

Creative Music Project Practice:

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The Trials of Rhea's Daughters

Eighteen minutes and forty-seven seconds

Word count: 5493

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Introduction:

When I was younger, my mum would read me *The Odyssey* for Kids¹, then we would play a quiz game to see what I had learned; the brave Odysseus and his men, their heroic ventures and narrow escapes. When playing with my brother, we would reenact our favourite myths: the sheep and the cyclops, the sirens, the underworld. Many years later, in my final year of school, I was lucky enough to study Classics. As fascinating as it was, I remember feeling slightly disappointed when I discovered the curriculum focused more on politics and empires than the mythology that had captivated me as a child. Still, my interest endured. During university, I began reading Natalie Haynes' books and listening to her podcast, 'Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics'². The first novel in this genre that I read was 'Circe' by Madeline Miller³, which opened my eyes to a new way of seeing these stories. Soon after, I discovered Pat Barker, Jennifer Saint, and Margaret Atwood's 'The Penelopiad'⁴. Their works shifted my perspective entirely: Odysseus wasn't as heroic as he once seemed; Medusa wasn't as monstrous. The injustice of their portrayals became impossible to ignore.

When deciding what to focus on for this project, the choice was clear. I wanted to deepen my understanding of Greek women and their stories while pushing myself creatively through music production. After extensive research reading many of the modern retellings such as 'Ariadne'⁵ and 'Silence of the Girls'⁶, I narrowed down my choice of women. I chose my stories by reading 'Stone Blind' by Haynes⁷, which centres around Medusa and Athene's story, 'Circe'⁸ by Miller which tells Circe's story, 'The Penelopiad'⁹ by Atwood which is all about Penelope, and 'Divine Might'¹⁰ by Haynes which delves into Demeter and Persephone's relationship. I also listened to each of Haynes' podcast episodes¹¹ that centre around these female protagonists (bar Circe). I chose these characters in particular because they share a common theme- a fight for survival in a world run by gods and men. Circe turns her male visitors into swine after she was brutally attacked, Demeter fights for her daughter's return, Penelope tricks hundreds of men to keep them away from her, Medusa remains resilient after Poseidon's assault, and Athene, attacked by the the blacksmith-god Hephaestus, gets her revenge, showing her strength and resilience. This helped me build a clearer understanding of my topic and a mental blueprint for my project.

¹ The Iliad and the Odyssey, written and illustrated by Marcia Williams (London: Walker Books Ltd, 2006).

² Natalie Haynes. *Natalie Haynes Stands Up for the Classics*, podcast, BBC Radio 4, 2014–present, [accessed April 23, 2026], <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0411vx9>.

³ Madeline Miller. *Circe*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2018.

⁴ Margaret Atwood. *The Penelopiad*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2005.

⁵ Jennifer Saint. *Ariadne*. London: Headline Publishing Group, 2021.

⁶ Pat Barker. *The Silence of the Girls*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2018.

⁷ Natalie Haynes. *Stone Blind*. New York: Harper, 2022.

⁸ Miller. *Circe*. 2018.

⁹ Atwood. *Penelopiad*. 2005.

¹⁰ Natalie Haynes. *Divine Might: Goddesses in Greek Myth*. London: Picador, 2023.

¹¹ Hanes. *Stands up*. 2014-present.

The stories I've chosen are worth exploring because they reveal the untold emotions and complexities of women often reduced to footnotes in classical mythology. These narratives answer questions the original myths leave unaddressed: How did Circe come to terms with her exile and growing awareness of her powers? How did Medusa process her transformation? How did Penelope endure the twenty-year wait? I aimed to reflect their perspectives through emotional connection and atmospheric soundscapes, giving voice to their experiences in a way that words alone cannot. I set out to reflect Haynes, Saint, Barker, Atwood and Miller's interpretations of the mythology while incorporating my own style and pushing myself out of my comfort zone. I believe these stories are important because they are familiar and relevant today, almost more so than when they were told thousands of years ago. These six female protagonists - Penelope, Circe, Demeter and Persephone, Athene, and Medusa - embody real and relatable attributes and emotions that resonate across time: loyalty, jealousy, revenge, familial bond, love, loneliness, fear and courage. I set out to incorporate these qualities as musical themes in my EP, inviting listeners to empathise with the stories creating a space for these women to exist beyond their original restricted mythic functions, to be complex, flawed, seen and heard.

