



Erysichthon's Forest

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Erysichthon's Forest

for soprano, bass, cello and piano
(2022)

Richard Whalley

Erysichthon's Forest

for soprano, bass, cello and piano

Programme note

The story of Erysichthon pulls no punches. In Ovid's version of the tale, Erysichthon cuts down every tree in the sacred grove of Ceres, and the wood nymphs who live there demand revenge. On hearing about this, Ceres bids Hunger to visit Erysichthon and inflict his body with everlasting hunger: a hunger so severe that the more he eats the hungrier he will get. Nothing can satiate this hunger, despite Erysichthon ultimately selling all his worldly goods to buy food to consume. In desperation, he finally sells his daughter, Mestra, who discovers at this point a talent for shapeshifting, a skill that Erysichthon determines to use to trick traders who think they are buying a slave to give him money. But still the hunger won't go away. If you take this story to its logical conclusion, there is only one possible ending, which is indeed what happens: Erysichthon's hunger is such that the only relief is for him to consume himself, until nothing is left.

This melodrama sets three scenes from the story to texts written by the poet John McAuliffe. It was written for a project funded by the University of Manchester, in association with Creative Manchester, and produced by Manchester Opera Project.

Movements

- | | | |
|-------|---|---------|
| (i) | Erysichthon's Proposal
for soprano, bass, cello and piano (c. 7 mins 30) | page 1 |
| (ii) | Erysichthon's Axe
for bass, cello and piano (c. 6 mins 30) | page 21 |
| (iii) | Mestra's Lament
for soprano, cello and piano (c. 7 mins) | page 31 |

Total Duration: c. 20 minutes

Libretto

(i) Erysichthon's Proposal

Erysichthon: Mestra

Mestra: Father

Erysichthon: Here we are, at my old wood, *my* wood,
where, as a child, you played

Mestra: I did, father,

Erysichthon: By this old oak, Mestra,
I remember it too, hatching plans here...

Mestra: Remember the acorns I'd pick from the oak for you.
And bare winter days, I'd climb it into the blue.
Coming here I felt like part of its family
It's good to be back under this tree.

Erysichthon: And I'm still making plans, and where better to tell you.

Mestra: What is this plan, father, I heard you roaring earlier,
At the supervisor, on the factory floor?

Erysichthon: Mestra, listen. This land is paid for, mine,
Ours. If I plan to burn it down
And tear the earth, I can, it's mine.

Mestra: Is that your plan, father?

Erysichthon: The wood I cut, Mestra, I will not burn;
this wood will be the makings of a new town,
and best of all, the wedding hall
where one day you will be married.

Mestra: Where I get married?

Erysichthon: A shining, gleaming wedding hall,
in the middle of my new town
perched on that little hill,
overlooking all I own.

Mestra: Father, its true
that the Planner decides,
but this wood, father,
is it nor sacred?
Sacred to a god,
the god who must bless
a wedding hall.

Erysichthon: Forget Her! Watch me make,
with my bare hands and this sharp axe,
your shining gleaming wedding hall
in the middle of my new town,
perched on that little hill,
overlooking all I own.

(ii) Erysichthon's Axe

My axe waits for the oak,
its fat shadow on the field,
its point growing
on the blue and clouds
and the tinkling glitter
of its swaying ornaments

what crosses me and mine
I will take out
under this same discriminating tree
you fear, which spreads,
year on year,
across my forecast growth.

No one gets to sit this out,
all are part of my big picture,
that I'll hang
on my word. Here
is the strong trunk and branch
of my nights and years

this gleam I'll take
to the obscure hours
which filter light
and baffle sound:
what presides over us
will end

with this sharp question
making its impossible offer.

(iii) Mestra's Lament

Where's the tree I hid under,
branches robins warned me thinly from
when he'd seek me out, my father?

who will bring him to his senses?
in this massacre of branches,
where the robin once was?

now the earth's a bare drum,
clear as a horizon
his step lands heavily on.

where I must follow him,
through the forest's slaughter,
my father's daughter.

