beckett’s works view him as a postmodern playwright with purely postmodern pre-occupations, but that seems a limiting, retrospective view (Hansen 1997).

In the time between Elizabethan theatre and Beckett, there were a plethora of new approaches to theatre, realism and expressionism to name but a few, transforming the theatre scene into something much more familiar (Styan 2022). Beckett’s works are considered as part of a wider genre in the 1950s, Theatre of the Absurd. This theatrical movement was heavily influenced by the myth of Sisyphus, a Greek titan,

who was sentenced to roll the same boulder up the same mountain every day for all eternity (Esslin 2004). This struck a chord with Camus, to whom in an age of increased industrialisation, war, and class inequality, found the myth of Sisyphus to mirror the individual's struggle in life. Absurdism differs from nihilism and other more pessimistic schools of thought, by implying the searching, or waiting for meaning, is in fact the meaning, but it is absurd to think one may have control in this process (Esslin 2004). Key features of absurdism in theatre are repetition of circumstance or dialogue, often with no significant change or learning from the first instance (Esslin 2004).

2.3.1. Intermediality in Beckett

There are three main ways in which Beckett utilises music in his scripts. The most predominant of these is his use of intermediality, or more specifically his adoption of musical characteristics in the overall structure and treatment of the text (Laws 2020). Christopher Balme (2006 in Laws 2020) defines intermediality, as “the attempt to realize in one medium the aesthetic conventions and habits of seeing and hearing in another medium”. Through this lens, the regular devices that are used to examine music may be utilised in Beckett's works. The musical concepts of tempo and rhythm, form and motifs, as well as texture, will be used to explore Beckett's works. This method of analysis will then be interrogated to find whether this format is in fact valid.

The first concept to be explored is Beckett's very strict use of rhythm and tempi, which, as a director, he employed in a more musical way than what is expected in the theatre. “He was routinely heard to use the musical terms piano and fortissimo, andante and allegro. Some would think it too much to place a metronome in front of an actor and leave it there ticking in order to get the rhythm he desired, but Beckett did just that to the poor Brenda Bruce in *Happy Days*” (Doran 2019). Also in *Happy Days*, Peggy Ashcroft reported that “Beckett would answer questions like 'Why does she gabble as she does at a certain point?' by saying 'Because it has to go fast

there.'" (Worth in Laws 2003 p. 122). These two instances show the intention of the work is clearly founded more in an abstract concept of musical tempo than what one would call 'dramatic' timing, which is usually driven by the meaning of the words.

Interestingly, despite Beckett discrediting the meaning of his own words, he also insisted on them being spoken clearly and accurately. One of Beckett's trusted actors, Billie Whitelaw said of the play, *Not I*, "It goes at this tremendous pace. I've been practising saying words at a tenth of a second.... No one can possibly follow the text at that speed but Beckett insists that I speak it precisely. It's like music, a piece of Schoenberg in his head" (Anon. in Laws 1996). It can be supposed therefore that the importance of the words themselves was the diction and rhythms that certain words produce. The other effect of this presto tempo is that the repetition of certain words and phrases carry more weight, as they are the ideas that are most understandable to the audience. Like a motif or ostinato in music, they are sonic ideas that capture the audience's attention and of which the recurrence or development become a key point of interest. David Warrilow, another of Beckett's actors goes as far as to say that the works should not be interrogated for traditional dramatic meaning at all, but that the meaning is created from the viewer's experience, striking on a concept common to music, but also to Postmodernism (Kalb 1989).

When examining these plays with a musical lens however, it is easy to forget that Beckett does continue to use words, and thus the semantics of speech cannot replace established musical practices in the Western Classical canon, to which his works are often compared (Laws 1996). The removal of harmonic and melodic content does make his work fundamentally different. "Musical analogies are limited by the failure to recognise both the importance of harmonic relationships to these dramatic musical forms and the fact that the semantic tensions of language are wholly different to the structural tensions of tonality..." (Laws 2003). Nevertheless, Laws still contends his late texts "come as close as possible to the meeting place between music and language" (1996). It is also notable that many avant-garde

musicians of the time such as John Cage and Schoenberg were pushing the boundaries of the definition of music, but Beckett's theatrical approach is wildly different to others of the time (Laws 2003). Therefore, while it is clear Beckett is adopting many musical techniques into theatre, his works should not be viewed exclusively as musical scores.

2.3.2. Music as a Feature or Character

In a number of instances, Beckett makes use of music itself as either a key element or as a character in its own right. In *Ghost Trio*, a television play, the second movement of Beethoven's *Geistertrio* plays from a cassette tape (Maier 2002). The recorded music plays with repetition and the flow is not consistent, nor in order. It is only heard at certain times when the focus is closer to the cassette player. In an interview Beckett compared his use of this music to the mood of the ethereal elements of Shakespeare's Scottish play (Maier 2001). He also experiments with the idea of 'unheard' music, by implying this same music is at times infuriatingly just out of hearing range. Similarly, he cuts the music at unexpected places like right before cadential conclusions so that the audience mentally hears the harmonic resolution but is not granted it audibly (Maier 2002). Beckett also explored how to dramatise active listening in *Krapp's Last Tape*. When asked by one of his actors, Pierre Chabert, how a play centred around the act of listening could be made to work in the theatre, "Beckett emphasized the importance of the tape-player as character and performer, suggesting that Krapp is semi-deaf, thus increasing the tension of his listening by making him strain to hear: Krapp clings to the recorder as if trying to reconnect his divided selves" (Friedman 2006).

The absurdist nature of Beckett's radio plays enabled him to create 'Music' as a character in its own right. 'Cascando' and 'Words and Music' were both written in his later life, when his works were becoming more concise and abstracted - characters no longer had actual names or engaged in real conversations (Bryden 1997). Therefore, introducing the wordless character of music seems fitting in

characterising abstraction. But music's character arguably is oversimplified in these works compared with Beckett's previous treatment, here being presented as a purity of character and form that Beckett's words could never equal (Laws 1996).

Nevertheless, Beckett's introduction of music as a character is still pertinent, for although music has often been used to represent a character, for instance in *Peter and the Wolf*, "here music is not the dialogue of a tramp or a wolf or a duck. Instead, Music features as a particular mode of expression, namely itself" (Grant 2000).

Chapter 3

Contemporary Approaches

In recent years, theatre practitioners have been experimenting with the role of music in theatrical contexts, adjacent to the expected role that it performs in musical theatre or underscoring. While there are many instances of this experimentation, only three will be analysed in the context of this paper.

3.1. *Once* (the musical)

Once (the musical), although sitting inside the bracket of music theatre, is unique in its treatment of musicians onstage. In this story, the characters are all musicians, which allows the presence of instruments onstage to feel realistic and natural. The transition from spoken word to song ensues from the characters sharing their work and ideas as opposed to an expected suspension of disbelief (Mcelhinney 2023). In the case of the Darlington Theatre Company's 2020 production, every actor was also at times a singer and musician. This allowed for the musical numbers to be performed with individual characters, which embellished the importance of the instrumentalists as both actors and musicians.

3.2. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes is a more traditional, Golden Age music theatre work, where the characters begin to sing their thoughts and emotions when they become sufficiently excited. This integrated musical theatre convention creates an intrinsic suspension of disbelief about all elements of the production (underscored music, dance, lighting etc.) unifying in service to the narrative (Adams 2017). However, in Hayes Theatre Company's 2023 production of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the musicians formed the band aboard the cruise ship on which the production takes

place (Clarke 2023). This allows them to interact with the other characters and actors as a character in their own right who forms part of the same space as the characters of the show. Particularly noteworthy in this regard was “the musical director Victoria Falconer, who shines throughout and brings in the second half with some terrifically fun audience interaction that had us all bonding, laughing and cheering” (Sirtes 2023). Through this placement, the musicians become performers and characters intrinsically linked to the world of the play, creating a more meaningful reason for their presence on stage and shaping their own unique experience with the audience.

3.3. A Fool in Love

While music theatre works have been increasingly treating their musicians as characters and actors, theatre works have similarly been including more musicians in their plays. Sydney Theatre Company’s 2024 production of *A Fool in Love* by Van Badham is one of these plays. Based on Lope de Vega’s *La Dama Boba*, the play takes full advantage of elements of farce to allow music to take a larger role than usually prescribed. One character in particular is known to be writing tragic songs about unrequited love, which are performed in full. His music is further used in scene transitions to set different moods, these are performed in character, but with the full realisation that his character would not physically be in that space. Finally, this same character at one stage follows the main couple with an accordion while they endeavour to meet in secret. His music is then used both to set the mood, and to create a sense of farce. The other characters comment on his playing, treating it now as diegetic content that affects each character in different ways. This shows a multitude of ways in which music is used to create dramatic meaning in a traditionally theatrical play.

Chapter 4

Playing Diotima

Playing Diotima is an original theatrical work by Anna Rushmer written in a quasi-dialogue form. The original script is attached for reference in Appendix A. Socratic Dialogue was the invention of Plato around or after Socrates' forced suicide by the state (Puchner 2010). It was a written and likely dramatic form used in Plato's Academy, which uses Socrates as a character in a discussion around deep issues (Charalabopoulos 2012). Unlike the tragic form discussed in Chapter 2, dialogue performances would not have been accompanied by aulos, they were spoken by one or two actors who would voice all the parts (Puchner 2010). It is possible a lyre was occasionally used in accompaniment as this was seen as a more thoughtful, academic instrument (Hoegnifioh 2022). This interplay is a central feature in *Playing Diotima*.

4.1. Intention

Playing Diotima is an experimental music and theatre work which explores the elusiveness of women's voices in historical research by using music as a metaphor for the interpretative and adaptable nature of accepted facts.

Diotima is originally a character in Plato's *Symposium* and is described as a woman from Mantinea, who taught Socrates the meaning of love (Westacott 2020). Unusually, Plato uses Diotima as his mouthpiece while Socrates is a young student whom she is teaching. While this is a regular format in dialogues, it was unique to use Socrates as the student rather than the teacher (D'angour 2018). There is another female character in *Symposium*, 172a-223d; a 'flute girl' who enters only to be immediately dismissed. *Playing Diotima* entertains the idea that this fictional flute

girl was included because she was actually connected to a real woman named Diotima that Plato met in his youth.

The work interweaves two interconnected narratives. One is set in Ancient Athens and follows the relationship between a young Plato and a woman named Diotima who played the flute. They meet prior to Plato's encounter with Socrates, and the play follows their connection and the effect Diotima may have had on Plato's writings. The modern narrative utilises an adaptation of Plato's dialogue structure to follow the present-day Aurora, Jonathan, and Cleo as they attempt to piece together Plato and Diotima's relationship. It begins with Aurora suffering a major setback in completing her PhD thesis when a book on her topic is published before her completion. She accepts Jonathan's help in finding proof of a new idea, the process of which eventually leads Aurora toward researching the level of authority we give to relics of the past, given their largely masculine perspective.

Playing Diotima experiments with music and theatre through substituting instrumental music for expected lyrics and asking the audience to interpret their own meaning. The musical ideas are designed to be improvisational, but Diotima's main theme is attached in Appendix B. Diotima speaks freely in the past narrative and is shown discussing ideas at length with Plato. As his intellectual equal, we see how she possibly contributes to the formation of his later views on society and women. However, when the present-day characters attempt to recreate these conversations, they can only base her character on Plato's words. Consequently, in their recreations, Plato speaks with words from his dialogues, whereas Diotima can only reply by playing the flute – her voice has been lost and now her words can only be seen through an interpretive medium, in this case music.

4.2. Specific Musical Elements involved

4.2.1. Diegetic Music

Playing Diotima experiments with numerous musical concepts found in both historical and contemporary practices. The first of these being the exclusive use of diegetic music. There is music in almost every scene, and the music is almost always acknowledged and treated with the same regard as speech. The characters playing music use the medium as a way of expressing themselves, making the surrounding characters, and by extension the audience become active listeners and interpreters of their music. This was inspired by the Elizabethan approach to music, where the society placed higher importance on the sound of music. Arguably, having the characters in the world of the play treat music with greater significance encourages the audience to follow suit. This enables a unique theatrical experience.

4.2.2. Music as a Character and as Voice

The character Diotima speaks freely in her own time but is still rarely seen without her flute and during most conversations it is clear she would rather be practising. It is fitting then, that when the present-day characters try to imagine her, she can only use her flute to converse with them [Appendix C 1:19:39 – 1:22:46]. In the plot this is a point of frustration for Aurora who wants to hear Diotima in a more conventional, logical way. Diotima's inability to comply, and the continued use of her music for self-expression has a dual meaning. On one hand, there is a sense of pathos around the loss of her voice to history. However, there is also hope and optimism that she was able to use her time and passion effectively. It also encourages Aurora and the audience to place more importance on different forms of communication.

4.2.3. Dramatising Heard and Unheard Music

Expanding on the previous concept of purely diegetic music, *Playing Diotima* extends on Beckett's exploration of heard and unheard music. Diotima's music, or as we know it to be, her voice, can be heard at various times by the characters in the present day. It is instantly audible and comprehensible to the more instinctive, emotionally based characters, while Aurora, who is caught in one frame of viewing information, struggles to hear her. This is indicative of the inner block she has created for herself when information comes from an unexpected and less culturally acceptable source. Dramatically, this functions as a major frustration for Aurora, as everyone around her finds connecting with Diotima instinctual and simple, when she has put the most work in but struggles the most. This leaves her vexed and envious, feeling excluded from her own work.