I chose the name 'The Trials of Rhea's Daughters' because I feel it accurately reflects this case study: Rhea, known as the Mother of Gods, is Zeus' mother.¹² Although she is not the mother of all of my chosen characters, I feel she represents women as a whole universally. In all of these stories, the common factor is that these women are (metaphorically) put on trial by human society for simply being women. They are collateral damage, they are seen as objects and they are discarded through and through. This name reflects the injustice towards all women.

My technique:

My approach to structure and my compositional voice are not conventional. I found my true style through creating 'sound objects'. These are typically one to two minute pieces of music that are made up of layered samples of my voice and other instruments. I then find a way to weave two objects together to progress the storytelling. For example, these are two of my 'sound objects' from Circe (Fig. 1) and Athene (Fig. 2):

¹² 'Rhea (Rheia),' Theoi Greek Mythology, accessed April 26, 2026, <https://www.theoi.com/Titan/TitanisRhea.html>.

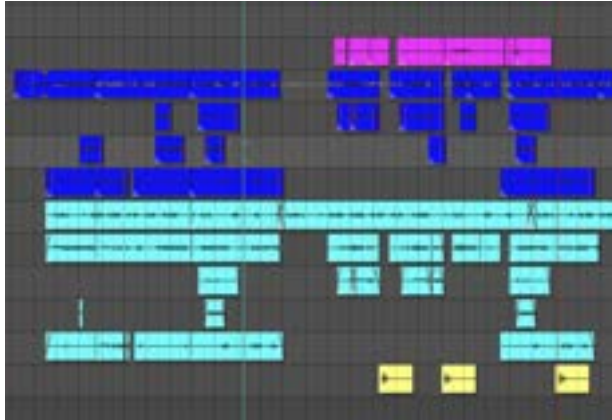


Fig.1: Circe's opening from (0:20-1:13). Both blues are the drone flute, pink is vocals and yellow is bass.

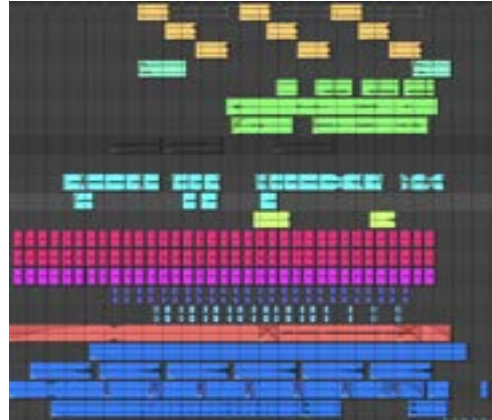


Fig. 2: Athene's opening at (0:00-1:30) Pink tracks are the vocal riff, cyan is the flute/aulos, green are the vocal harmonies, orange is the rusty banjo strumming, blue is the reversed guitar and yellow is reversed wind chimes

Instead of recording instruments myself, most of what I use are samples- single impulse notes that I either create myself, or take from free internet sources such as this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tfm4E6PcjESsiXP9FCV--PxI-czW_r9j/view?usp=share_link

I then take that note and pitch-shift, layer, and/or manipulate it into my own sound entirely. I don't take the conventional approach of using MIDI and I don't always particularly work with set time signatures. Instead I make this:



Fig. 3: Screenshot of my flute tracks that are pitch-shifted and layered together using Reaper DAW software

Which sounds like this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/17DSnbB5Gk5TI1KaGldF8NbC04yRjszla/view?usp=share_link

It's my way of allowing the form to flow and take its natural path. I do everything by ear, and what feels right in the moment. I don't compose scores, I create forms of layered sounds in

my Reaper DAW software. I start with a riff or a pedal, and then I shape my music around this, whether with a chord progression, a harmony, or a simple solo melody, it eventually takes shape. I used a AKG - C414B XLS microphone in the studios, and a Focusrite Scarlett 2i2 Studio (4th Gen) when recording at home.

I also experimented with many sound effects to create atmospheres, such as in *Circe*, I recorded cicadas singing when I was in Spain, and used this to create the Mediterranean ambience as the opening for the song (00:00-1:12).

I use a lot of plug-ins in my work, especially reverb which adds a haunting ambience to my pieces. Reverb is one of my favorite tools because it can transform a dry, flat sound into something immersive and three-dimensional. For example, in my track for *Medusa*, I applied a long, dark reverb tail to the vocals to create the sense of her disoriented, echoing thoughts in the cave (1:22-2:14). This helps to place the listener inside her perspective, as if they're experiencing her confusion and isolation firsthand. Beyond reverb, I also experiment heavily with panning to create a sense of space and movement. In *Circe's* piece, I panned the layered harmonies of the chant '*Aeaea*' (1:14-1:48) across the stereo field to mimic the feeling of voices surrounding her on the island, almost as if the island itself is singing back to her. This technique adds depth and makes the listener feel like they're standing in the middle of the scene. EQ is another essential tool. For instance, in *Penelope's* track, I boosted the mid-range frequencies of the guitar strumming to give it a warmer, more intimate tone, while cutting some of the low-end to avoid muddiness in the mix (0:40-1:44). This helps the guitar sit nicely alongside the other elements. Distortion is another effect I turn to when I want to add grit or intensity. In the middle section of *Athene's* track, I applied heavy distortion to the strings to mimic the sound of crackling electricity, tying her to her father, Zeus (2:32-3:39). It's a subtle but effective way to reinforce her divine connection.