Erysichthon's Forest

(i) Erysichthon's Proposal

Text: John McAuliffe

Richard Whalley

Birdsong; freely

Mestra

Erysichthon

Violoncello

'seagull effect'

pp *mf* *pp*

Birdsong; freely

8va

p *fp* *fp* *p* *fp*

(♩ = c.69) *loco*

Vc.

pp

Colla voce
senza vib.
sul tasto, airy

Pn.

mf *p* *mf* *fp* *mf* *pp* *mf*

loco

Vc.

more bow pressure →

mp

Pn.

(♩ = c.69, *poco accel.*) (poco rit. -----)

f *p* *fp*

1

Calmly, ♩ = 63

M.

E.

Vc. *birdlike, spontaneous*
mf > p *mf > p* *pizz. arco*
(C#) mf p (p)

Pn. *Calmly, ♩ = 63*
poised, strictly in time
p

M.

E.

Vc. *(harm gliss.)*
p < f > p *mf* *pizz.* *arco*
p mf > p

Pn.

2

15

M. *ther*

E. *Mes - tra* *Here we are,*

Vc. *pizz. arco senza vib.* *normal vib.* *sul pont.*
p *3 pp* *p*

Pn. *fp* *p*

20

E. *(espress.)*
at the old wood, my wood, where

Vc. *pizz. arco, nat.* *s.v.* *s.p.* *(harm gliss.) nat.*
mf *p* *mf* *p*

Pn. *5*

24

E. *p*

as a child, you,

Vc. *f* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *pizz.* *arco* *pizz.* *arco* (harm gliss.) *p* *f* *p*

Pn. *senza cresc.*

28

M. **3** **Freely**

I did, Fa - ther.

E. you played.

Vc. *p* *pp* *pp* *mf* 'seagull effect'

Pn. *Freely* *p* *fp* *fp*

4

Continuing from before, ♩ = 63

p increasingly purposeful

(31)

E. *p* 32 3 3 3

Vc. *pp* *pizz.* *arco* *p* *p*

Pn. *p* *fp* *p* 5 5 5 5

by this old oak, Mes - tra

Continuing from before, ♩ = 63

35

E. (darkly) 3 3

Vc. *pizz.* *arco* *crescendo.* 5 5 5 *f* *pizz.*

Pn. *crescendo.* 5 5 5 5 *f*

re-mem-ber it too; hatch-ing plans there

5

Fast, lively ♩ = 63

40

M. *p* Re-mem-ber the a - corns I'd pick from the oak for you. And bare win-ter days I'd

E.

Vc. *arco* *p* *poco sul pont; light bow (measured trem.)*

Pn. *p* *Fast, lively* non legato ♩ = 63

47 *(espr.)* *pp*

M. climb it in-to the blue. Com-ing here, I felt like

Vc.

Pn.

53 *mf* *p* *poco cresc.*

M. part of its fa-mi - ly. It's good to be back un-der

Vc. *poco a poco cresc.*

Pn. *mf* *p*

59 *f*

M. this oak tree.

Vc. *pizz.* *(mf)* *f*

Pn. *p* *più legato* *f*

Ped. *

6

7

63 **Freely** **As before, ♩ = 63**

M.

E.

Vc.

Pn.

And I'm still ma-king plans Mes - tra

arco (nat.) 'seagull effect'

8^{va} *Freely* *loco* *As before, ♩ = 63* *mfp*

non leg. *p* *mf*

Ped. *

67 *more warmly*

E.

Vc.

Pn.

and where bet-ter to tell you?

pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz.

p *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *p*

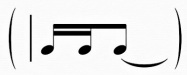
72 *mf* (irritated)

M. What is this plan, Fa - ther, I heard you roar -

E.

Vc. arco pizz. arco

Pn. *mf* *p* *mp*



76

M. ing ear-lie - er? At the su-per - vi - sor on the fac - to-ry floor?

E.

Vc. *mf* *p* *mf* *mfp* *p* sub. *espress.*

Pn. *mf* *p* *espress.* poco ped.

81 8

M.

E. *p calmly*
Mes - tra; Mes - tra,

Vc. *mf*

Pn. *mf* *loco* *p*

Ped. →

86

E. lis - ten

Vc. *mf* *pp*

Pn. *p* *mp* *pp*
poco espress.