4.2.4. Music as a Plot Point

Music figured as an instigator of madness in Euripides' *Herakles* as well as a lure in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Wilson 1999, Ortiz 2021). In both instances, music featured as a pivotal point in the plot and outcome of the story. *Playing Diotima* adds to this collection by a scene set at the City Dionysia – an Ancient Athenian festival of plays dedicated to Dionysus [Appendix C 1:33:10 -1:48:07]. In this moment a woman with a flute (possibly Diotima) plays a lilting tune that drives the characters into states of increasing excitement and mania, the kind that was associated with previously described Bacchic rituals. The chaotic state the characters each inhabit drives forward the plot of the play, by bringing to the surface quarrels and thoughts that would usually be repressed. It also neatly gives tribute to the ancient tradition of giving thanks to Dionysus, god of tragedy, on stage through music.

4.3 Results and Discussion

Playing Diotima was performed with support of AMPA as a development showcase on the 31st May 2024. The following results will discuss this specific performance, a recording of which is included as Appendix C.

4.3.1. Diegetic Music and Instrumentation

The use of diegetic music was largely effective, with audiences charmed by Diotima's flute music. There was some confusion around the use of a recorded track in the scene of the Dionysia. Even though this was still considered diegetic, it was hard for the musicians on stage to hear while moving around the space and it removed some of the import from the musical characters, giving the impetus to the recording instead [Appendix C 1:42:43 – 1:43:10].

When using purely diegetic music, it did limit the possibilities of instrumentation. There are constraints to the number of instruments both the cast and characters can reasonably be expected to play. Consequently, the majority of the show employs simply solo flute, solo guitar, or flute and guitar. There was difficulty in the timeframe to generate from only these instruments a sense of the music building and evolving as would be more common in musical theatre. The loop track recording in the Dionysia was designed to alleviate this limitation, however in essence the opposite occurred, where the live musicians felt themselves locking into something static instead of creating their own undulating heartbeat for the scene [Appendix C 1:44:30 – 1:45:22].

4.3.2. Music as Character and as Voice

The use of music as an extension of character was perhaps the most effective use of music in *Playing Diotima*. Audiences were taken with Diotima's theme that recurs

throughout the play and responded they were humming it for days [Appendix B]. This music became synonymous with her character and her whimsical nature. Particular appreciation was given to Diotima's first introduction where she enters and proceeds to play enthusiastically for herself [Appendix C 12:00 -13:45].

When 'speaking' with the present-day characters, the visual use of a flute (as opposed to strings or percussion) was effective in replacing Diotima's voice, since playing and speaking both require use of the mouth. In this way, it seemed the flute was a natural replacement for singing or speaking as the actor could not be expected to perform both tasks. The most effective moment was late in the play when Aurora is finally talking alone with Diotima, and the latter only replies to the former's questions by playing the flute. Aurora becomes frustrated by this and asks her to use her words, to which Diotima replies with complete silence [Appendix C 1:53:33 – 1:55:02].

4.3.3. Dramatising Heard and Unheard Music

Conceptually, creating tension from Aurora's inability to hear the music as compared with the other characters was a strong idea. It was indicative of each character's willingness to engage with other perspectives and ways of thinking, and made the music an obvious metaphor for their approach [Appendix C 20:34 – 22:21].

Unfortunately, the structure of *Playing Diotima* as performed on 31st May 2024 did not demonstrate this concept to its full potential. To be used to greater effect, tension between the characters needed to originate more obviously from this divide. There also needed to be a greater number of moments where this element was explored to create clarity through repetition.

4.3.4. Music as a Plot Point

In the complexity of bringing this work to the stage, unfortunately this point was slightly lost on audiences. It was not clear that the flute music was the reason for the

resulting chaos, and the audience were more likely to explain it away through alcohol or the references to Dionysus [Appendix C 1:33:19 – 1:34:50]. Technical issues aside, this was in part caused by Diotima's seemingly regular interaction with several characters throughout the scene. For future clarity, it was suggested that Diotima remain solely as flute player and chaos instigator throughout the scene, with her melody and musical tensions more obviously driving the emotions and behaviours of the other characters. This could be achieved in future productions by keeping Diotima onstage throughout the scene, with her music and expression dictating the mood of different conversations. There is also an opportunity for her to be forcibly interrupted, enabling the other characters to return to their usual selves temporarily. This would demonstrate much greater causality between Diotima's music and the behaviour in the scene, as well as the overall outcome.

4.4 Overall Findings

The 2024 AMPA production of *Playing Diotima* employed a number of musical features in a theatrical space in order to challenge traditional thinking of instrumentalists in theatre. While some of these techniques were employed to greater effect than others, the work was successful in integrating musicians into the heart of the story and making their music a key element to the play's success. Further development on these concepts would allow the main musical themes to flourish, but the performance still clearly showcased the benefits of meaningful incorporation of musicians in theatre.

Conclusion

History has provided many experimentations and creative explorations of instrumentalists in theatre spaces that challenge the existing norms of theatre today. Some of these were once common place and have since been lost, while others may have been too radical for their audiences. Nevertheless, the reception of *Playing Diotima* shows it is clear that much can be learned from both historical and comparative sources and that there is a general thirst from audiences for fresh approaches in this space.

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Appendix A – Script

Playing Diotima

A new theatre work by Anna Rushmer

Character List

Ancient Athens

DIOTIMA, a young woman of Ancient Athens who played the ancient flute, with all indication of her existence destroyed. Her name is used in Plato's dialogue on love '*Symposium*'.

PLATO, a young man of Ancient Athens, renowned today for his many written dialogues on philosophical thought.

TERPSION, Diotima's younger brother. A citizen of Athens of small means.

EUPHEME, Diotima's friend and Terpsion's wife.

AGATA, a recently made homeless woman from the outskirts of Athens.

SOCRATES, an older man of Ancient Athens, renowned for his philosophical ideas and for having never written them down.

Modern Day

AURORA, a female, Australian PhD student on exchange in Athens.

CASSANDRA, an Australian academic with four published papers. She is Aurora's academic supervisor and a quasi-parental figure.

JONATHAN, a male, Australian PhD candidate on exchange in Athens. He has studied music and plays guitar.

CLEO, an Artist in residence at Athens University.

LYSSA, used as a stage name to represent the personification of madness. She is a flute player and entertainer in modern day Athens.

Performance Notes

The play is designed for five actors with the following doubling:

Actor One, 20s female identifying – Diotima, Lyssa

Actor Two, 20s male identifying – Plato, Socrates

Actor Three, 20- 30s female identifying – Aurora, Agata

Actor Four, 20- 30s male identifying (preferred) – Jonathan, Terpsion

Actor Five, any age, female identifying (preferred) – Cleo, Cassandra, Eupheme

SCENE 1

AURORA on stage in bright, wide lighting.

Ambient city soundscape sounds.

Enter CASSANDRA in a hassled manner.

CASSANDRA: Aurora! I'm sorry about all of this, after my flight was cancelled, the next service they could put me on was a whole day later. So, I had a long night exploring the lounges of Dubai and paying \$12 for an overly milky coffee.

AURORA: Yikes. Inflation?

CASSANDRA: No. Then I finally got to the hotel only to find the trains from there to the city aren't running because of a strike. So, thanks for meeting me halfway, I really appreciate it. Do you mind if we keep walking on while we talk?

AURORA: Sure. I'm enjoying the air, still a bit frosty, but it's warming up!

CASSANDRA: So. What's been going on, how's the research coming.

AURORA: Well, I'm sure you heard of my, uh, small... setback.

CASSANDRA: That's one way of phrasing it. Aurora, I know I'm your supervisor, but I also care about you. Just tell me the truth and we'll see what's possible from there.

AURORA: Do you want the long or the short of it?

CASSANDRA: We've got a solid walk ahead of us.

AURORA: The long it is. I'd better start where it all went sideways, you know Cleo, one of the artists in residence.

CASSANDRA: The one who does the graphic novels?

AURORA: Oh no, her stuff is more varied, sculpture, big murals...

CASSANDRA: Then no.

AURORA: Oh, I thought you would.

CASSANDRA: Should I?

AURORA: No, I just... well, we were talking. The kind of hallway conversation where you both were on the way somewhere else, but somehow, it's now been five minutes and you're both still standing there, so your legs are tired and you want to sit, but that would mean either leaving or committing to staying.

CASSANDRA: I have the idea.

AURORA: Right. So then she asks me;

The lights dim and become more centrally focussed.

CASSANDRA becomes CLEO, the conversation is continuous.

CLEO: Are you going to the language exchange Friday night?

AURORA: I can translate Ancient Greek writings about as quickly as a snail can glide over them, which, actually isn't too bad! But I can speak about three words of modern Greek, what good would I be at a language exchange?

CLEO: That doesn't matter, they're fun! Worst case, you can stand there looking cute and blank until people say words while holding out objects for you to understand.

AURORA: Most of the locals speak English, so it feels dumb stumbling through Greek.

CLEO: You just don't want to look bad not knowing something!

AURORA: That's not true!

CLEO: Prove me wrong. Come along.

AURORA: I'll think about it.

CLEO: I send you the info *(she pulls out her phone and does)*.

AURORA: No promises. *(she absently pulls out her phone and looks, then something catches her attention and she forgets anything else)*. Oh fucking fuck. Fuck!

CLEO: Aurora?

AURORA: This article... it's my thesis topic. *(she continues doomscrolling while pacing)* This can't be happening, I just needed another few months/ and then...

CLEO: *(about the phone)* Can I see?

AURORA: Why not.

CLEO: It might not be that bad... *(reading)* Socrates in love: how the ideas of this woman are at the root of Western philosophy.

AURORA: Scroll.

CLEO: *(skim reading)* Socrates as a young man... Socrates talking to Aspasia... More about Aspasia... Who is she again?

AURORA: Mistress of Pericles, and early confidant of Socrates. Also the star of my thesis.

CLEO: That's right I remember.

AURORA: Scroll.

CLEO: This says, "She was ... known for her skill in speaking and, like "Diotima", in particular for speaking about love." *(realising)* Diotima was the fictional woman you were trying to find the real-world inspiration for.

AURORA: Sure was.

CLEO: Oh. Well it's probably still going to be okay right?

AURORA: It's my exact argument.

CLEO: Don't they have double ups in academic papers all the time... It should be fine.

AURORA: No. They don't. That's the whole point.

CLEO: It's probably not as bad as you think.

AURORA: My thesis is due in three months and it's now basically irrelevant.

CLEO: Well, you're smart, surely you can come up with something else.

AURORA: *(with disbelief)* Come up with something else? Just like that? This is two years of my life down the drain. I've known you for what, two weeks and I swear to God if you're in my face in the next two minutes! *(she storms away)*

The lights brighten and become wide.

CASSANDRA returns and stares at AURORA with some reproach.

CASSANDRA: She probably didn't know what a big deal it was.

AURORA: She could have thought about it for two seconds.

CASSANDRA: I know someone else who isn't great at that.

AURORA: Stop it would you, remember this happened over a month ago.

CASSANDRA: And have you apologised?

AURORA: Not exactly.

CASSANDRA: *(distracted)* Oh look, what a great view of the acropolis. I've been here so many times but I always forget how striking it is.

AURORA: *(looking too)* Definitely. *(pointing elsewhere)* Oh they're still cleaning up from the Dionysia last night, don't envy *that* job.

CASSANDRA: *(beat)* So, then what happened?

AURORA: I spent the rest of the day looking frantically for other angles, wondering what I'm doing with my life and capped it off by emptying a couple of bottles of wine at the uni bar.

CASSANDRA: Fitting.

AURORA: The next day I had that conference, remember? God that was a struggle to get through hungover and feeling like a fraud.

CASSANDRA: Right, that sounds like a recipe for success.

AURORA: And to top it off, I wound up on the same train home as Jonathan (*JONATHAN enters languidly*) – you remember Jonathan the other Australian student from Sydney Uni?

CASSANDRA: The PhD boy with a high opinion of his own opinion?

AURORA: That's him.

The lights dim and become more centrally focussed.

CASSANDRA shifts to background and exits as appropriate.

AURORA: So, he asks me;

JONATHAN: Have you written your thesis yet?

AURORA: ...It's not due for three months.

JONATHAN: Mine's done.

AURORA: Congratulations.

JONATHAN: I actually finished it a while ago, but my original exchange was cancelled part way through because of covid, you know how it is... So now I'm polishing it off with a bratwurst in Berlin, olives and figs in Roma, a gazpacho in Sevilla and some bordeaux in... Bordeaux, of course!

AURORA: And bothering me is somehow part of this great culinary tour.

JONATHAN: After a month of enriching my taste, I realised I needed a... project, to enrich the mind.

AURORA: A project. Oh god.

JONATHAN: You see, one has to keep the mind active, or else it withers and dies.

AURORA: He's what, 27 going on 82.

JONATHAN: So, I thought to myself, whose life looks like it's taken a turn for the 'shit hitting the fan' variety.

AURORA: Yikes.

JONATHAN: Although it's a common thought for me. I do enjoy thinking on the misfortune of others.

AURORA: Charming.

JONATHAN: Then last night, what do I overhear, but an Australian girl, nice accent (*winks*), waxing lyrical about Diotima and a flute girl, and somehow it all relates to Socrates. This is all interspersed with wailings of "I'm a failure" and "I'm going to fade into oblivion like all these other historical women." It's wonderfully chaotic. Which could be to do with the one or two empty wine bottles in front of her.

AURORA: I was... blowing off some steam...

JONATHAN: Colour me curious, this flute girl of yours, should we call her a flute girl? I think you did when you spoke of her. I mean calling it a flute is obviously historically inaccurate since Ancient Greeks didn't have flutes. They had the aulos, which is more like a modern-day equivalent of the oboe. But I suppose saying 'flute' makes things 'simpler', so we can stick with the colloquial term.

AURORA: Thanks... for explaining my topic to me. What was your topic again? Oh wait, I just remembered, I don't care.

JONATHAN: That's fair, even I stopped caring about it months ago. (*a pause*) So! What are we working on?