For many of my drum beats, I used an app called 'Djembe Loops'¹³ which allowed me to put together a 'tribal' African inspired drum beat. The video below shows how I constructed the drum beat heard in *Circe* at 1:11-1:55:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/11cGZtxuEkE44XdU0VQxnTxfuXqsGMxIL/view?usp=share_link

These are a few examples of the tools I use to help me create my music. Below, I will now discuss each individual track in more detail.

¹³ *Djembe Loops*. Developed by mSensis S.A. Version 1.01. January 13, 2025. Mobile application. <https://apps.apple.com/>

Medusa

Three minutes and twenty-three seconds



Fig. 4: Jastrow, "Perseus & Medusa by Cellini," *World History Encyclopedia*, June 20, 2013,

Medusa is the most well-known of my chosen characters but yet, I'd like to argue, the most misunderstood. Everyone knows the story of Medusa with her slithering monstrous snakes for hair, how she can turn anything to stone with a glance, and how Perseus, the great hero, chops off her head and uses it as his own weapon. I will be telling a different story. Not many people know of Medusa's innocence or Poseidon and Athene's role in her tale yet it is crucial to her downfall. Growing up with her two sisters Eurayle and Stheno, Medusa was said to have resided in a cave off the coast of Libya. She was a gorgon girl who looked human with the exception of her wings. Poseidon, god of the sea, watched her from the ocean, tantalised by her beauty. When she goes to explore a new temple built for Athene, Poseidon follows her and rapes her in the temple. Athene, outraged by the disrespect from Poseidon, decides to curse Medusa to get back at him: her hair is turned into snakes and is forever doomed to turn everything she looks at to stone. To avoid

inflicting this on her sisters, Medusa wears a blindfold. Meanwhile Perseus, a young demi-god (son of Zeus) is on a quest to claim the head of a gorgon in exchange for his mother's freedom. Athene slyly leads him to Medusa, where he takes her head while she is asleep in the cave (Fig. 4).¹⁴ Perseus is no hero, and Medusa is no monster. Her head ends up engrained on the front of Athene's shield, a gift from Perseus, forevermore a tragic injustice.

With my piece of music for Medusa, I intended to reflect the theme of innocence. In her story, she cannot see for the first few days after the curse was placed on her, so she feels her way around the cave and into the light, desperately listening out for her sisters for help. This

¹⁴ Haynes. *Stone Blind*. 2022

music is created to reflect her thought processes in this time period, as she is trying to adjust to her awful new reality.

Inspiration:

My main inspiration for this music comes from Bon Iver and their album *22, A Million*¹⁵. It is heavily sampled and uses a ‘collage’ style to layer the samples together, much like my own style. I decided to sample this album and incorporate it, specifically at the end when my piece crescendos. I want it to feel like an overwhelming wave of emotions as she comes to terms with her new transformation.

One of the original samples I used was a short part of the song ‘22 (OVER S∞∞N)’¹⁶, and sounds like this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/12-Y-m_qTWO3X1o_HR5hPjO4Nug-qTiU-/view?usp=share_link

I manipulated it into this (as heard in the final piece):

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Z3Ce6uGd6i9li_zRuxX3sQtNB_EiEzc6/view?usp=share_link

Process:

My aim was for the music to feel as though it is entirely from her perspective so as she looks for her sisters, I wanted them to call out to her- I incorporated a voice (1:39-2:18) that sings أنا هنا. اسمعني which translates from Arabic (they were said to live in Libya) to ‘I’m here. Here me’ and added a low pass EQ filter to make it sound far away (as seen in Fig. 5). This highlights how her other senses are heightened since she has lost her eyesight. I also added the sound of lapping waves to represent Poseidon's constant haunting presence at the front of her cave.