(hold in ped)

(slow release) *

9 (purposeful, once more)

92 *poco p*

E. This land is paid for, mine, ours If I plan to

Vc. *mf*

Pn. *f* *p* *pp* *mf* non leg.

Red. *

98

E. burn it down and tear the earth, I can, it's mine!

Vc. *p* *f* *mf* *p* ord. *mf* *p*

Pn. *mfp* *p* *mfp* *mf* *p* legato

103 *sotto voce p*

M. Is that your plan, Fa - ther?

E.

Vc. *mf* *p* *mf* *espress.* *sub. vivace (birdsong)*

Pn. *mfp* *p* *mf* *espress.*

poco ped.

10

108

M.

E. *p* tender, yet determined

Vc. pizz. *f*

Pn. warmly *p*

The wood, I cut, Mes-tra The wood I cut

115

E. I will not burn, Mes - tra This

Vc.

Pn. *p*

121

E. wood; this wood; this wood,

Vc. arco barely perceptible, like raindrops *pp*

Pn. *pp*

11

125 *p* purposeful, once more

E. will be the ma-king of a new town and best of all the wed - ding hall,

Vc.

Pn. *p* sustained con ped.

130

M.

E. *mf* *p* *mf*
where one day you will be mar - ried

Vc.

Pn.

134 *p* *mf*

M. *Where I get mar - ried?*

E. *p* *A*

Vc. *5* *tr* *mf* *5* *5*

Pn. *espress.* *mf* *5*

Ped. →

12 137 *animated*

E. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*

shin - ing gleam - ing wed-ding hall, in the mid - dle of my new town,

Vc. *5* *5* *5* *5* *5* *poco a poco crescendo*

Pn. *p* *dolce ma cresc.* *(poco ped.)* *5*

140

E. *mf*
perched on that lit-tle hill, ov-er-look-ing all

Vc. *mf*

Pn. *mf*

13

$\leftarrow \text{♩} = \text{♩} \rightarrow$

Fast, lively ♩ = 63

mf animated

143

M. Fa - ther, it's true that the plan ner de -

E. own!

Vc. *f* poco sul pont; light bow (measured trem.) *p*

Pn. *f* *mf* non legato

146

M. *p* *mf*
cides, but this_ wood, Fa - ther, is it not che - rished?

Vc. *poco a poco cresc. (to bar 166)*

Pn.

150

M. *p* *mf*
Is it not sa - cred? Sa - cred to a

Vc.

Pn. *sub.f* *8va*

V.S.

154 *f* *p*

M. *f* *p*
 god? The god who must bless; the god who must bless; the god who

Vc. *mf* *mf* *mp*

Pn. *f* *p* *p* *pp* *poco a poco cresc.*
loco

160 *mf*

M. *mf*
 must bless this wood - en - wed - -

Vc. *f* *mf*

Pn.

165 *ff*

M. *ff*
 - ding hall?

Vc. *mf* *ff*

Pn. *(mf)* *ff*

169 **As before,** ♩ = 63

M. *f* **Shouted** *p* **Sung** *insidiously* *f*

E. For-get her! Watch me make with my bare hands and this sharp axe heavy slow bow, senza vib.

Vc. *p*

173 *p* increasingly animated

E. slow gliss your shi - ning gleam - ing wed - ding hall

Vc. con vib. senza vib. *f* *p* poco a poco crescendo (to bar 193)

Pn. Mid ped. *sempre mf*

176

E. in the mid - dle of my new town perched on that lit - tle hill ov - er - look - ing all I own!

Vc. *pp*

Pn. (starts in background)

start pushing imperceptibly forwards

180 *poco a poco crescendo (to bar 191)*

E. Your shi - ning gleam - ing wed - ding hall, in the mid - dle of my new town,

Vc. *start pushing imperceptibly forwards*

Pn. *poco a poco crescendo (to bar 191)*

182

E. *3* *3* *3* *3* *3* *3* *3*
 perched on that lit - tle hill ov - er - look - ing all I own!

Vc.

Pn. *5* *5* *5*
(p)

184 **15** $\text{♩} = 66$ *(mf)*

E. *(mf)*
 Wed - ding hall; _____ that lit - tle hill; _____

Vc. *(mf)*
 I start introducing vib.