AURORA: I'm working on how to shoo the arrogant fly buzzing around my ear.

JONATHAN: C'mon, I remember between the swigs of wine, you said there was a girl with a flute in Plato's '*Symposium*', and she's the only other woman to appear in this dialogue that discusses Diotima, the woman who taught Socrates about love. So because of that, you pegged them as the same person? How does that work? You mean the flute girl they send away *is* Diotima and by being there, Socrates remembers their previous meeting when he was a young man and she taught him about love? The timelines don't add up. Socrates would have been over fifty at the time, making this woman almost sixty! I really don't think an escort of that age would have been a welcome sight at Agathon's Symposium.

AURORA: By God, he's cracked the case. That must be why the men send her away within a minute.

JONATHAN: (*ironic*) Funny.

AURORA: You're inflicting modern ideas of ageism onto ancient societies.

JONATHAN: But am I wrong?

AURORA: This is my stop.

JONATHAN: Our stop – same uni remember.

AURORA: Unfortunately. *(they exit ‘train’ while remaining onstage)*

JONATHAN: You do know that Plato’s dialogues on Socrates’s life aren’t historically accurate.

AURORA: *(with bitter sarcasm)* No, stop it, you just ruined my entire thesis! Again!

JONATHAN: Okay, so then what is your take that is so much more reasonable.

AURORA: *(unable to resist)* I’m not saying they’re the same person in the context of Plato’s *Symposium*. I’m saying when Plato wrote about Diotima, he included a random flute girl in the scene because the *real* Diotima was a flute girl.

JONATHAN: A flute girl who taught Socrates about love?

AURORA: The basics... maybe. Socrates was known to talk to anyone... It’s still a fresh idea.

JONATHAN: *(in earnest)* Okay and how would you go about trying to prove that? There’s nothing from Socrates, so in terms of the literature, all you have to go on are the dialogues of Plato, maybe Xenophon and a few other letters if you’re lucky. It seems like a tall order to prove a connection between a real flute girl no-one has heard about, and Diotima, who most people think is a fictional invention by Plato – solely based on the presence of *another* fictional flute girl. So where on Earth are you expecting to find any new evidence?

AURORA: I’m not expecting to find any new evidence from your condescending drivell.

JONATHAN: *(beat)* I came on a bit strong didn’t I... I’m told I have what the Germans call a Backpfeifengesicht.

AURORA: A sparkling personality?

JONATHAN: A face badly in need of a fist.

AURORA: *(laughs despite herself)* Oh god, if it weren’t so long, I’d make it your nickname.

JONATHAN: *(grinning)* It’s a shitshow you’re trying to wade through. Your new idea is whack, but – I’m curious. Colourfully so.

AURORA: You know what they say about curiosity and cats.

JONATHAN: Well that’s alright, it’s just one life after all, eight left to live to the fullest.

AURORA: Argh, someone make it stop!

AURORA walks out smiling despite herself. JONATHAN remains a moment with a look like ‘mission accomplished’ and walks out after.

SCENE 2

The lights fade slightly.

Enter DIOTIMA playing her flute, she looks around her and finds a suitable spot and then begins playing. She checks whether anyone is watching, then plays for herself a while, before returning to her chosen spot.

Enter PLATO, he is looking for someone.

PLATO: This way? No... Yes? Why wasn't it just at the front? *(noticing Diotima after walking past her)* Do you know where the andron is?

DIOTIMA: The andron? Why you walked past is, it was just at the front.

PLATO: That room was full of women. Are you sure it wasn't the gynaikeion?

DIOTIMA: I'm sure. They just need the bigger space.

PLATO: Whatever for? Not for the Symposium...

DIOTIMA: No... For living.

PLATO: *(still confused)* Well, I heard the music and followed...

DIOTIMA: So, the plan worked.

PLATO: But you're not at the symposium.

DIOTIMA: No. My music is just to lure you in, but it can't take you all the whole way. It's a mirage really

PLATO: How disappointingly unhelpful.

DIOTIMA: Well, we couldn't hire any flute girls, times being as they are.

PLATO: You mean, other, flute girls.

DIOTIMA: Did I?

PLATO: Then what are you?

DIOTIMA: I usually think I'm a woman. They're entertaining just two rooms down the hall. You should be able to hear them in a moment.

PLATO: Thank you. *(he makes to leave, then pauses)*. You play well.

DIOTIMA: Thank you.

PLATO: You have a good sense of rhythm. I usually don't care for the flute. How long have you played?

DIOTIMA: Since I was a girl.

PLATO: So, it is a profession for you, no wonder. Who was your teacher?

DIOTIMA: Self-taught.

PLATO: With your communication? Surely not.

DIOTIMA: You don't think I could teach myself the nuances of Symposia conversation?

PLATO: No, you don't play like a heitaira, you *must* be a flute girl.

DIOTIMA: Maybe I don't care to tell you my life story.

PLATO: Don't I have a trustworthy face?

DIOTIMA: Not really. And far too many rings.

PLATO: Ten of them in fact. (*he shows her one*) See that's how trusting I am, now you know everything about me.

DIOTIMA: Aren't you worried someone might rob you.

PLATO: They could try.

DIOTIMA: Oh?

PLATO: I'd be betting on me.

DIOTIMA: I hope you're more trustworthy than you are humble.

PLATO: Much. How did you learn?

DIOTIMA: It started as some exotic fun with my aunt, she was Sp... (*catching herself*) I mean, she had *knowledge* of Spartan ways. (*checking for a reaction*) Now of course it has become my livelihood.

PLATO: I see. You did not always think to be a flute girl, so you must be good to prove yourself, it makes sense. It was unexpectedly fortuitous for you then.

DIOTIMA: Oh yes, it's certainly more rewarding than selling ribbons at the market – and I don't have to deal with the disapproving eyes of men quite so often. Usually, they don't think to assume I should be home doing wifely duties.

PLATO: Wifely duties... you are a daughter of Athens?

DIOTIMA: (*satisfied*) There it clicks.

PLATO: How improper. Why are you not now a citizen's wife?

DIOTIMA: The andron is full of aunts, cousins, friends struggling to get by now they have lost their husbands to the plague or this endless war. Why should it matter if I marry one of these men *before* he is taken from me.

PLATO: Wifedom is the/ ultimate...

DIOTIMA: Wherever that was going I'd rather it not. I don't hope for marriage, and I am content.

PLATO: How old are you by now? *(he looks her over with scrutiny)*

DIOTIMA: 24. *(she looks him over with scrutiny)* I'll wager you are much the same, yet you are a young man and me an old woman.

PLATO: What is your name?

DIOTIMA: You ask many questions and have left me no space to return the favour. My name is Diotima and what is *your* name.

PLATO: Aristocles. Though, those who try to rob me might call me Plato.

DIOTIMA: Ah, the wrestler. And how is it that you make *your* living, Aristocles?

PLATO: How unexpected.

DIOTIMA: Well?

PLATO: I'm a Tragedian.

DIOTIMA: What have you written? Anything I might know?

PLATO: No, I have not completed any... yet. I'm a young man as you say.

DIOTIMA: Naturally.

PLATO: But I'm writing a new style of Tragedy! So you won't find the expected worn-out teachings of Homer – no, I will break more ground than Euripides. My tragedies will revitalise our society and return Athens to greatness. *(an afterthought)* Since you pose as a flute girl you could view it for yourself.

DIOTIMA: If it lives up to that speech, I would like to. Usually, I'm more taken by comedies myself, Lysistrata by Aristophanes where the women end the war. Wonderful.

PLATO: *(ignoring her)* Your flute... It is the instrument of tragedy, yet I don't much care for it. *(thinking aloud)* Perhaps she could craft the music. Though she couldn't play on stage of course.

DIOTIMA: *(with laughter)* She could not play onstage, but I... *(she mimics Plato's 'masculine' stance and attire while he isn't looking)* have a friend who can. A man, obviously, *(sizing up her appearance)* well I guess he's more of a boy still. A woman couldn't play onstage that would be ridiculous... I would be happy to make the music, with fair compensation of course.

PLATO: You are not like most women.

DIOTIMA: Spoken like one who has known very few.

PLATO: *(a snicker)* Perhaps. They do not interest me much. Although...

DIOTIMA: *(with humour)* You had best head along to your much more interesting conversation with men then.

TERPSION: *(offstage slurring)* I think Theodote's tits are still the best I've ever seen. *(resounding laughter)*.

DIOTIMA: Was Theodote's tits the name of a new bill?

PLATO: Oh yes... I'd best be off.

He leaves. Diotima returns to playing.

SCENE 3

CLEO enters, she dances a bit to the music while grabbing herself a snack.

DIOTIMA exits but remains playing. The light brightens slightly.

AURORA enters and notices, she thinks about leaving then clumsily draws attention to herself.

CLEO: *(not looking at her)* Ah, I'm sensing a generally magenta, maybe cocoa cloud of doom interrupting my carefree snacking. Along with a scent of... is that a chocolate muffin?

AURORA: Long gone I'm afraid *(she holds up an empty wrapper)*. I'm surprised you could even notice my entrance amongst the incessant happy-go-lucky vibe cluttering the room with... wait is that vanilla perfume? Nice. I mean... suffocating. *(she pretends to wave it out)*

CLEO: It's no use I'm afraid, the room's just too small to contain me. Were you able to fix your thesis problem yet?

AURORA: That's going to take a about a year.

CLEO: *(taken back)* You really don't have a back-up plan?

AURORA: It doesn't really work like that.

CLEO: I always have three projects on the go. Sometimes one of them sticks.

AURORA: I couldn't. If I'm in, I'm all in.

JONATHAN: *(entering)* That's odd music to be playing here, I didn't know there was a flute player in our midst!

AURORA stares at him blankly. CLEO stiffens.

AURORA: I think there was a party two rooms down the hall?

DIOTIMA stops playing.

JONATHAN: What no it was here... *(looking around then noticing CLEO)* Oh, Cleo.

CLEO: Jonathan. *(they assess each other)*

AURORA: *(oblivious)* Yes Jonathan, great, I've been craving a second opinion.

JONATHAN: Excellent, I've been looking to give one.

CLEO: Well... seems my opinions don't count, so I'll leave you academics to it.

CLEO walks out past JONATHAN.

AURORA: How much *can* we trust Plato's dialogues?

JONATHAN: Ooh okay – good thing I brought coffee. *(he has a bag with a chocolate muffin in it as well which she grabs happily)*

AURORA: I've been over and over this, he writes his dialogues with Socrates as the main character discussing philosophical ideas. But for what purpose? *(she drinks his coffee then nonchalantly swaps the cups)* Theory one, he is devastated by his teacher Socrates' forced suicide by the state and creates a record of all his teacher's encounters that he can find.

JONATHAN: Ah yes, the enlightenment at its peak, the universe and all its secrets are knowable if only we learn from the facts! That's the biographical reading, but it doesn't work, particularly in his later dialogues as the timelines don't match other historic references. *(she agrees)* So two, he develops a style that is a great, public advertisement for the type of questioning that would happen at his academy.

AURORA: Right, even in Ancient Athens we didn't escape the need to market the pursuit of knowledge. But it's unlikely since he began writing the dialogues decades before he founded his school, so that would be an awful lot of pre-

planning for marketing. Third option, he wants to honour Socrates, but knows he can't transcribe everything, so creates this new written form befitting of Socrates' style, since he was a famous orator. Then uses the format to put forward Socrates's ideas.

JONATHAN: A true innovation of artistic form. Pity it only lasted several hundred years.

AURORA: *(with mockery)* A mere drop in the ocean in the scheme of things. Although more than what we can say for stream of consciousness.

JONATHAN: *(as if stabbed)* How brutal, when you know my love for James Joyce runs deep. A sub-branch of your latest theory is he uses this new format to put forward his *own* ideas.

AURORA: Yes, that's definitely the most interesting option... But Socrates was a well-known figure, Plato couldn't stray too far from what he was known to say.

JONATHAN: Socrates left room for interpretation, so Plato might have just filled in the gaps with his own take.

AURORA: There's too many gaps, there's nothing in anything I've read. It's hard enough to get Socrates straight, how am I supposed to find the women in his life?

JONATHAN: So literal.

AURORA: Excuse me?

JONATHAN: What are your main sources for your research?

AURORA: Plato's dialogues of course, as well as Xenophon's and then Diogenes-Laertius' biographies.

JONATHAN: So, literally, literal.

AURORA: Their writings are the most relevant factual evidence.

JONATHAN: Maybe. Let's make our own literature for a moment. *(AURORA gives him a look)* C'mon, what do you have to lose? Let's imagine Socrates talking to Diotima, and see if anything feels right.

AURORA: I'm going to prove my theory based on *imagining* and *feeling* am I?

JONATHAN: Who said prove? Behold, Socrates *(SOCRATES enters looking like the famous, old, impoverished man)*.

AURORA: My mum always told me boys would go mad for me. Just two weeks of talking with me and he's lost it. *(eats muffin with satisfaction)*

JONATHAN: *(to SOCRATES)* Not *that* Socrates, we want the young Socrates. He's lithe and lean like the soldier he was in his youth. *(SOCRATES transforms and continues to act out what they say about him)* He's an exceptional sculptor.

He's well-travelled, he's good with the ladies, he's popular with the men too...

AURORA: He's not yet heard of the Oracle about him being the wisest man. Meaning he hasn't begun his life-long mission of proving it wrong and ridding the world of false knowledge. *(SOCRATES is stumped)*

JONATHAN: That might be a bit too complicated for the exercise... At ease Socrates. *(SOCRATES is relieved)* Then we have Diotima *(enter DIOTIMA)* she's... a priestess from Mantinea, *(DIOTIMA stiffens)* who also plays the flute? *(her flute appears)*

AURORA: She's not a priestess. *(DIOTIMA relaxes)*

JONATHAN: No?