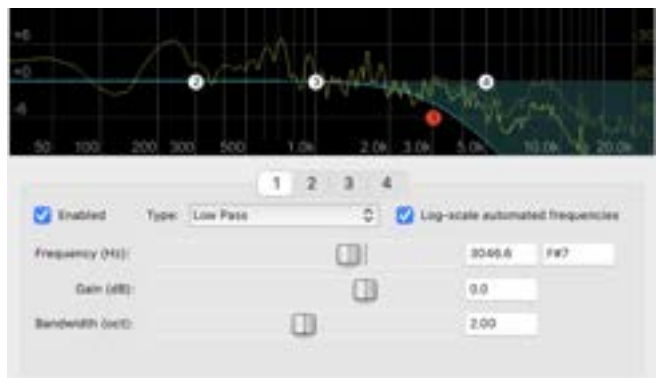


Fig. 5: A screenshot of my EQ plug-in used for the vocals at 1:39-2:18 in Medusa in Reaper DAW.

¹⁵ Bon Iver, *22, A Million* (Jagjaguwar, 2016).

¹⁶ Bon Iver, *22* ‘(OVER S∞∞N)’ track 1 on *22, A Million* (Jagjaguwar, 2016).

Athene was also said to have created an instrument called the Aulos (as pictured in Fig. 6). She wanted the flute-like instrument to replicate the screams of Medusa's sisters¹⁷. I aimed for this song to have a strong presence from Athene, so I incorporated this sound to the best of my ability. I didn't have the exact instrument so I sampled a flute instead. This can be heard at 1:07-2:30. The same instrument is used in my Athene piece (spoken about on page 11) to link the two stories together.



Fig. 6: Ancient Greek vase painting of a musician playing a double pipe (*aulos*), image, in "5 Ancient Musical Instruments Lost...", [Ancient instruments article](#)

In Medusa, the flute sounds like this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SeGfnzHFPfFfKOg3To6sAZqKrekUpEi/view?usp=share_link

I specifically didn't want a set time signature for this piece, to highlight Medusa's shock and confusion. Her mind is in overdrive and she does not feel fully present in the moment. I sampled a lot of Bon Iver 22, *A Million* because I felt the fragmented and processed textures reflect Medusa's 'fragmented' mind well. Here is one of Bon Iver 'cleaner' more raw guitar sounds that opens their song '29 #Strafford APTS'¹⁸:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-6sKaCHsCYuQf5muouAoILoa3qPybX-8/view?usp=share_link

I manipulated it into this, combining it with my own recording and used it in the ending of my song:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bvtTIW3BUryZixARNoG8j384nF7Xbd0o/view?usp=share_link

¹⁷ Ettie W. Lapointe, 'Lost Musical Instruments from History,' *Instrument Heritage*, December 16, 2025, <https://csmfht.substack.com/p/5-ancient-musical-instruments-lost>

¹⁸ Bon Iver, '29 #Strafford APTS,' track 5 on 22, *A Million* (Jagjaguwar, 2016).

Athene

Three minutes and fifty-two seconds

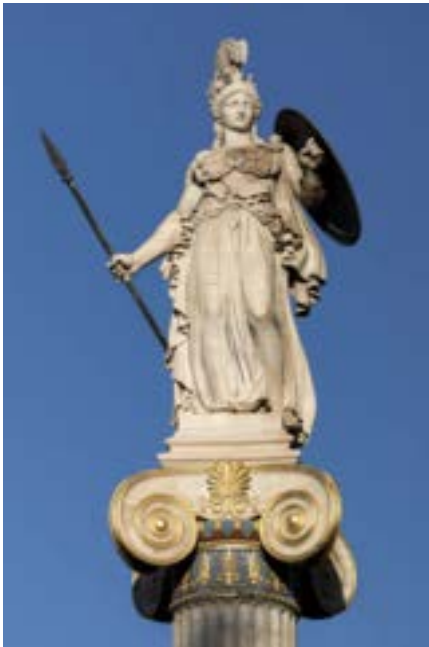


Fig. 7: 'Athena Goddess Statue in Front of Academy of Athens, Greece,' iStock, accessed April 25, 2026,

Athene, (sometimes known as Athena) the goddess of wisdom and war, is the child of Zeus and Metis. Cunning and deceptive, as most gods are, she is an immortal, and is involved in many stories, but my song is specifically linking her to her involvement in Medusa's tragedy (as mentioned in the previous chapter). To summarise, she curses the innocent Medusa for Poseidon's wrong-doing by transforming her into a monster¹⁹. Athene's creation of the Aulos to replicate the screams of Medusa's sisters demonstrates her vengeful spirit²⁰. Athene has a reputation for being wise and powerful, but in other stories, she is reckless and selfish. My music explores this side of her character.