Pn. $\text{♩} = 66$ *(mp)*

186

E. *(mf)*
 _____ my new town; _____ all I own!

Vc.

Pn. *(mf)* *marcato*

188 (♩ = 69) *(f)*

E. *(f)* Wed - ding hall; that lit - tle hill;

Vc. *(f)* increase vib.

Pn. *(f)*

190 (♩ = 72) *ff*

E. my new town; all own!

Vc. *ff* (retake bow as often as necessary)

Pn. *ff*

192 **Much slower, with rubato**

E.

Vc. *fff* slowly letting go of intensity *p* weary; p.v. s.t., s.v. *ppp*

Pn. *mf* **Much slower, with rubato**

Full ped. (slow release) * attacca

(ii) Erysichthon's Axe

Ominous ♩ = 72

Erysichthon

Violoncello

Piano

5

E.

Vc.

Pno.

9

E.

Vc.

Pno.

f *p* *f* *p cresc.* *f*

p cresc. *mf* *f* *poco espress.* *p cresc.*

sfz *ff*

pp *fff*

poco ped. (change on each chord)

senza vib. *molto vib.*

14 **1** *f*

E. My axe waits for the oak, its fat

Vc.

Pno. *mf* *p* *mf* *f*

18 *ritmico pizz.* *mf* *f* *espress.* *f*

E. sha-dow on the field, its point grow - - ing

Vc. *mf* *f* *espress.*

Pno. *p* *mf* *p cresc.*

21 *mf*

E. on the blue and clouds, and the

Vc.

Pno. *f* *mf*

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains three systems of music for voice, violin (Vc.), and piano (Pno.). The first system (measures 14-17) features a vocal line starting with a first ending bracket and a forte (f) dynamic. The piano accompaniment includes triplets and complex rhythmic patterns. The second system (measures 18-20) includes a 'ritmico pizz.' instruction for the violin and a piano crescendo (p cresc.) for the piano. The third system (measures 21-22) continues the vocal line with a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic. The score is written in bass clef for the voice and piano, and treble clef for the violin. Time signatures change from 3/4 to 4/4 and back to 3/4.

take time

25

E. twink - ling glitt - er _____ of its sway - ing or - na - ments, _____

Vc. arco senza vib. *pp*

Pno. *f* *p* *mf* *pp* *mp*

5, 2+2+3, 5, 2+2+3, 5

sub. *p* *espress.*

in tempo

28

E. *mf*

Vc. *f* vib. norm.

in tempo

espress.

Pno. *p cresc.* *mf* *sfz*

2 *mf*

32

E. what cross - es _____ me and _____

Vc. *espress.* *pp*

Pno. *sfz* *ff*

5, 3, 3, 3

37 *(espress.)*

E. mine I will take out, I will take out

Vc. *ff* *f* *ff* *p* arco

Pno. *p cresc.* *mf* *p*

41

E. un-der this same dis - cri-mi-na-ting tree you fear

Vc. *f* *mf* *p* pizz. arco

Pno. *espress.* *p* *mf*

44

E. which spreads year on year a-cross my fore - cast

Vc. *mf* *p* *mf* *f* pizz.

Pno. *p* *mf* *p cresc.*

48 *mf* *f*

E. *growth* *3* *3*

Vc. *arco* *p* *mf*

Pno. *mf* *p cresc.* *3*

51 **3** 3+2 *mf cresc. marcato* 3+2 *f*

E. My axe waits; My axe waits.

Vc. *f*

Pno. 3+2 *mf cresc.* *3*

[ped. on each note]

56 *p* **4**

E. No - one

Vc. *marcato* *ff* *(arco)* *mf*

Pno. *f* *ff* *espress.* *p* *3*

Ped. *

60 $3+2+2$ *poco a poco cresc.* [to bar 70]

E. $2+3$ $4:3$
gets _____ to sit this out, all _____ are part of my big

Vc. _____

Pno. $3+2+2$ 3 *mf* 5 *p* $2+3$ $4:3$ *mf*

64 *(espress.)* 3 3 $3+2$ $5:3$

E. pic - ture _____ that I'll hang on my word _____ Here is the trunk and

Vc. *pizz.* *mf* *f* *arco* *pp* *mf*

Pno. *mf* *f* *f* *pp* $3+2$ *p espress.* *con ped.* *pp*

68 $2+2+3$ $5:3$ 5 *f dim.*

E. branch _____ of my nights _____ and years, my nights and years. _____

Vc. *p* *ff*

Pno. $2+2+3$ *mf* *ritmico* 5 *p* *f*

71

E.