AURORA: No, the priestess is Plato's creation, he couldn't let Socrates learn from just some woman.

JONATHAN: That's the spirit! I'm picking up the hypothetical you're putting down. Okay, now let's ask them to speak. We'll give him a line Plato wrote for him in *Symposium*.

SOCRATES: *(robotically)* What do you mean, Diotima, that love is neither fair nor good, is love then evil and foul?

DIOTIMA replies by playing her melody haltingly, like a sporadic music box.

SOCRATES: One thing only I know, is that I know nothing.

SOCRATES turns back into the old man, puppet like and unable to control his limbs properly he knocks some things over and then falls over. DIOTIMA's melody rises to confused shrieks and cuts out, she crumples. Beat. Both remain on stage without moving further.

AURORA: Well, that was a riot.

JONATHAN: I think... We couldn't *feel* it. *(to DIOTIMA and SOCRATES)* You can leave. *(They exit)*

AURORA: It was ridiculous.

JONATHAN: Hold up a second.

AURORA: I told you I'm stuck. How can I envision anything when I don't have a foundation?

JONATHAN: Think about what *did* happen, then we can work backwards.

AURORA: (*unwillingly intrigued*) Why did she only play flute and not speak?

JONATHAN: Why did he become an old man...

AURORA: Maybe he's an old soul.

JONATHAN: Maybe... Wait no, he was happy to be young by himself, it was only when he started talking to Diotima that it all went wrong.

AURORA: (*fatalistic*) She's probably just Aspasia after all. Why am I even...

JONATHAN: No, he got old again! He's older than Diotima!

AURORA: She's not a woman from his youth...

JONATHAN: They met later in life!

AURORA: Yes! (*beat*) No! Socrates wouldn't be schooled in that manner later in life... no, no. (*to herself*) The priestess is Plato's creation... (*beat*) How much can we trust Plato's dialogues?

JONATHAN: This again?

AURORA: Tell me the sub-branch of option three.

JONATHAN: Plato uses Socrates as a mouthpiece to put forward his *own* ideas.

AURORA: Don't you see? If it's reasonable that he's putting forward his own ideas, then couldn't he be including his own friends and relationships and dressing them up as people Socrates had known?

JONATHAN: It follows.

AURORA: This means she could be based on Aspasia from Socrates' youth *and* based on a woman from Plato's youth. Oh, send thanks to Athena that I don't have to betray Aspasia!

JONATHAN: You're welcome!

AURORA: You're Athena?

JONATHAN: Well, I am wise.

AURORA: Careful she doesn't smite you for your arrogance, it's common of the Greek gods.

JONATHAN: (*as though worshipping*) I am wise because Athena has led me down this path. I give thanks for her patronage every day.

AURORA: Still with the wise thing... I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know.

JONATHAN: Quoting Socrates at me... touché.

AURORA: On that note... I've spent too much time on Socrates. It's time to deep dive into Plato.

The lighting becomes bright and wide.

CASSANDRA: *(entering on the line)* Aurora, I thought I said to tell me the truth. Is this really what happened?

AURORA: Cassandra, what do you mean?

CASSANDRA: How long did you say Jonathan had been around by this point?

AURORA: Two weeks.

CASSANDRA: Two weeks, and you've let him in on your thesis, shift you in a new direction and embrace a new idea based on... an imagined scenario you shared. I usually pride myself on my foresight, but if you'd asked me how likely this was a month ago I would have said slim to none. Are we sure he's not actually a mind controlling sociopath out for his own ends?

AURORA: He's not so bad.

CASSANDRA: Better be careful, next he'll be buying you chocolate muffins and taking the rubbish out when you're too stressed.

AURORA: *(she's still holding the muffin and quickly throws it away)* It's not like that.

CASSANDRA gives her a look which AURORA returns.

CASSANDRA: I know, I'm just teasing. Do you think it was like that for Diotima and Plato?

PLATO and DIOTIMA enter behind the action – they are in their own time.

AURORA: No.

CASSANDRA: No? He didn't marry, so I suppose not, but then, we weren't talking of marriage.

AURORA: I can see the headline "An illicit love scandal; The woman behind Plato's Symposium" Promoting research inevitably turns to romance or betrayal.

CASSANDRA: We have to make history sexy somehow, that's what sells. Our young researchers aren't helping us out too much.

AURORA: Hey!

CASSANDRA: You don't have a romantic bone in your body. (*AURORA glares at her*) Am I wrong? (*AURORA assents*) So, do we get any more bizarre from here?

AURORA: You don't know the half of it.

They exit.

SCENE 4

The lighting fades to a dimmer, more narrow focus.

PLATO is transfixed with his work in front of him, DIOTIMA has grown bored and is exploring the room.

PLATO: Can you... (*she's not listening*) Diotima. Can you play me the part after the chorus leaves again?

She does, PLATO listens.

PLATO: It's good.

DIOTIMA: It *is* good.

PLATO: Perhaps a little sombre? No?

DIOTIMA: I think it's just sombre enough.

PLATO: You're right, but maybe it should be played higher?

DIOTIMA: I think the current pitch matches the mood exactly, as we discussed before.

PLATO: No, yes. It's good – but for the unevenness of the flute. (*a beat, DIOTIMA rolls eyes*) But maybe it should be played/ faster...

DIOTIMA: Aristocles. We've been doing this back and forth all day. I promise it's good.

PLATO: Have we? Yes you're right, perhaps I'm scrutinizing too hard, this part is the most fluent and succinct. I know exactly how it will be staged and can plan it

all exactly. The other sections... dealing with a chorus is so cumbersome and unspecific.

DIOTIMA: And necessary? How could you have tragedy without the chorus.

PLATO: Yes, but you will note I have crafted distinctive characters within the chorus, but how am I to know whether the correct lines will be distributed to the correct characters?

DIOTIMA: You do not.

PLATO: If done incorrectly it will be a complete mess and all my well-constructed meaning will be stripped away and vandalised.

DIOTIMA: I think you are too pre-occupied with meaning.

PLATO: You may not understand, but discerning meaning is what all young notable aristocrats like me should be occupied with. There is nothing more worthy.

DIOTIMA: Worthy? Indeed. What makes something worthwhile?

PLATO: The pursuit of knowledge is the worthiest of pursuits.

DIOTIMA: The eloquence of the young aristocrat!

PLATO: You mock.

DIOTIMA: I've overheard enough of my father's discussions to know one cannot know everything. The more you strive to learn, the more aware you are of your own ignorance.

PLATO: Your father is interested in philosophy?

DIOTIMA: He spoke to Socrates one day and became obsessed. At first, he was always bubbling to talk about all these ideas with Terpsion and I. Then father was called to Sicily...

PLATO: He did not return.

DIOTIMA: He did, but... he didn't, he can't work anymore, so he was changed, quick to anger, envious. We *had* to be a part of *that* crowd of philosophical thinkers. We *have* to keep up pretences. So, all our money is spent on hosting showy symposia... Like the one you came to.

PLATO: Oh, that wasn't Terpsion's house?

DIOTIMA: You didn't meet my father?

PLATO: No... I had assumed Terpsion was host.

DIOTIMA: My brother... typical.

PLATO: But that doesn't sound like what I've heard of Socrates.

DIOTIMA: No. It began with him, but then it was different men. Your uncle is one of them.

PLATO: Ah. Charmides I would assume.

DIOTIMA: Father was always making trouble for us, but we used to laugh it off and he'd put something together to make it up to us. But... Now we have no money but what we hide away – just like we hide the women needing shelter in the andron.

PLATO: That outcome is surely not what Socrates intended!

DIOTIMA: He left a lot of room for interpretation. My father filled in the gaps.

PLATO: I don't understand.

DIOTIMA: This is my point. What you miss in seeking to understand everything is the magic in the unknowable, and the sweetness of interpretation. I can play five notes now tell me what it is that I meant.

PLATO: You mean to provoke me.

DIOTIMA: And that is the beauty of interpretation. I did not *intend* for these five notes to be a plot to provoke you. But now you have said it, and if that is how you feel, then we find that it is now part of its truth. You see, the intention of the creator is always viewed and turned around by the person partaking.

PLATO: No.

DIOTIMA: No?

PLATO: No. I disagree. There must be a right way to create things and then these chaotic disparities would not occur.

DIOTIMA: But who decides the 'right' way to create things?

PLATO: Men who study knowledge.

DIOTIMA: Who teaches it, so that all will know how to interpret the 'right' thing.

PLATO: It will be known, because it is right.

DIOTIMA: And what if what is right for one, is not right for another. For instance, it is right for my father to use the drachmae I earned to keep his place in high society, but for me...

PLATO: You have a point, perhaps a guide is needed.

DIOTIMA: But this doesn't resolve the quandary of my five notes. Really, they had no meaning but what we both placed upon them.

PLATO: No. There must be one true meaning.

DIOTIMA: Music is abstract and can't be examined in that way.

PLATO: Music is mathematical, I've studied how it is created by patterns. Maybe its meaning is unknown to you too, we all should strive to seek truth.

DIOTIMA: I don't think you can ever rid differences in interpretation completely.

PLATO: We would live better if we did.

DIOTIMA: Perhaps. *(pause)* I suppose there is danger in interpretation. I cannot know how my five notes, or others, may be interpreted. To you they are a frustration, to the next man they might be a comfort, while the next again might find them an implicit permission to perform an indecent act in exchange for drachmae. Whatever you call the 'truth,' there will always be danger in interpretation, and not acknowledging that is a lie of its own kind.

PLATO: You speak like you do not partake in "indecent acts" as you call it.

DIOTIMA: I cannot. I need my honour as an unwed woman intact.

PLATO: I had assumed since you did not wish to wed that your flute-girl duties might include...

DIOTIMA: *(quickly)* They do not. *(beat)* If this changes our arrangement/ I will...

PLATO: It does not, I told you women do not interest me much. Although – you do make good conversation. *(a pause)* I wonder... Do you wish for children?

DIOTIMA: I wish to feed myself and keep control of what I earn.

PLATO: Perhaps then you have a masculine soul, no wonder you interest me.

DIOTIMA: *(she laughs)* Ha! It's feminine to me, but you can interpret it how you'd like. Come find me if you need your five notes re-interpreted... again.

DIOTIMA exits. PLATO pores over his manuscript.

PLATO: It's good. *(he goes to leave, then returns once more)* It's good. *(he exits)*

SCENE 5

The lights become bright and wide.

AURORA and CASSANDRA enter mid-conversation.

AURORA: (to CASSANDRA) So I had been in the burrow – I mean – library all morning and had just reached another dead end when I realised my stomach was attempting to eat itself. So I thought I'd do something about that and headed to the student kitchen, and who do you think I found there...

CASSANDRA: Jonathan?

AURORA: Cleo. What are the chances.

CASSANDRA: Pretty high... it's spring break so I heard there's only about ten students living on campus.

AURORA: Really?

CASSANDRA: You hadn't noticed?

AURORA: It felt like I saw people a lot. But I guess it was always the same people... Anyway, I said:

CASSANDRA becomes CLEO, the lighting dims and becomes narrower.

AURORA: Cleo... Hi.

CLEO: Hi.

AURORA: I'm just... getting some food.

CLEO: The wild Aurora has emerged hungry from the burrow I see, but the question is, will she deign to communicate with her fellow humans, or will she simply devour sustenance and return, sated to her den. *(An awkward pause, AURORA can't find an answer)* Well that joke floated like a stone. *(beat)*

AURORA: How was the language exchange?

CLEO: What? *(remembering)* Oh. I didn't go. Something came up. *(beat)* There's another one next week.

AURORA: Nice. *(another beat)*

CLEO: Well, I grew tired of not talking with 20% of the people here, so I talked with Jonathan. *(CLEO waits for a reaction and gets none)* He said you two have been looking into Plato.

AURORA: Yes. Do you know him?

CLEO: I'm an artist, not a neanderthal.

AURORA: Actually, neanderthals were more advanced than homo-sapiens/ at the time when...

CLEO: Were they on the Earth at the same time as Plato?

AURORA: What? Of course not.

CLEO: So, my comment stands.

AURORA: *(impressed)* Fair.

CLEO: I've been thinking about what you're studying, and I think you're limited.

AURORA: *(taken back)* Umm.

CLEO: I'll start again, you know why I like going to language exchanges, even though my Greek isn't fantastic?

AURORA: Because you want to look 'cute' – and you're trying to get better?

CLEO: Well maybe, but not what I wanted to say.

AURORA: Then?

CLEO: It's because it keeps me open to understanding communication outside of language. We have a word for *water* in English, but in Greek they have *nero* and the Latin *aqua*. There's no obvious commonality between any of these words. At some point each one was just made up, brought about by the need to have a word to communicate about water.

AURORA: That's a lot of languages to name drop. You have the Spanish and Japanese for me to?

CLEO: If you'd like?

AURORA: That's okay.

CLEO: When I go to a language exchange, we all go back to grasping at what makes water, water to communicate about it, rather than the preconceived ideas you already have around the word.

AURORA: Was this going somewhere, or are you just explaining postmodernism to me? Pretty sure I get it, haven't you heard, we're into meta-modernity now.

CLEO: That's not what I'm trying to say.

AURORA: If you stop using metaphors and just say what you mean, I might get it.

CLEO: *(laughing with irony)* This is exactly my point. Facts, words, facts, it's all you look at. Take the words away what do you still have?

AURORA: Silence.

CLEO: You have music, dance, clothing, jewellery and art. There are so many ways to express oneself and humans have been doing that since we first learnt to sing. Not everything is 'serious' stuff like your papers and texts, or even my

art- if you put any value in that anyway. A hairpin on your shirt is a choice for self-expression, just like the colour you use to paint your bedroom.