In Medusa's story, Athene is the victor in the end, after being gifted Medusa's head by Perseus, which she attaches to her shield turning any enemies to stone. In this song, I wanted to reflect her sense of triumph followed by a pang of regret and hollowness as her game has ended and she must continue her immortal life- Was it all really worth it?

Inspiration:

When composing this music, I started with my main inspiration coming from the song 'Me And The Devil' by Soap&Skin²¹. This song reflects all the chaos and cinematic atmospheres that I set out to convey. However, as I developed it further, I found myself drawing more inspiration from Bon Iver again, specifically how Justin Vernon (the lead of the band) uses his voice as an instrument in songs like '8 (circle)'²². For example, this part of my song:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1x_SM4zQcelBNrpmCxuWjOH00Yo2s6O-a/view?usp=share_link

I recorded one short note and then pitch-shifted it and manipulated it into this riff.

¹⁹ Haynes. *Stone Blind*. 2022.

²⁰ Lapointe. *Lost Musical Instruments*. 2025.

²¹ Soap&Skin, "Me and the Devil," track 2 on *Sugarbread* (PIAS Recordings, 2013).

²² Bon Iver. '8 (circle)'. Track 8 on 22, *A Million*. (Jagjaguwar, 2016.)

Process:

I started by mapping out my first ‘sound object’ at the beginning of my piece. I came up with the short percussion-like vocal riff as heard above. I wanted the first section (0:00-1:30) to introduce her strong exterior. Although she is a ruthless antagonist in this story, she is nevertheless a strong female role model. I aimed to convey this with the first section.

I included the sound of a flute as a main melody to represent Athene’s instrument the ‘Aulos’. This sound:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/17DSnbB5Gk5TI1KaGldF8Nbc04yRjszla/view?usp=share_link

I added the strings and put heavy distortion on them (2:33-3:39) to sound like crackling electricity to represent Athene’s tie to her father Zeus, God of Thunder, and her constant need to win his approval:

Fig. 8: Screenshot of AuDistortion (Apple) plug-in squared-term set high (18.11) on Reaper DAW



As heard here:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1knokevHFkhS-OSul4WcljhxodEnQbn-r/view?usp=share_link

My middle section is there to represent her hunt for Medusa (1:30-2:40) and my third and final section is to symbolise her ‘triumph’- but at what cost? It almost crescendos, but then falls flat as Athene’s game has played out and she has nothing left to entertain her. I wanted to convey a feeling of emptiness as the song fades out, where Athene reflects on her actions in private- no one can see her vulnerability.

Circe

Three minutes and forty seconds



Fig. 9: John William Waterhouse. *Circe Offering the Cup to Ulysses*. 1891. Oil on canvas. Oldham Art Gallery.

Circe is the daughter of the sun god Helios and the Oceanid Perse. She was banished for eternity to the remote island of Aeaia by her father after she tried to aid her uncle Prometheus who was on trial for his own crime at the time. She spends many years cursing her father and crying out to be rescued, but as time progresses, she discovers her true capabilities with help from the island- she learns that she is a witch. She receives many mortal and immortal visitors over the years, but she stays wary of the dangers of men after a sour encounter with a group of travellers. She protects herself through her magic by turning any new visitors into swine²³. I wanted my song to reflect her fierce and free spirit, as she slowly gains her powers and becomes in tune with her island. I also set out to reflect her resilience, because after every awful experience she had had, she still allowed herself to fall in love with a unique visitor searching for hospitality- Odysseus.

Inspiration:

When mapping out this piece of music, my first point of inspiration came from the singer 'Aurora' specifically her song 'A Soul With No King'²⁴. This song contains tribal beats and melodies that I felt matched how I perceive Circe. I also drew inspiration from the song 'Golden Brown' by The Stranglers²⁵, specifically the outro where they layer the same lyrics over and over into polyphonic harmonies.

Process:

My inspiration from 'Golden Brown' comes into play in my middle section (1:13-1:58) where I chant *Aeaea* with harmonies layering over each other. I toggled with the volume control to make it slowly rise and then fall (As pictured in Fig. 10). I wanted this to represent Circe coming to terms with the fact that she is not alone on the island. Everything around her



Fig. 10: Mother track of 'Aeaea' chant's volume control in envelope track in Reaper DAW software.

²³ Miller. *Circe*. 2018.

²⁴ AURORA, 'A Soul with No King,' track 9 on *What Happened to the Heart?* (Glassnote Entertainment Group, 2024).

