

The Flowering Desert

Libretto by Roxanne Korda

Composed by Daniel Blanco Albert

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

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The cast and ensemble should be performing in a circular stage surrounding the audience who sit at the centre. There will be an immersive projection onto a hemispherical dome and a 5.1 speaker system to play the pre-recorded vocal elements of the Measurer and Mother Star

Cast

Measurer	Recorded female voice
Pantele	Mezzo Soprano
Xoe	Coloratura Soprano
Mother Star	Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass

Ensemble

Piano, Percussion, Flute, Clarinet, French Horn, Violin, Viola, Cello

Overture

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

The Measurer:

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

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

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

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

21 Yet,
 22 I will search
 23 Like all good astronomers should.

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

Pantele

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

Pantele:

24 I the planet Pantele,
 25 (self) One side never night,
 26 (shadow) One side never bright,

27 With a shadow as strong as my self.
 28 (shadow) Formed just as my mother star
 29 (self) From the rubble of her welding parts.
 30 With a shadow as strong as myself.
 31 (shadow) Every three years I see my neighbour twice,
 32 (self) Every two years I see my neighbour thrice.
 33 I the planet Pantele
 34 With a shadow as strong as my self.
 35 (self) A dusky cage of persistent sunrise,
 36 (shadow) The terminator where light dies.
 37 I the planet Pantele.

Mother Star

Together this SATB chorus is the character - Mother Star.

Mother Star:

38 I the Mother Star.
 39 Parent, child, and carer.
 40 Kind and endless source.
 41 An axis of the eternal.
 42 Young but older than most,
 43 Common but barely observed.
 44 I the Mother Star.

Xoe

Xoe is pronounced 'ʒə:ɛ' (zhoh-ay)

45 Xoe:
 46 I am the comet, Xoe.
 47 I am the two tailed trickster,
 48 Dropping via counter steered descent,
 49 To a mother star's skirt brim.
 50 Frozen stone exterior
 51 Radiate rays effervescent,
 52 Excitement - begin!
 53 I am the comet, Xoe.
 54 I am the two tailed messenger.

55 Travelled far beyond this system's edge,
 56 In an ever-wiser spin,
 57 With a motion pendular.
 58 Path perturbed by planetary dredge,
 59 Secret's I've within.

Scene 1

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

Recitative

Xoe:

60 Pantele!
 61 Someone is watching you Pantele!

Pantele:

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

Xoe:

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

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

Aria for two halves of the self

Pantele:

70 *(self)* What does Xoe mean?
 71 *(shadow)* What does Xoe mean?
 72 *(shadow)* I can see the world outside,
 73 Kaleidoscopic distant eyes.
 74 I spied to them and now it seems
 75 That one is spying back on me.
 76 Dark winds blow to wake my soul,
 77 And carry thoughts to make me whole.

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

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

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

Recitative

Xoe:

84 Steady on now Pantele . . . Couple of setbacks deary.
 85 They seek a life like theirs, and that cannot be you.
 86 Soon their gaze will drift, you are not one of few.
 87 Cheerio, tally Ho, out I trot, off I pop!

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

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

Recit

Pantele:

88 (self) Silly Pantele! Nothing could look upon you.
 89 What could they see? One side scarred another side
 90 bruised.
 91 (shadow) But no . . . Maybe I can change, project some
 92 majesty - become the things they want to see!

Mélodrame 1

The Measurer:

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

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

Scene 2

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

Brutal mother and forgotten child duet

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

Mother star:

101
 102 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
 103 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

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

 106 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
 107 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
 108 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

 109 Oh, Iron I say,
 110 You look feral today.

Pantele:

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

Mother Star:

113 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
 114 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
 115 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

 116 Lithium is missing.
 117 Hydrogen is kissing.

Pantele:

118 Mother I'm ecstatic,

119 There's something so fantastic!

Mother Star:

120 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
121 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
122 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

123 Out struts Titanium Oxide,
124 The cool M Dwarf guide.

Pantele:

125 Mother, can you listen?
126 I discovered my ambition.

Mother Star:

127 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
128 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
129 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

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

Pantele:

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

Mother Star:

134 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
135 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
136 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

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

Pantele:

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

Mother Star:

141 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
142 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
143 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

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

Pantele interrupts with increasing frustration

Mother Star:

146 Hydrogen 1 meet Hydrogen 1
147 Hydrogen 2 meet Hydrogen 1
148 Helium 3 can't meet Helium 3

Pantele:

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

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

Mélodrame 2

The Measurer:

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

Scene 3

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

Recit

Xoe:

160 Back I trot, out I pop.

Pantele:

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

Xoe:

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

Xoe's tone intensifies to signify an important message:

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

Returning to a lighter tone:

175 Habitability is hospitality and so far, you have none.

Pantele:

176 I have neither one?

Tidal Heating Trio

The Mother Star's gravitational field is heard through a series of open and closed sounds.

177 Mother Star: A-V V-A, O-V V-O, E-V V-E

Xoe:

178 Your mother has been tugging
 179 Within you is a friction
 180 The outward eccentricity
 181 Now dissipates internally
 182 And caused a deformation
 183 While underneath a bubbling
 184

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

Mother Star:

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

Pantele:

(Self)
 190 As I let my mother pull me,
 191 My skins crack to release a moan.

192 Active and sore to my core,
193 A heated tidal bulge.

Mother Star:

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

Mother Star choir the directs a painful bombardment at Pantele.

198 Pah ha ha ha
199 Poh ho ho ho
200 Pih hi hi hi

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

201 Xoe:
202 Your shield is growing.
203 A veridian glow is humming.

Pantele:

204 (shadow) Aurora's at my rim
205 (self) My mother's glare gets dim

Recit

Pantele:

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

Freeze as the lights go off

Mélodrame 3

The Measurer:

208 It smells dusty in here.
209 Everyone crowds at the screens.
210 Waiting my turn, then at last I see them -
211 Transits.
212 I don't dare to blink.
213 A system and planets b to g.

Scene 4

Recit

Xoe is suddenly filled with sadness and mild panic.

Xoe:

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

Pantele:

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

220 Mother Star: Accelerate

Xoe's triumphant aria

Xoe:

221 Be brave Pantele.
222 You are seeing clearly.

Mother Star:

223 Sublimate

Xoe:

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

Mother Star:

228 Excel

Xoe:

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

Mother Star:

233 Plunge

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

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

Recit

Pantele:

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

Xoe:

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

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

Pantele:

244 Aaaaaawhooooooooooooo
 245 Whooooooooohaaaaaaa

Xoe:

246 (hum) Z-O-E

Hymn

Pantele:

247 The airs I blow have hope.
 248 A field protects my face.
 249 Thank you Mother,
 250 1

Mélodrame 4

The Measurer:

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