AURORA: I really don't get how this is relevant.

CLEO: I think you need to be finding those parts of ancient societies if you want to find the women, especially a flute girl – her whole life is music, can you actually imagine what she looked and sounded like?

AURORA: I refer you to an unnamed professor, "No-one has ever made head or tail of ancient Greek music, and no-one ever will. That way madness lies."

CLEO: That's changed, and you know it. Even without music, there are still vase paintings; descriptions of dance moves for Dionysus rituals, some actual tapestry remains – isn't that amazing? There are relevant feminine artefacts you can find, they're just not all literal.

AURORA: You *have* been talking to Jonathan. I can't look at so much extra stuff. I don't have time. I don't even have time to eat. There's a process that I have to follow and it's enough without adding in random extra work for myself.

CLEO: Have it your way, but it doesn't seem to be working.

AURORA: You don't get it. I actually care about my research and want to do it right. It must be great choosing not to care about anything so you can do whatever you feel like.

CLEO: I think you're the one that doesn't get it.

The lights become bright and wide.

AURORA: *(to CASSANDRA)* Then I left. I mean, if I wanted unsolicited advice, I would have asked my aunt.

CASSANDRA: She makes good points.

AURORA: Don't you start.

CASSANDRA: Oh she's still touchy...

AURORA: I'm not! *(beat)* It took me a few days, but I did look into a couple of instances of flute girls on vases.

CASSANDRA: Stop. I just need to make sure. Aurora, are you in there? You can come out now it's just me here...

AURORA: *(rolls eyes)* Then I went to find Jonathan.

CASSANDRA: Not Cleo to say thanks for the new direction? *(AURORA gives a look)* No? Okay.

Both exit. The lighting dims and becomes narrower.

JONATHAN enters with his guitar and begins to play. AURORA enters but remains side stage watching for a while. JONATHAN concludes.

AURORA: That was beautiful.

JONATHAN: *(sarcastic)* Oh please Aurora, come on in to my bedroom!

AURORA: I didn't know you played.

JONATHAN: Seriously?

AURORA: ... Yeah?

JONATHAN: What did you think I was studying?

AURORA: Philosophy?

JONATHAN: 'The societal role of music in Ancient Athens and its contribution to modern musicological practices'.

AURORA: You don't need to play music to study it.

JONATHAN: It helps. I took philosophy as an elective in my undergrad Bachelor of Music, all arts PhDs are grouped under Philosophy.

AURORA: That's unnecessarily confusing.

JONATHAN: Well, when you said you didn't care before, I guess you meant it. *(holding out hand)* Nice to meet you, I'm Jonathan. I studied music at Sydney Con, before being accepted in a PhD at Sydney. But my most impressive claim to fame is that last year, at the same time as completing my PhD I also won two Warhammer tournaments in two different countries, on two different continents.

AURORA: That's... an unexpected flex. But yes, and you finished and submitted your thesis months before it was due, I remember. Likely with no edits required/ because...

JONATHAN: Finished yes. *(beat)* I didn't say submitted.

AURORA: Oh okay. Right. I came to talk to you about flute girls, which I now realise you probably know a lot about...

JONATHAN: Not so much- it's why I was interested. My research was more focused on the lyre, *(as though justifying)* it's a stringed instrument... and it was seen as more mathematical and respectable, so it was studied and replicated. The aulos, sorry ancient flute was more for parties, theatre and madness, anything in Dionysus' domain.

AURORA: The second list sounds more interesting to me!

JONATHAN: Isn't that a surprise.

AURORA: I was looking at some vases after ... Cleo mentioned it could be helpful.

JONATHAN: Cleo?

AURORA: Yes, so what?

JONATHAN: So nothing.

AURORA: So, it looks like flute girls maybe weren't all necessarily courtesans or sex workers. I think it was more like opera singers in the 1700s. They could sleep with men and gain favours for doing so, but it wasn't in their job description. Most of the reasons historians have that impression is from a few accounts of men who abducted flute girls to have their way with them, which made it seem like that was usual. But what if this were written because it was exceptional and noteworthy? Flute girls are depicted on all these vases and other pottery that seem completely regular, not something with an improper leaning. What if all these flute girls, and boys – there were flute boys too, what if they all had a specific role in Ancient Athens, not just one shared with the heitairai.

JONATHAN: That's good. Yes that should stand up. A lot of the philosophers dismissed the flute and players of the instrument because they didn't understand it.

AURORA: I read that it was compared with the inconsistency of women, and how they have a wandering uterus/ which...

JONATHAN: Did you wake up with your uterus in your foot this morning?

AURORA: I think it's made its way to my knee.

JONATHAN: Music was mathematical to the Ancient Athenians; you probably know it was studied as one of the four branches of maths? *(she nods, Jonathan proceeds to demonstrate the following)* The lyre was logical with their mathematical findings, the full string makes a sound, the half string makes the same note an octave above, then the 5th, a 4th and so on, that's essentially how the modern scale came to be – in a kind of best fit way. But the ancient Greek flute, remember it's more like a modern oboe, with a conical bore. The Greeks couldn't calculate the maths behind the creation of the instrument, so it seemed the tone holes would be carved in at random points on the instrument, by trial and error.

AURORA: Pretty infuriating for a people that prided themselves on discovering the mathematics of the universe.

JONATHAN: Exactly, hence Aristotle and Plato's dislike for the instrument.

AURORA: But they were always looking for answers, for new theorems and knowledge. Surely they could have learned how the aulos worked.

JONATHAN: Surely they could have learned that a woman's uterus does not wander. I'd wager there were theories, but remember they were just like us, often the biggest barrier to knowledge is our own society.

AURORA: *(thinking out loud, her pacing should mimic Plato's from earlier)* The flute was seen as an inferior instrument based in myth, so it's played by followers of Dionysus and women. This lowers its status even further, so when the maths of the instrument is difficult, that is because the instrument is inferior, not because they're not clever enough to work it out. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy where the people who play this instrument must also be immoral and base, which in turn discourages future mathematicians from studying it, because why would they waste their time with a tainted instrument, when there are so many more worthy things.

JONATHAN: In a nutshell.

AURORA: But the instrument persisted. I think some of this stuff belongs in your thesis right? Against the academic trends and morals, this resilient instrument persisted into modern usage, and I'm sure it left its own imprint on modern musicology. That's so exciting! You should definitely be including this.

JONATHAN: *(too quickly)* No it's not relevant.

AURORA: What? Of course it is. And you just said it wasn't submitted, so/ you should definitely...

JONATHAN: You're the second person to say that today. I don't remember asking your opinion, have you read my thesis? *(he starts packing clothes into a suitcase)* Do you actually know anything about it at all? Both no. It's not relevant, I don't have time or space for this.

AURORA: Are you going somewhere?

JONATHAN: No. I'm... *(he realises he's been packing and starts throwing clothes back around the room)* unpacking from a trip.

AURORA: What trip?

JONATHAN: One that was more enjoyable than this conversation, *(muttered)* which seems to be recurring like a broken record.

AURORA: I don't get why you don't think it's a good idea.

JONATHAN: Is that because you won't see anyone's perspective but yours.

AURORA: I've forgotten, were you packing, unpacking or just unloading on me? Did you want some more ammunition? *(she tosses a shirt toward him)*

JONATHAN: No. *(he throws it on the floor then realises what she said)*. Honestly, at this point I'll go for broke and choose the lot.

AURORA: Well. This has been fun. *(AURORA turns to leave)*

JONATHAN: And if you see Cleo tell *her* I'm busy too.

The lights brighten and become wide.

AURORA: *(to CASSANDRA)* What an overreaction, I was just trying to help.

CASSANDRA: Well look at the pot calling the kettle black.

AURORA: What?

CASSANDRA: You were also a bit much?

AURORA: Some girls give gifts to show they care... I give strong rigorous debate.
(CASSANDRA gives a look) I can't help my love language.

CASSANDRA: Love language hey? So now we're getting *romantic* with the musician.

AURORA: *(sighs)* Don't make me call you a boomer.

CASSANDRA: Unjustified on so many levels.

AURORA: Less interruptions, there's a lot still to tell and we're getting close to the station.

CASSANDRA: Right okay. The floor shall be yours. *(she zips lips)*

They exit. Light down.

Possible intermission.

SCENE 6

The Agora.

Lighting is soft but bright.

Sounds of market commotion can be heard.

DIOTIMA, dressed in floor length dress and veil is selling wares at a merchant stall. AGATA enters, a displaced respectable woman hoping to purchase.

AGATA: How much is this one?

DIOTIMA: That one's a drachma.

AGATA: I don't have that much on me, I could pay a quarter.

DIOTIMA: I'm sorry, I really can't sell it for less than half a drachma.

AGATA: We have money – I can pay the rest later – if my husband ever arrives.

DIOTIMA: I'm very sorry. I would, but it's not my product and the owner needs the profits straight away... You're from the country? *(the woman nods)* Do you have somewhere to sleep tonight? I think I could make some room.

AGATA: Thank you, but I have a cousin here, so we will manage. *(she leaves)*

DIOTIMA looks after her sadly. Then she thinks about playing flute once, then again, she checks no-one is around and finally begins to play. EUPHEME enters, catching her unawares.

EUPHEME: *(mock scolding)* Did you sell anything for half its value again? Or have you just scared away all the customers with your abrasive music?

DIOTIMA: *(slightly guilty)* No... but I offered and she still couldn't pay half price, so I turned her away.

EUPHEME: Then I thank Hermes for the continuation of this business.

DIOTIMA: You are pleased she suffers a lot rather than just a little?

EUPHEME: Of course not. I have enough people to worry about already.

DIOTIMA: How was little Demetrius?

EUPHEME: His fever has passed, so we think he will be better after some rest. Thank you for minding the store for us again. When I actually sell something – for its real value – I'll buy you fresh ribbons to celebrate.

DIOTIMA: Sounds lovely. Do you mind if I practice here a bit longer, I was really onto something and I just want to get it down, please please...

EUPHEME: Fine...

DIOTIMA: Thank you! I'll hide around the side.

EUPHEME: But if I say, "Hello customer!" I expect you to stop.

DIOTIMA: But why, when I could serenade them and charm them into believing your linens are then best in Athens.

EUPHEME scoffs, DIOTIMA remains onstage practising sections, she makes some errors and corrections. TERPSION enters.

TERPSION: Now who could be making that terrible noise at this hour of the morning.

EUPHEME: Don't ask *me* about it.

DIOTIMA: Good morning my lovely brother.

TERPSION: What are you up to this time little sister, were those tragic wailings I was hearing?

DIOTIMA: Perhaps.

TERPSION: You're not planning to play onstage, are you?

DIOTIMA: *(mock offended)* Me?

TERPSION: Diotima...

DIOTIMA: I have a commission!

EUPHEME: Oh, very fancy. You can buy me ribbons instead.

DIOTIMA: Only if I can finish this section in time, but I keep being distracted.

TERPSION: Who was silly enough to ask you?

DIOTIMA: He's a young aristocrat with very little worldly sense, but I think he's a good sort. One of the men at our last symposium.

TERPSION: Aristocles, must be. Too reserved for his own good that one, arrived late and barely spoke.

DIOTIMA: *(smiling)* Really?

TERPSION: Maybe that's why he asked you, you're an easy target.

DIOTIMA: You take that back.

TERPSION: Why should I?

DIOTIMA: Take it back or I will tell Eupheme here of your appreciation for a certain Theo/dote...

TERPSION: Don't you dare – that conversation was meant for men.

EUPHEME: A men's conversation about a woman called Theodote, wonder what that could be about.

TERPSION: The appreciation was all from afar my love.

EUPHEME: This is exactly why we should be part of these conversations. You say you're fixing the austerity, holding off the Spartans, but instead we declined their

peace offering and now you still have time to comment on a woman
(*DIOTIMA is gesturing to her upper torso*) – Oh good, time to comment on a woman's breasts. From afar you said? (*TERPSION stares daggers at DIOTIMA*)

TERPSION: Yes. From afar.

DIOTIMA: (*giggling*) We - have to - appreciate the beautiful things in life. (*PLATO enters*) Oh look it's Aristocles! Aristocles, hello! Would you like to buy some ribbons or linens?

PLATO: Diotima... you're here, in the agora.

DIOTIMA: (*offended*) Yes. These are my brother's wares; I believe you have met Terpsion. Shall I introduce you to his wife Eupheme, or should we ignore her because the idea she might exist outside her home would make you uncomfortable?

TERPSION: Diotima!

PLATO: No – of course. A pleasure to meet you.

EUPHEME: And you. Diotima said you were a good sort.

PLATO: She did?

EUPHEME: And that you're writing a tragedy. Do you plan to submit it to the City Dionysia?

PLATO: I do.

EUPHEME: (*to Diotima*) Your notes are going big time!

TERPSION: What is the subject?

DIOTIMA: You won't recognise it. It's all new!

TERPSION: What do you mean new?

DIOTIMA: The characters, they're not from Homer – they're just people.

TERPSION: So, you're writing a comedy.

PLATO: I'm not.

DIOTIMA: Tragedies have been treating Homeric legends as contemporary figures for decades anyway. He's just changing the form. I think it's excellent.

TERPSION: You're playing with fire here. You can't write a tragedy about real people, it's illegal.

PLATO: But they're not real people.

EUPHEME: If you're pretending either way, what's the point of changing the type of pretence.

They are all stumped thinking for a moment. From here PLATO and TERPSION listen more to each other while EUPHEME and DIOTIMA converse.

DIOTIMA: It's because people expect a certain format so when you change one element, they're more likely to see the whole issue from a fresh perspective.

TERPSION: Tragedy is very fixed in its ways.

PLATO: It's only one element.

EUPHEME: Yes, you're right - that comedy with the women, it was similar to other anti-war comedies, but showing the women's perspective.