²⁵ The Stranglers, 'Golden Brown,' track 9 on *La folie* (Liberty Records, 1981).

is aiding her, working in her favour- the plants, the herbs, the water, the wind. They show her how to use her powers. I wanted these voices to represent all of these components on the island.

I recently went to Grazalema, Spain- a rural village in the middle of a national park. Here, I worked on a farm with a man called Nano. He would play this Native American A-frame drone flute instrument that he kept in the stables. I asked him one day if I could record him playing to incorporate into my Circe piece and he agreed. I took a photo of the flute as seen in Fig. 11.



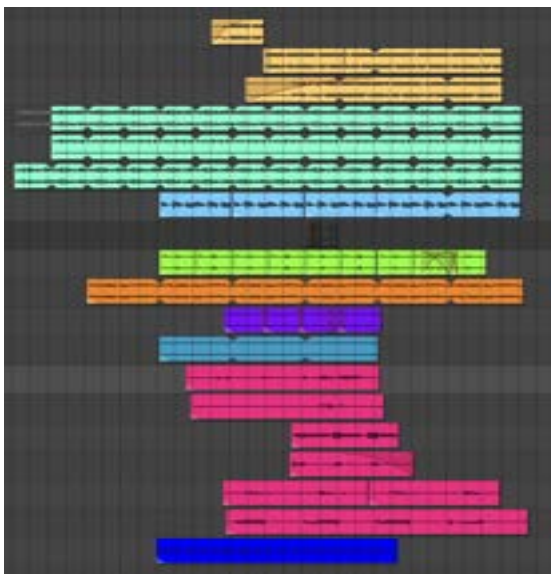
Fig. 11: Photo of Nano's A-frame drone flute, taken September 2025, Spain

It originally sounded like this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/14DpSHxU4O-VwqJiL1kNpbTGFSkCSlr2K/view?usp=share_link

So I turned it into this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18TrzcLWfaXipgA4wh3mt0tkvjAcZAi0H/view?usp=share_link



I wanted the middle crescendo to represent Circe gaining her powers and discovering her full strength (1:12-2:08) I then shaped this section to be centred on her reflection of this experience, (2:08-2:44) and then I wanted the last section and the outro (2:38-3:40) to be her accepting her powers, enjoying and relishing in it as she dances around her island. To do this I created a lot of syncopation with the guitar, drums and the violin to feel like a piece of music you could dance to, layered with lyrics singing 'I don't need to be saved, I'll save myself.'

Demeter and Persephone

Four minutes and seventeen seconds



Fig. 13: Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *The Rape of Proserpine*, 1621–1622, marble, Galleria Borghese,

Demeter is the Goddess of the harvest and the mother of Persephone. Before their story began, the world lived in constant sunshine and warmth. Hades, the God of the underworld takes a liking for the young Persephone and decides to abduct her with a secret blessing from Zeus, king of gods. (Fig. 13 is a famous marble statue displaying the abduction, known as *The Rape of Proserpine*). Demeter searches for her everywhere and in her rage and grief, takes away the crops and harvest from the mortals, leading to famine. The gods force Hades to resolve the matter. They come to an agreement: Persephone would return to her mother for part of the year, bringing spring and life, but would spend the other part in the Underworld, causing the plants to wither and ushering in autumn and winter²⁶.

I wanted this song to reflect the seasons, starting with Demeter’s search for Persephone in my first section (0:00-2:18), then eventually arriving at the gates of the underworld (middle section (2:18-2:50)) where they strike the deal and Persephone is finally released and Spring arrives (the final section (2:50-4:17)). I hoped that this song would explore the themes of maternal bond and familial love.

Inspiration:

I wanted to give a nod to Vivaldi’s well-known ‘Four Seasons’²⁷. I decided to sample two bars from Max Richter’s ‘Four Season’s Recomposed’²⁸ and then reversed and manipulated it.

The original sample sounded like this:

²⁶ Natalie Haynes, *Divine Might: Goddesses in Greek Myth* (London: Picador, 2023).

²⁷ Antonio Vivaldi, ‘Spring’ (*La primavera*), Concerto No. 1 in E Major, RV 269, from *The Four Seasons*, Spotify.

²⁸ Max Richter, ‘Spring 1,’ from *Recomposed by Max Richter: Vivaldi, The Four Seasons* (Deutsche Grammophon, 2012), iTunes/Spotify.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1T5bs1hci7ILW2EkRwW9yAfiGws05a0gq/view?usp=share_link

Whereas after my manipulation, it sounds like this:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1N0jpibYFCQTuSnu9m3WTsh1vK8xIwi4q/view?usp=share_link

I also took inspiration from the band ‘Sigur Rós’ for this song. They use voices for harmonies but without lyrics, much like the way in which Justin Vernon uses his voice as an instrument. Sigur Rós does this well particularly in their song ‘Untitled #9 - Smáskífa 1’²⁹. I wanted to replicate this soundscape, especially in the ‘Spring’ section of my piece (2:50-4:17). I feel as though this reflects themes of maternal bond through a vague call and response.

Process:

My first section (0:00-2:18) I aimed to represent the abduction and Demeter searching for her daughter. The soft piano represents her inner dialogue, the pain she feels as she travels around the earth and skies.



Fig. 14: Screenshot of Reaper DAW showing 'winter' and the search for Persephone (0:00-2:18).

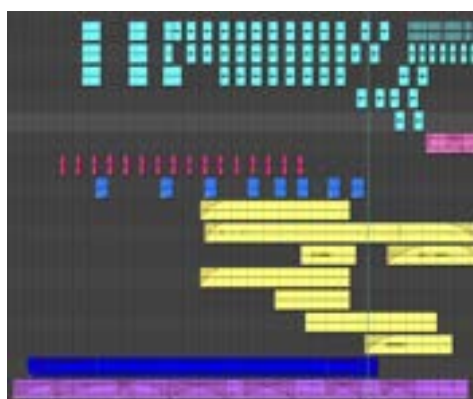


Fig. 15: Screenshot of Reaper DAW showing Demeter at the gates of the Underworld, knocking (2:18-2:50)



Fig. 16: Screenshot of Reaper DAW showing Persephone's release and the world going into Spring (2:51-3:09)

The knocking bass (2:18-2:50) is to represent Demeter banging on the gates of hell, demanding her daughter back (Fig. 15). The key change and modulation from minor to major (2:51-3:09) is to represent the deal being made and eventually swelling into a crescendo of spring as Persephone is brought back home, even just for a short time. All the crops, plants and trees spring back into life as mother and daughter are reunited (Fig.16).

²⁹ Sigur Rós, ‘Untitled #9 (Smáskífa 1),’ track 9 on () (FatCat Records, 2002).

Penelope

Three minutes and thirty-five seconds



Fig. 17: Unknown artist, *Penelope Weaving*, c. 5th century BCE, red-figure vase painting (Greek), image, Museo Archeologico Ambientale.

Penelope's story is primarily found in Homer's *Odyssey*, where she is the faithful wife of the hero Odysseus and queen of Ithaca. For 20 years, she cleverly puts off 108 suitors who occupy her palace and consume her resources, using the ruse of weaving and unpicking a shroud- She said that she would choose a suitor when she was done weaving a particular shroud, but she would unpick her progress every night to delay (fig. 17 - Penelope weaving). Her intelligence and patience are key, as she faithfully waits for Odysseus's return, and when he finally does, she recognises him and helps him defeat the suitors to reclaim his kingdom³⁰. Yet during those long 20 years, she dreams of the time she could have been spending with Odysseus and

their son, Telemachus, as a family. I took inspiration for my piece after reading Margaet Atwood's 'The Penelopiad'.

I wanted Penelope's song to centre around themes of patience and yearning. I incorporated the sound of a couple playing with their child (I recorded my cousin and his family) (1:44-3:33) to represent Penelope's imagination- daydreaming of a life where Odeysseus was present and a father to their son. This is a lyrical song too, which has a contemporary feel to it. I feel the lyrics accurately reflect Penelope's yearning.

Inspiration:

My inspiration for the main guitar chord pattern came from Van Morrison, specifically his song 'Sweet Thing'³¹. I wanted it to feel light-hearted and upbeat with a hint of nostalgia, I believe this chord pattern demonstrates exactly that. Morrison's music has a way of blending warmth and melancholy. The progression in the song feels like a gentle sway, almost like a lullaby, and I aimed to capture that same emotional duality in my own work.

³⁰ Atwood. *The Penelopiad*. 2005

³¹ Van Morrison, "Sweet Thing," track 3 on *Astral Weeks* (Warner Bros. Records, 1968).

This track also incorporates a reworked section from one of my earlier compositions submitted a couple of years ago³². When I listened to it again this year, I realised the melody is exactly how I pictured Penelope's. I wanted to create something bigger and more grand with it, so I took the main melody and reworked it for the ending of my song.

Process:

I mapped out the song's progression as I wanted it to start soft and minimalistic and then build into something bigger. I decided to add lots of harmonies to represent all the different thoughts bouncing around Penelope's head as she waits in boredom every day.

I wanted this song to crescendo into Penelope's heartache at the end of the song, feeling a sense of warm melancholy- a bittersweet feeling.