DIOTIMA: Lysistrata. Wouldn't it be great if women could actually perform those roles that are about them.

EUPHEME: Now *that* would be changing the form. *(she laughs)* Women speaking their own dialogue.

PLATO: Yes, that's it, I should be focusing on the dialogue.

TERPSION: They're very forward these women of mine. You can't take them too seriously.

DIOTIMA: I take myself very seriously, Eupheme too. The people are tired of tragedies, we find enough brutality in the everyday. But this change will revitalise it and inspire the next generation!

EUPHEME: *(laughing)* Like you're so old.

PLATO: But she's right. This change will do exactly that. I'll buy your best linen in thanks. *(TERPSION leaves this to EUPHEME and wanders off)*

EUPHEME: Oh... really? That's this one it's embroidered/ with...

PLATO: How much?

EUPHEME: 10...

DIOTIMA: *(interrupting)* If you have the ability, would you consider buying this for a woman in need? *(She is holding the item AGATA tried to buy earlier)*

EUPHEME: *(scolding)* Diotima...

PLATO: Oh... If you need it.

EUPHEME: 11 drachmae.

DIOTIMA: Thank you! It won't go to waste! *(She hurries off in search of AGATA)*

PLATO: Here you are. Oh Diotima - *(but she is gone)* it was a pleasure working with you.

PLATO exits. EUPHEME dusts hands at her good sale and packs up for the day, then exits.

SCENE 7

The lights brighten slightly.

AURORA and JONATHAN enter, they have clearly been discussing work for some time.

AURORA: No, I'm saying I need to have a *reason* for the son of a notable aristocrat having an important interaction with a regular flute girl.

JONATHAN: Sometimes life just happens, if people were studying us in two and a half thousand years' time, is there a logical reason we met?

AURORA: We're contemporary academics, we're from the same country. That's like saying how did Shakespeare know Marlowe.

JONATHAN: That's fair. It would be less clear how I know Cleo.

AURORA: How *do* you know Cleo?

JONATHAN: Seriously? She was my girlfriend. Until about a month ago.

AURORA: What?

JONATHAN: Yeah!

AURORA: I did not pick that at all.

JONATHAN: It was pretty blatant, holding hands, tasteful levels of PDA, weekend trips away together. Since then, there's apparently been a -what was it again- ah, "a desert-orange, suffocating atmosphere that occurs when we're in a room together." You actually interrupted me a few days ago when I was moving my stuff back from her room.

AURORA: *That's* why you were so touchy.

JONATHAN: No. *That* was because I found a half bottle of bordeaux just sitting there, covered in dust going off. I mean what kind of psychopath does that?

AURORA: What a waste of good wine.

JONATHAN: *(beat)* You know the rest of us have lives when we're not talking about your thesis right?

AURORA: *(taken back)* Of course I know.

JONATHAN: It would be nice if you took an interest, ever.

AURORA: I just did, didn't I?

JONATHAN: That's not... nevermind

AURORA: I know I'm one tracked at the moment. There's just, so much I have to do. It's like... I'm walking in, deep sand, you know the soft sand where you step your foot in and you sink to halfway up your shin. And it's hot and muggy, the humid air is so hot the moisture in my eyes feels like it boils. And I'm walking to the sea, but I'm not getting any closer, it's like some nightmare loop where every time I look up, the sea is just as far away.

JONATHAN: *(beat)* Was that a metaphor? How unexpected. *(seriously)* Aurora, we've been talking over a month, and I've never seen you relax. Break the loop for a minute, come to the Dionysus festival the American uni is hosting tonight.

AURORA: Thanks, but I want to write up/ the work...

JONATHAN: Come on! You're in Athens, live a little! It's a recreation of the Dionysia, kind of, it's basically research for you. I'm sure there'll even be a flute girl there.

AURORA: Tempting.

JONATHAN: I'm going with Cleo as... friends. We're trialling forgetting those two months- and a wasted bordeaux. I could use a backup!

AURORA: Two months? That's barely even a girlfriend!

JONATHAN: But you know what they say, two months when travelling is like a year at home.

AURORA: I don't think anyone says that.

JONATHAN: Tell that to your new frown lines from all the stressing.

AURORA: Hey!

JONATHAN: So how do you think Plato and Diotima might have met?

CLEO enters talking to JONATHAN.

CLEO: Hey, Jonathan, about that festival, I have a big meeting tomorrow about/ my art show and...

JONATHAN: No, don't you dare bail! I just convinced Aurora to join us.

CLEO: *(she notices Aurora)* Oh, hi.

AURORA: Hi.

CLEO: Is this true?

AURORA: If you want me there?

CLEO: I guess I'm pretty prepared already.

JONATHAN: We were just about to discuss how Plato met Diotima, care to join?

CLEO: Sounds intriguing. If you want me here?

JONATHAN: Of course! We need some lateral thinking, we've been going in circles.

CLEO: *(to Aurora)* Do you want me here?

AURORA: Sure.

CLEO: Well, that wasn't very convincing.

AURORA: Stay, it should be fun.

CLEO: Fun? With Aurora? Well now I can't say no.

AURORA: Ha ha. Plato lived an 80-year long life, but '*Symposium*' is an earlier dialogue, *(to CLEO)*, wait, have you heard of the dialogues?

CLEO: You mean the quasi-dramatic form Plato used to write about philosophy, where two people walk around the city recounting previous philosophical discussions? *(they stare at her)* I was interested...

AURORA: Well, yeah... that will do. *Symposium* is estimated around 385- 370BCE, if we take the earlier estimate, then he would have been 52 when it was written. Which still leaves, over half of his life for him to have met her.

JONATHAN: You thought it would be a young Socrates, does the logic hold for Plato too?

AURORA: Unsure. Socrates was quite known for romantic relationships with numerous people, meaning he would have needed to be tutored early on. Plato... not so much. He never married, even though that was more or less expected at the time.

JONATHAN: He isn't known for having any long-term partners, male or female either.

CLEO: And he thought he was qualified to write about love? Typical.

AURORA: The end of the symposium decides that the purest form of love is a love of knowledge and acquiring wisdom.

CLEO: At least he stuck to writing what he knew.

AURORA: But also made it seem like the morally superior choice.

CLEO: Also typical.

JONATHAN: Men. Am I right?

AURORA: If he had married, he might not have recommended mating 'by lot' and removing children at birth to be raised anonymously in hospitals.

CLEO: Wow. Was his family toxic?

JONATHAN: Plato thought it was all for the betterment of the state, it wasn't personal.

CLEO: Plato's personal situation probably sucked, so he didn't think twice about destroying it.

JONATHAN: He was from a privileged family.

AURORA: But his uncle and cousin were part of the thirty tyrants uprising, don't you remember? He wanted nothing to do with them after that. And Socrates, a mentor and probable father figure was murdered by the state, which happened in part because of this uprising.

CLEO: I'm seeing a pattern of broken trust emerging, first by his family and then the state. This is sounding more like it – vive la revolution!

JONATHAN: More like they tried that and it sucked, then the fallout of returning the state was bad too.

CLEO: How old was he during these events?

AURORA: His exact birthdate is unclear, but about 23 during the thirty tyrants, 28 when Socrates died. That's young for Athens, he was still considered a 'youth' at Socrates' trial.

CLEO: This kind of thing makes you grow up quickly. If this woman had an impact on his core beliefs, it was probably before.

AURORA: I can accept that, he spent a lot of time travelling afterwards, and it does seem simpler to meet a flute girl in Athens.

CLEO: *(amused)* You're taking my advice?

AURORA: It's steered me well so far.

CLEO: Oh? And here I was thinking my thoughts just set off a timer for your next explosion.

AURORA: Let's... Imagine them meeting, just try and, feel it.

CLEO: You. Feeling?

JONATHAN: I thought you said that idea was "ridiculous."

AURORA: No I didn't, I said it was a riot!

JONATHAN: Jury's out on that one.

AURORA: Enter Plato (*PLATO enters with swagger*), he's a young man, an avid student of Socrates, he's denounced his family and sworn himself to the pursuit of knowledge.

PLATO: Hi, I'm Plato!

CLEO: That was a bit weird no?

JONATHAN: Just go with it.

AURORA: Enter Diotima. (*she enters with flute*) She's a woman... with a flute!

PLATO: Flutes are a base instrument, take this woman away and bring me a lyre instead.

AURORA: I see he's hitting his stride.

CLEO: This seems weird too.

JONATHAN: It's part of the process.

PLATO: I don't have time for idle chatter.

CLEO: No, I mean Plato is weird. He's like... a robot.

JONATHAN: Yes, he's single minded.

CLEO: That's it, it's like talking to Aurora.

AURORA: Hey...

CLEO: He won't be connecting with anyone like that.

JONATHAN: That's true.

PLATO: I asked for a lyre!

CLEO: Jonathan get your guitar. (*he does*) Play something, anything, but make it good!

PLATO: (*these are spoken sporadically during Jonathan's performance*).
 "Well, you know what happens to lovers: whenever they see a lyre, a garment or anything else that their beloved is accustomed to use, they know the lyre, and the image of the boy to whom it belongs comes into their mind." (*DIOTIMA rolls eyes and takes herself offstage*)
 "The good man is the only excellent musician, because he gives forth a perfect harmony not with a lyre or other instrument but with the whole of his life."

JONATHAN: (*JONATHAN raises eyebrows*) I don't think my goodness has anything to do with my hours of practice.

PLATO: "The true musician..."

JONATHAN: Oh great, it's still going.

PLATO: *(clears throat)* "The true musician, is attuned to a fairer harmony than that of the lyre... for he truly has in his own life a harmony of words and deeds arranged in the Dorian mode. Such a one makes me joyous with the sound of his voice, so eager am I in drinking in his words."

JONATHAN: Sure man. You're drinking in my harmony eagerly enough.

CLEO: It's not the right music.

AURORA: This is ridiculous.

CLEO: It's bad.

JONATHAN: *I'm trying my best here.*

CLEO: It's wrong. Stop playing Jonathan. *(to Aurora)* Make him younger.

AURORA: Enter a younger Plato...

A doll in Plato's image is thrown onstage.

AURORA: Not that young! *(PLATO throws the doll away with disgust)* Enter Plato, he's become enraptured by knowledge, but the thirty tyrants uprising hasn't yet made him lose all faith in the state.

PLATO: Hi, I'm Aristocles.

CLEO: No that's wrong.

JONATHAN: Did his name change?

AURORA: What do you mean it's wrong.

PLATO: Why has my thinking music ceased.

AURORA: Why aren't you still playing Jonathan? *(he recommences)*

CLEO: There's no point, it's wrong. He needs to be younger.

The doll is thrown on stage again.

A and C: Not that young! *(the doll is removed again)*

AURORA: Fine! You do it.

CLEO: I will. Stop, just stop playing Jonathan! *(he does with annoyance)* Enter Plato, he's an impressionable young elite who just met Socrates and is eagerly soaking up life experience. *(JONATHAN plays a dramatic chord for his*

entrance, which PLATO responds to as if a puppet forced, all stare at JONATHAN)

JONATHAN: What? That was fun!

AURORA and CLEO start laughing, the kind that's too hard after breaking tension. PLATO rolls eyes.

AURORA: Wait, where did Diotima go?

CLEO: I think she left.

JONATHAN: Yes, she disappeared while I was playing for Plato.

AURORA: We're doing it. We're literally sitting here doing it. She's fading into the background, before my eyes and I didn't even notice.

JONATHAN: What are we doing?

CLEO: Forgetting her.

Flute music begins playing from offstage.

JONATHAN: It's her music.

AURORA: What is?

JONATHAN: Just listen.

He begins playing too, the duet continues and CLEO asks AURORA to dance. PLATO listens too, perhaps he sits, he seems guilty. In time DIOTIMA joins them onstage, she plays and interacts with CLEO and JONATHAN, but upon reaching AURORA, she notices PLATO, stops playing, shakes her head and walks out with a look of hurt and betrayal. He freezes, thinking then after a moment follows after her.

PLATO: Diotima wait!

CLEO: Oh my gosh! Oh my gosh we did it!

She jumps in the air, JONATHAN goes to celebrate with her, but AURORA has already reached for CLEO's arms, so he ends up awkwardly hugging them both.

CLEO: That was amazing! I think I get why you care about this so much.

AURORA: Do you have the feeling we just turned to the back cover?

CLEO: Yes! So he's younger still, he hadn't met Socrates when they met! I knew it!

JONATHAN: *(feeling excluded)* That was excellent playing Jonathan, thanks for the marvellous once in a lifetime performance. That's my pleasure, just for the two of you, I will accept payment in drinks and admiration *(the other two acknowledge him)*.

AURORA: But why won't she talk to us.

CLEO: What do you mean?

AURORA: She doesn't talk, Plato does.

CLEO: She *is* talking. It's like I said, we can't all talk with words.

AURORA: But I want her to talk, I want to give her voice back.

CLEO: *(gently)* Maybe you can't.

AURORA: *(annoyed)* Of course I can. *(beat)* That's the whole point. I need this to work.

CLEO: I'm... going to get ready for tonight, need a bit of a refresh.

JONATHAN: *(quickly)* Great idea! I think we all need a minute. Meet you both out the front at 8?

AURORA: I don't know, I should probably write some of this up/ and work some more...

J and C: Don't you dare.

AURORA: Fine! See you then.

All three exit in different directions.

SCENE 8

Outside of an Ecclesia which has just ended.

The lighting is soft and bright. They are sounds of commotion as a group disperse.

DIOTIMA waits outside for the men to go by, she is looking for someone. PLATO enters walking with purpose. DIOTIMA pushes through a crowd to get to him.

DIOTIMA: Aristocles!

PLATO: *(with surprise)* Diotima... You're here.