I put a strong reverberation on the sound of a family playing together and some slight delay to make it seem like a distant thought coming into view- a longing for what could've been (as pictured in fig. 18).



Fig. 18: Screenshot of VST: FdnReverb (IEM) (64ch) plug-in on Reapre DAW software used on track of couple playing with a child (1:44-3:33).

I also incorporated the sound of a loom into the percussion to represent her weaving and unweaving, to make her feel more present. Along with this, I added the sound of a ticking clock to represent time passing over the years, and her wishing it would slow down.

³² Izzy McNaught. 'Fragile' *Composing for Voices and Instruments submission*. Unpublished. 2024.

I took a default VCV rack patch³³ and used it to create my ‘trombone’ sound using the keyboard as my synth (as seen in Fig. 19). It was just two notes interchanging so I didn’t need a proper MIDI keyboard. I incorporated this at 2:44-3:33.



Fig. 19: Screenshot of default VCV rack used for ‘trombone’ synth in Penelope (2:44-3:33)

Lyrics:

Someday I'll be
Rid, rid
Rid, rid of
Rid of this place

Someday
Someday I know I hope I won't complain
Who am I without you?
These days (these days)
These days are wasted
Am I going insane?

Be in my arms
Take my scars
Hold me apart

I used to be so mentally agile
I'm afraid I'm too
Fragile

I wanted the ‘place’ she’s singing about to be the metaphorical ‘jail’ that she has herself stuck in, as she waits for Odysseus. She hopes that maybe someday she’ll be content and stop complaining but she can’t fathom a life without her husband. The crescendo ‘Be in my arms’ is the beginning of her daydream coming into sight.

Then in the next section (2:12-2:41) she is singing about how she finds it difficult to be so resilient for so long. She’s questioning if she still has the strength, but then comes to the conclusion that she would do anything for Odysseus, so she will have to persevere.

Fig. 20: Penelope lyrics

³³ VCV Rack, default patch configuration, used by Izzy McNaught, 2025.

Reflection:

This project has taught me a lot, not just about the Greek myths, but about my personal compositional voice. I have been able to harbour a style and cement it down throughout this process. My initial goal was to explore the stories of Greek women through music, giving voice to their complexities and emotions in a way that words alone cannot. I wanted to challenge the traditional narratives that often reduce these women to footnotes, and instead, present them as fully realised, complex individuals with their own agency, struggles, and triumphs.

One of the most significant aspects of this project was pushing myself out of my creative comfort zone. My approach to composition using 'sound objects' and layering samples rather than using traditional MIDI methods has allowed me to create music that feels organic and true to the emotional soundscapes of each character. This method is very liberating as it allows space for a lot of experimentation. It required me to trust my instincts and take on a lot of spontaneity, which was somewhat daunting. It allowed me to value the art of experimentation and the importance of allowing a piece to evolve naturally.

Each character's story is a testament to resilience whether it's Circe's transformation from exile to empowerment, Demeter's relentless fight for her daughter, or Penelope's cleverness in outwitting her suitors. These themes are also relevant to contemporary issues of agency and consent, and the struggle for autonomy. By exploring these narratives, I hoped to create a space for these women to be recognised beyond their mythic roles.

While I worked primarily alone, I recognise the value of collaboration and wish I had incorporated more input from other musicians and artists. The contributions of Sophie, Noah, and Nano were invaluable, and I am grateful for their willingness to be part of this project. Moving forward, I would love to explore more collaborative opportunities, as I believe they can bring new perspectives and enrich the creative process.

Looking back, I am proud of what I have achieved. This project allowed me to merge my passion for Greek mythology with my love for music. I feel I have created something that feels both personal and universally accessible. It has deepened my understanding of these ancient stories and their relevance today, and it has pushed me to grow as an artist and a storyteller.

I hope that listeners will not only enjoy the music but also feel a connection to these women. By giving them a voice through my music, I aimed to honor their stories and inspire others to see them in a new light.

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Musicians and Samples:

Medusa:

Musicians:

Izzy McNaught - voice

Samples:

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Athene:

Musicians:

Izzy McNaught - voice

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Circe:

Musicians:

Izzy McNaught - voice
 Sophie Holley - voice
 Nano Mace- drone flute

Samples:

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Demeter and Persephone:

Musicians:

Izzy McNaught - voice

Samples:

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Penelope:

Musicians:

Izzy McNaught - voice

Izzy McNaught - guitar

Noah McNaught - guitar solo

Ben Sharrock, Elisa and Aritz - voice

Samples:

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