DIOTIMA: After I suddenly stopped hearing from you – I had to wait somewhere I knew you'd be.

PLATO: I suppose that was to be expected.

DIOTIMA: There are many more people in the city than usual. It should be a good festival this year.

PLATO: If you say so.

DIOTIMA: Not as great as Athens in our Golden Age though, I'm sure the crowds would have been triple this number.

PLATO: That would be more to your liking – I'm sure many of them were rich.

DIOTIMA: Yes, and then they would buy Eupheme's wares. *(beat)* Perhaps if your vision comes to pass, we might see those numbers again.

PLATO: I suppose I should thank you again for the conversation with Terpsion and...

DIOTIMA: Eupheme.

PLATO: Well... that would have /been

DIOTIMA: Almost a month ago, and you haven't told me which day your tragedies are to be performed, I take it, it is not the first one!

PLATO: No. I was on the way to deliver my work to the Dionysia, but my heart was no longer in it. Was this work really what I wanted to be known for? Then, in a moment that I knew would shape the rest of my life, I saw Socrates speaking with a statesman. They spoke of humility/ and at every turn...

DIOTIMA: I can see where this is going – I've heard of the great orations of Socrates, as I'm sure you remember. Which of the five days have your tragedies been allocated?

PLATO: My tragedies? Weren't you listening? Watching this man speak it came to me, this is the future of theatre, this is how I can focus on the dialogue and the ideas. The form is the problem - the tragic form is so pre-occupied with its song and dance, and cannot escape from the stale, old teachings of Homer.

DIOTIMA: But you *have* escaped it...

PLATO: I don't understand... This is what we talked about.

DIOTIMA: Excuse me?

PLATO: That conversation with your brother. We discussed that I should be focusing on the dialogue.

DIOTIMA: We never said that. Song and dance are the staples of storytelling. They're beauty and emotion and connection. Without that you just have... words.

PLATO: Exactly! They will speak plainly and tell us how to better ourselves.

DIOTIMA: But they won't make us want to.

PLATO: No, they won't trick us by controlling our emotions. It's like you said, no-one wants to watch tragedies anymore. It's time to remake the wheel.

DIOTIMA: I said they'd watch yours. What day will your tragedies be performed?

PLATO: They won't.

DIOTIMA: Can you repeat that?

PLATO: I burned my tragedies!

DIOTIMA: You burned them.

PLATO: Yes, I burned them. They were worthless.

DIOTIMA: Worthless? They were the start of something innovative and beautiful. I poured my soul into that music.

PLATO: That was the problem. They were no longer mine, the music changed them into something I never intended.

DIOTIMA: You didn't like the interpretation.

PLATO: But I buried their ashes by my favourite tree where they will nurture my new future. I will learn from Socrates and one day I will use his great mind to educate and better the whole of Athens.

DIOTIMA: (*bitter*) Why stop at Athens? If this is as momentous as you say I'm sure you could be bettering the whole of mankind! (*PLATO chuckles*) When you're done singing -or should I say orating- your own praises, you could start by educating me on how to find a secure work that doesn't go up in flames at a whim. Some of us don't have the luxury of burning hard work.

PLATO: Have I upset you?

DIOTIMA: Have you... (*beat*) I wish you well on your new path... I ask only for fair recompense for the time spent on this music which has now been put to the flame, a month past if your tale is to be believed.

PLATO: And there it is, of course you do. The performances did not occur.

DIOTIMA: No, and now they never will. I turned down at least three other performing opportunities for you. Never mind the time spent learning your script,

composing the music, memorising it. So, I consider you very much in debt to me.

PLATO: You? You turned down work for this. What are you talking about?

DIOTIMA: I don't have a male flute friend. How would I? There aren't enough men for anything anymore. It was always me who was going to perform.

PLATO: But, you can't.

DIOTIMA: Why not. I'm just as good, no, I'm better than 9 out of 10 of the male performers- most of them are old drunks. I should be on the stage.

PLATO: You don't have to keep pretending, you've only been out for money and status this whole time, just like your scheming father.

DIOTIMA: Of course I had to pretend, look at how differently you're treating me.

PLATO: You were right, I should have been worried someone might rob me. You may call me Plato.

DIOTIMA: When did I ever try to rob you?

PLATO: I already paid for your chiton, I won't be giving you anything else.

DIOTIMA: (*confused*) My chiton? (*realising*) You mean the meagre linen you purchased for a homeless, probably widowed mother?

PLATO: It was not for you?

DIOTIMA: As if I would ask that of you!

PLATO: Either way. You can't be on stage, it's not right.

DIOTIMA: This is your tipping point? I put all the work in, know the material inside out, but now I should pass this off and just train another, less talented musician, because it's not right?

PLATO: I'm glad I burned my tragedies! So I can cut ties with such a boastful, shameless woman.

DIOTIMA: And I. So I don't have to spend any more time looking at your ignorant, self-righteous face. My payment, please.

PLATO: I consider it paid in linen; the performances did not occur.

DIOTIMA: You really mean to not pay me.

PLATO: I won't be supporting your pretences, find another impressionable young man. (*He storms off*)

DIOTIMA: You are just as trustworthy as humble.

DIOTIMA paces aggravatedly, then takes some deep breaths, pulls out her flute and tries to play but her emotions keep breaking her sound. She becomes more frustrated and looks to throw the flute away but catches herself and hugs it instead.

SCENE 9

The lighting brightens slightly.

CLEO onstage wearing a pale yellow chiton and Ancient style wreath in her hair and sandals. AURORA enters in a deep blue chiton but her accessories are all clearly modern.

CLEO: You're wearing heels with that? Brave.

AURORA: I'm taking the best of the past and blending it with the best of the present.

CLEO: Cute. But don't you know where we are? This side of Athens you might need to run fast on cobblestones at a moment's notice.

AURORA: Why...?

CLEO: People have fun, people riot, you don't want to get in the middle.

AURORA: I back myself to run in heels. I was athletics champion at school.

CLEO: You were?

JONATHAN: *(arriving)* I'm more worried about her being the one to start the brawl.

CLEO: That's true.

AURORA: Hey!

JONATHAN: She'll be correcting them, 'The ancient Greeks didn't wear togas...'

C and J: It's called a chiton!

CLEO: "Why are you all in plain white, chitons were actually very colourful"
(AURORA rolls eyes) Next minute she's annoyed the wrong person and caught in a headlock.

AURORA: I'll put *you* in a headlock in a second.

CLEO: I'd prefer a different position. Shall we?

They enter the Dionysia.

Music begins softly in background.

AURORA: So, what actually happens at this festival, are we watching some plays or?

JONATHAN: I did say it was the American Uni was hosting right... Pretty sure they just run the opening ceremony, so we're here to toast Dionysus, dress up and drink.

AURORA: But you said...

CLEO: Gosh look at her mask, it's perfect, I wish I'd made that.

JONATHAN: Look it's a Lyre! I'm going to ask if I can play it. *(he runs to audience)*

AURORA: What a nerd. *(CLEO gives her a look)* I'm a *different* kind of nerd. So what kind of position do you prefer? *(CLEO shrugs playfully)*

LYSSA: Welcome all to the Dionysia! For tonight you can call me Lyssa, for I'll be responsible for your descent into chaos. We give our thanks Dionysus, god of revelry, chaos and of course – tragedy! Please, eat, drink, dance, and revel!

AURORA: Doesn't she look just like Diotima did?

CLEO: Hmm, No I think she is taller. *(after the woman sets up her flute)* Now she looks like Diotima!

LYSSA begins to play, a lilting repetitive tune. The accompanying music becomes louder.

The characters are enraptured by it and start to act increasingly crazed throughout the scene.

AURORA: I'm so glad I came! I wasn't sure you'd want me here.

CLEO: I wasn't sure I did either! But it's nice. *(she dances away)*

JONATHAN: *(returning)* They didn't let me play!

AURORA: What?

JONATHAN: They said I wouldn't know how. How am I supposed to show them a maestro at work?

AURORA: How about... give your habitual peacock persona a break, try asking them like a normal person.

JONATHAN: A peacock that rests on its feathers is just another turkey.

AURORA: Be the lyre bird. Mimic their sound.

JONATHAN: While I do have a wonderful singing voice, unfortunately it doesn't match the lyrebird in mimicry.

AURORA: Well then. Be the cockatoo, pester them into submission.

JONATHAN: I'll be the parrot and swiftly exit this bird chat! *(they rejoin CLEO)*

CLEO: *(about LYSSA)* She's so pretty!

AURORA: Is she?

CLEO: The way she plays, it's so graceful.

AURORA: *(annoyed until she looks over)* She really looks like Diotima.

AURORA tries to walk toward LYSSA, but the way is blocked. PLATO enters, DIOTIMA sees him and ducks away.

PLATO: *(seeing CLEO)* Oh Theodote, pleasure to see you as always.

CLEO: *(coy)* Pleasure is all mine, can I tempt you to our circle?

PLATO: No, thank you. I have a business to see tonight.

CLEO: He's all business. I can never tempt him, sounds like someone else I know.
(she glares meaningfully at AURORA, unaware of what was said AURORA looks over)

AURORA: Hi! Nice to meet you.

PLATO: Aristocles. Well met. *(he makes to leave she blocks him)*

AURORA: Aurora. Wait... have we met before?

PLATO: I shouldn't think so. *(he leaves)*

AURORA: How rude. Where's Jonathan?

CLEO: *(she looks)* Over there! Wait, is that him?

TERPSION: Diotima!? Sister!? what are you doing here?

DIOTIMA: I just came to give thanks to Dionysus, like everyone else.

TERPSION: Diotima no. It's one thing to pose as a flute girl by the theatre, but you can't be here for the Opening Ceremony, I won't have it, it's not safe for you.

DIOTIMA: You value my safety much more than my needs.

TERPSION: What are you talking about?

DIOTIMA: What did you say to Plato?

TERPSION: Plato?

DIOTIMA: Aristocles.

TERPSION: When?

DIOTIMA: When I was there. You must have said something against me. You must have.

TERPSION: I... *(scrambling)* I said tragedy is set in its ways.

DIOTIMA: Then thank you very much. Because now he's burned his tragedy and all my work is up in smoke.

TERPSION: It's probably for the best.

DIOTIMA: For the best? He burned part of my soul. Why did I think you would understand. *(she storms away)*

CLEO: Jonathan! Jonathan! Jonathan! Oh found you, where were you?

JONATHAN: *(the character is jarred by the transition between characters, then he notices them holding hands)* I felt needed elsewhere.

AURORA pulls away from CLEO.

AURORA: We didn't want to lose each other – it's turning into a riot.

JONATHAN: Does Aurora actually want someone else around? Well now I have seen everything.

CLEO: That's a bit unfair.

JONATHAN: You know what, I'm not interested in being a third wheel. I'd prefer just get lost in the crowd and forget. *(he leaves but remains onstage in a separate 'bubble')*

AURORA: Someone's in a mood.

CLEO: *(rounding on her)* He has a right to be. You know, you've spent weeks ignoring me, always act like my thoughts are vapid or philistine, and now because you come out with us, we're all just supposed to pretend everything's great and nothing ever happened between any of us. Honestly, I don't even know if we're friends.

AURORA: I don't either.

CLEO: I don't even know if I like you!

AURORA: Me neither.

CLEO: Gosh, I don't know if I want to shake you or... *(CLEO leaves)*

AURORA: *(half-hearted)* You can both go to hell! Or Hades! Whatever! *(her yells fall on deaf ears and she soon forgets them in dance. The characters interact)*

superficially, sometimes with masks. PLATO eventually notices DIOTIMA and makes his way toward her).

- PLATO: Diotima? *(grabbing her- he is relieved while she flinches)* Diotima!
- DIOTIMA: Plato.
- PLATO: I did not expect to see you here – maybe I should have.
- DIOTIMA: You’d rather not see me at all.
- PLATO: I was wrong.
- DIOTIMA: On which point. Burning my work, refusing to pay me, or was it about accusing me of befriending you only to benefit from your money and status. It could also be for assuming there was no place in Athens for a woman like me – or any woman really, but on that point – you were absolutely correct.
- PLATO: Our state is broken. I want to help fix it.
- DIOTIMA: Our friendship is broken.
- PLATO: Most of them are.
- DIOTIMA: Good to know what’s more important to you.
- PLATO: It’s the road to a better future.
- DIOTIMA: And the present? I wanted to make something beautiful, something to make us forget our troubles and see the good in the world. But you took that from me. You might as well take the rest of my goodness too. If I’ve only ever been after money, Plato, then surely you’d expect I would offer my body at some point.
- PLATO: Don’t.
- DIOTIMA: Why not? I’m told it’s fun. *(she approaches him)* And young men like you just can’t say no.
- PLATO: Stop it.
- DIOTIMA: Well, at least not for long
- PLATO: Just stop it. Stop! *(he pushes her away)*
- DIOTIMA: I repulse you.
- PLATO: No.
- DIOTIMA: Don’t lie. *(she runs away past JONATHAN)*
- JONATHAN: Diotima? Sister, you shouldn’t be here. *(he follows after her)*
- AURORA: *(yelling after him)* Sister? Diotima’s my project! Stop taking over my work!
- CLEO: You can’t own her, stop trying, that’s a toxic mentality.

AURORA: I thought you didn't want to talk to me.

CLEO: Is that what you want? To be alone forever like your sad man Plato.

AURORA: No.

CLEO: You keep pushing everyone away.

AURORA: No, just you.

CLEO: So I'm special?

AURORA: Especially infuriating.

CLEO: That's still special. *(she kisses AURORA)*

AURORA: You're so confusing.

CLEO: Good.

AURORA: Is that what you say to all the boys and girls/ or am I...

CLEO: Excuse me?

AURORA: I mean, you say you dabble, that means with people too right. Jonathan, for starters. I just...

CLEO: Wow, there you go again. You're right, I do like to test the waters before swimming and this one is turning into some dangerous surf, I might just look elsewhere. *(She leaves)*

AURORA: That's not how I meant that...

PLATO: Have you seen her?

JONATHAN: Aurora?

PLATO: Who? No, your sister.

JONATHAN: I don't have a sister.

PLATO: You're not Terpsion?

JONATHAN: Not last time I checked... Jonathan *(he holds hand out, PLATO ignores it, looks twice at him in disbelief)*

PLATO: What a strange name. *(he leaves)*

JONATHAN: Terpsion...

DIOTIMA enters playing flute, slightly maniacally. CLEO re-enters with instrument now too and begins accompanying. The two circle around each other intensely. AURORA looks on jealously (perhaps with a drink) and infrequently tries to make contact with one or the other of them. JONATHAN enters sees DIOTIMA, he walks to her, then becomes confused

momentarily, when he tries again DIOTIMA ignores him or brushes him aside. JONATHAN sees AURORA and heads to her, she remains distracted by the other two.

JONATHAN: I think I'm Diotima's brother.

AURORA: Are you high?

JONATHAN: No it's a really strong feeling, it keeps coming in waves.

AURORA: Are you sure you're not just hallucinating because this woman looks so much like the Diotima we imagined.

JONATHAN: It feels like the trials we were doing, but I'm somehow, part of them.

AURORA: You're part of them? What, having some bullshit music conversation again?

JONATHAN: I spoke to her.

AURORA: No you didn't.

JONATHAN: I did.

AURORA: She doesn't talk, she can't talk. There's no way in hell she'd choose to talk to you.

JONATHAN: Why did I even think to ask you about this.

AURORA: Why do people permeate every idea I have, then turn it around and twist it into theirs. You, Cleo... this is mine, back off.

JONATHAN: We all worked on it together, sure it's yours but why are you so unwilling to give us any credit.

AURORA: I didn't ask for your help. I thought I was just a project to stop your mind from withering and dying.

JONATHAN: You were getting nowhere without me. It's not my fault your first idea wasn't original enough.

AURORA: You're such a man.

JONATHAN: This isn't about you! Can't you see that other people might actually need some help?

AURORA: It's not my fault you're too scared to submit your own thesis. I can't help you fix your life, I have enough to deal with.

JONATHAN: And you said I'm 'such a man.'

JONATHAN storms out, AURORA glares after him until she gradually loses her resolve and thinks about going after him. Instead, she faces CLEO and resolves to talk to her first. PLATO

enters, he and AURORA look at each other quizzically, before each turning back to their more immediate concern. The following conversations occur in different timelines without interaction.

PLATO: *(overlapping)* Diotima, I'm sorry!

AURORA: *(overlapping)* Cleo please!

PLATO: Talk to me.

DIOTIMA: *(about CLEO)* At least *she* thinks I'm pretty.

CLEO: *(about DIOTIMA)* *She's* not judging me for who I am.

AURORA: I didn't mean it how you thought I did.

C and D: What do you really want with me?

AURORA: You know what I want.

CLEO: I don't think *you* do.

PLATO: Women don't interest me in that way. But *(overlapping)* I care for you.

AURORA: *(overlapping)* I want you.

C and D: Oh.

DIOTIMA and CLEO separate and move toward their conversation partner. The chaotic music fades as they walk. AURORA and CLEO quarrel silently until their body language relaxes before walking off together hand in hand, perhaps to find JONATHAN.

Lighting is dim and narrow.

DIOTIMA: You prefer relations with men.

PLATO: No. I prefer... not having relations.

DIOTIMA: I don't understand.

PLATO: I just want to talk, and learn.

DIOTIMA: So, it wasn't about me. *(a long pause)* I'm not going to be the first of us to apologise for not understanding the other.

PLATO: Diotima, there is going to be a new priestess in Mantinea.

DIOTIMA: Mantinea...? The terrible battle we lost. Why is that relevant to me?

PLATO: She will be elected by lot. Against my better judgement, I asked an old friend there to set it up limit the ballot to one name – yours.

DIOTIMA: Why would you do that?

PLATO: You will receive a wage of five drachmas a month, as well as the skins of the sacrifices. Could you consider it as payment?

DIOTIMA: I would consider payment as payment. But this... why would you ask me to uproot my whole life and move to Mantinea? I won't do it.

PLATO: Surely you've realised your life here is unsustainable. You said so yourself. You don't wish to marry, so there's no place for you here.

DIOTIMA: (*realising*) Being a priestess would give me security without marriage. I don't want it. You, Terpsion, you're both so worried about my safety. What about my ambition, my music.

PLATO: You could think less about ambition and more about duty.

DIOTIMA: That's hypocrisy if I ever heard it. All you think about is your ambition, but you disguise it as 'making a better world', but *you* have to be the one to do it. *Your* tragedy, *your* new dialogue form. *I'm* the one housing refugees from the country in our tiny front room and hoping to feed them with whatever I can spare. While *you* came to resent me for one chiton? I know my duty and it *is* my ambition. I want to help people. I want to make beautiful music; sweet, fun, heart wrenching melodies that make people forget the world they're in and imagine it how it could be.

PLATO: And how would you do that?

DIOTIMA: I would make my own music. I would play it for women and children – and injured men too – those who are too sick to remember it's me playing. I would have a space large and respectable enough to host women for their own symposia, and we would discuss the issues of the day and from solutions to our own problems. I would... I will go to Mantinea.

PLATO: You will?

DIOTIMA: I will. Your intention was wrong, but your solution was perfect. When would I need to leave.

PLATO: Within the week.

DIOTIMA: So soon. Could I return to Athens?

PLATO: The prospect seems unlikely.

DIOTIMA: But not impossible. I'll let my friends and family know. Oh and... Aristocles,

PLATO: Yes?

DIOTIMA: Will you visit me?

PLATO: I can make no promises.

DIOTIMA: I see. Then, a request, do you truly believe your new works will better the world?

PLATO: I do.

DIOTIMA: Then I ask that if in future, a woman asks to learn from you, that you accept.

PLATO: I cannot imagine being asked that by a woman other than you.

DIOTIMA: Spoken like one who has known very few. *(she exits playing flute)*

PLATO sighs deeply and exits.

SCENE 10

The light brightens.

AURORA enters the student kitchen. She sits at a chair appearing to think very hard.

AURORA: What am I doing. This is ridiculous. No, come on Aurora, it's gotten you further than anything else so far... Okay Diotima, it's just you and me this time. *(nothing happens)* Please talk to me. Please. *(DIOTIMA enters with her flute – she replies to each sentence with music)* How did you know Plato? Did you really teach him about love? Please talk me, use your voice. I want to hear your voice, I want the world to hear it, please. Will the world ever know you existed? Will I? You can't tell me can you. *(DIOTIMA responds and exits)*

AURORA exits. CLEO enters, looks half heartedly for food and then sits. JONATHAN enters without noticing CLEO and also looks.

CLEO: Don't bother there's nothing edible in here. *(he turns and notices her)* Oh gosh, I think you look like how I feel.

JONATHAN: Pretty sure I look how you look.

CLEO: Well that's a bit unkind. Any sign of Aurora?

JONATHAN: You'd know more than me, probably back in the burrow by now.

CLEO: Right.

JONATHAN: Cleo... look, I'm sorry I was churlish last night. I really didn't think jealousy would get to me like that. *(she looks quizzically)* Rejection is uncommon for me you know.

CLEO: We're always learning. Next time you'll be better at it.

AURORA goes to walk in during next dialogue, but freezes trying not to interrupt, they don't notice her.

JONATHAN: I'm not planning on a next time. Honestly this one was a bit rough.

CLEO: *(surprised)* Oh, really? I didn't know it meant something. You were always so casual... I, uh— I'm sorry.

JONATHAN: Well next time I'll be better at 'not casual' then. *(she looks at him with pity)* Oh stop it. I'm not a wounded dove and if we're going to stay friends, I can't have you treating me like anything other than the resplendent peacock I am.

CLEO: *(a pause)* Thanks.

JONATHAN: No, thank you. You're the one who forced us to stay friends. That's what I need right now.

AURORA announces her arrival with a coffee pot and breakfast food in hand.

AURORA: I see the sleepyheads are up, hope you're hungry. *(They both stare at her).* Have I got something on my face?

JONATHAN: Yes... a smile. We thought you'd have been buried back in your burrow long since.

AURORA: Ha ha.

CLEO: What a nice surprise.

AURORA: I like to be surprising.

JONATHAN: *(about the food)* Ooh, my favourite.

AURORA: I know.

They all sort out the food and eat some.

AURORA: *(to JONATHAN)* So do you still think you're Diotima's brother?

JONATHAN: *(snorts at the memory)* God no. But I could be Plato? *(doubtful shrugs)* Or maybe Socrates? *(resounding head shakes)* Wildcard, Aristotle?

AURORA: Then we wouldn't be friends. You know, *unlike* Aristotle's, Plato's school accepted women. One of them, Lasthenia, was from Mantinea... it makes me wonder... *Plato's* Diotima was a priestess from Mantinea.

JONATHAN: Lasthenia couldn't be Diotima, she joined his school after it was founded.

AURORA: Yes, that's why I dismissed it, but I still wonder if there was a connection.

CLEO: Perhaps she was a student of Diotima's in Mantinea.

AURORA: How would *our* Diotima have gotten to Mantinea?

CLEO: I don't think we can know.

AURORA: *(softly)* No, we can't. I've failed. I've failed Diotima.

JONATHAN: We can keep going, we'll try asking her again now, right Cleo?

AURORA: No. She can't tell us.

CLEO: Why did you want her to so badly?

AURORA: That's easy, why study history? So we can stand on the backs of our forefathers and see further than they could. But that's just it, our *fore-fathers*, the *mothers* experiences are mostly left to the void, so when I try to see further than them, after all these years, I can still barely see past a tree. Did you know that in the great Enlightenment, conditions for women actually went backwards? We like to assume all progress is forwards, but often it's only change, just look at the world of today. It all depends on *who* is deciding what is right for society. When we look back at history to guide us, all we find are men's voices. I wanted to change that. I wanted to hear another voice. But I can't, she's lost.

CLEO: There are ways to communicate outside of writings.

AURORA: Cleo, I really don't need a lecture or a pep talk...

CLEO: I'm not trying to change your mind. I think there is magic in the unknowable. Despite what you say, things *are* better for women in most societies. There's been ups and downs, but women have been passing down their stories. Fairytales, folk songs, dances, even embroidery. It's not as tangible, but it's there. *Our* lives are evidence.

AURORA: When *you* say that I can almost believe you. *(beat – then suddenly to Jonathan)* What about you slacker, what's your excuse?

JONATHAN: My PhD? I want to start over. The ancient flute, it should be in there, it should be the whole thing. I only have an opening paragraph detailing why I'm not discussing it.

AURORA: Is your reasoning correct.

JONATHAN: Yes.

AURORA: So leave it.

JONATHAN: But it's exclusionary. You both said that and it's true. I should burn it, like Plato burned his tragedy.

AURORA: *(scoffs)* No. Submit it. You have your whole life to build on it and fix what you've left out. From the writing quality, I'd say you have two books in you. At least.

JONATHAN: You read it?

AURORA: For research.

JONATHAN: For research?

AURORA: Yep, all 213 pages of it. For research. *(beat)* It's really good Jonathan.

JONATHAN: I'm not sure if it's what I want to be known for.

AURORA: Then make your next work even better.

CLEO: Do we think Plato's tragedy was actually terrible?

AURORA: Probably, so he was too gutless to have it performed.

CLEO: And then he blamed it on the form.

JONATHAN: Plato my dear, that's rule number one, you don't blame the form. *(beat)*

CLEO: No, I think it would have been wonderful.

AURORA: Diotima would have played the music.

JONATHAN: It would have been the start of something special. Can you prove it?

AURORA: We just know.

DIOTIMA's music plays softly in the distance. JONATHAN shifts and looks toward AURORA.

AURORA: I can hear it.

Long pause, the lights fade, JONATHAN exits.

The light brightens for CASSANDRA and AURORA, they are at the train station.

CASSANDRA: That's quite a story.

AURORA: That's the truth, according to me.

CASSANDRA: But where does that leave you?

AURORA: Sorry Cassandra, it leaves *you* stuck with me. I'm changing the whole topic.

CASSANDRA: I wish you didn't have to, but it seems for the best. *(after a pause)* So spit it out.

AURORA: Early days, but I'm looking at the undue weight researchers give to writings from the past, and how it forms a male-centric view on these societies – using the position of flute girls as a case study.

CASSANDRA: Now *this* should be fun. We can start by visiting the National library, you could come since I'm on the way there now. I vaguely recall a piece there that would be perfect... and I remember a colleague at the BSR has done something tangential to this, only during the Roman Republic, I can send you his email too. Here, the train's in two minutes, perfect timing, are you coming?

AURORA: Could I join you tomorrow please? I have a date with a certain artist to get to.

CASSANDRA: What a surprise. *(she goes to leave, then stops remembering)* Wait, flute girls. Yes, there's been some new discoveries from the Villa of the Papyri in Naples – they were just released. Philodemus recorded that when Plato was on his death bed, he asked for a Thracian flute girl to play for him.

AURORA: A flute girl?

CASSANDRA: Yes. If you'd believe it, he was literally dying but perked up enough to criticise her rhythm... I'll catch you later, have fun tonight!

AURORA: But he never cared for the flute.

AURORA realises the implications. She gives a knowing smile and walks off.

The End

Appendix B – Musical Excerpt

Diotima's Theme



Appendix C – Playing Diotima Video

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I8puZcbbckOfB9bPeFZJCBC_np3JHY17/view?usp=drive_link