Vc. *molto espress.*
p cresc. *sfz*
f dim.
 3 2+3+2 5 5 5 3

Pno. *molto espress.*
p cresc.
 [con ped.]
 2+2+3 5 7 5 3

75

E.

Vc. *gliss.*
 [pp]

Pno. *mf dim.*
 3 3 3 3 5 5 3

79

5 *p sotto voce*
 this gleam, _____ this glint, _____

E.

Vc. *pp* *mp* *pp cresc.*

Pno. *p* *pp* *f*
 3 5
 Ped.

83

E. *marcato*

Vc. *ff* *f cresc.*

Pno. *p* *f* *f cresc.*

Ped. (each note with ped)

87

E. *p* *p* [normal tone]

Vc. *ffp*

Pno. *ff* *pp* *p*

Ped.

This edge, I'll take to the ob - scure

91

E. *mf* *p*

Vc. *pp cresc.*

Pno. *mf* *p*

Ped.

hours which fil - ter light and baf - fle sound

95 *poco rit.* *a tempo*
mf marcato

E. That which pre-sides _____ ov-er us _____ (sss...) will

Vc. *mf* *espress.* 5 *mf* *p*

Pno. *poco rit.* *a tempo*
mf

100 **7** *f* 5 3

E. end. My axe _____ waits;

Vc. *marcato* *sempre f* 3

Pno. *marcato* [non arp.] *sempre f*

104 *mf* *f* 2+3 3 5:3 3

E. My axe _____ waits, _____ with this sharp _____

Vc. 3

Pno. 3 2+3

108 *dim.* 2+3 *mf* *f* 5:3

E. ques - tion ma - king its im-poss-i - ble of

Vc. 3

Pno. 2+3 3

113 *dim.* *fer.* *f* *ff* *subito p* *molto cresc.*

E. - - - - -

Vc. *f* *ff* *subito p* *molto cresc.*

Pno. *ff* *mp* *molto cresc.*

Red. →

117

E. - - - - -

Vc. *scratch* *nat.* *ff* *fff* *f*

Pno. *ff* *sffz* 8va

* *attacca*

(iii) Mestra's Lament

Grave, ♩ = 50

Baritone

Violoncello

confidently
pizz. (full resonant sound) vib.

f

Piano

Grave, ♩ = 50

5

Bar.

Vc.

arco

pizz.

(senza dim.)

sfz \rightarrow *p* *mf* *ff*

9

Bar.

Vc.

arco (senza vib.)

pizz.

mf *f* *f*

13

1 *p* desolate

M.

Where...? Where...?

Vc.

less resonant, but with bite

meno f

16

M. *mf* *p* *f*

Vc. *arco* *pizz.*

Where's the tree I hid un-der?

19

M. *f* *p* *p* *p* *mf*

Vc. *arco* *poco vib.* *pizz.*

The tree on whose branch-es ro-bins warned me thin-ly from when

23

M. *colla voce* *p* *mf* *p* *p*

Vc. *take time* *(a tempo)* *arco* *coldly*

he'd seek me out, my fa-ther?

26

M.

Vc. *pizz.* *arco*

2

30 *pp* *crescendo*

M. Who will bring him to his senses? In this mass-a-cre

Vc. *pizz.* *mp* *arco* *senza vib.* *pizz.* (fast, shallow strokes) *p*

Pno. *mf* *p*

34 *mf* *impassioned*

M. this mass - a - cre of branch - es

Vc. *f* *arco* *poco vib.*

Pno. *f* *mp* *mf*

37

M. where the ro - bin once was?

Vc. *pizz.* *pp* *mf* *p*

Pno. *mf* *pp* *p*

41 3 *pp* emphatic *p*

M. *pp* *p*
Now the earth's a bare drum, a bare drum,

Vc. *pizz. sul pont.* *arco sul pont.*
mfp *pp*

Pno. *heavy*
p

46 *mfp*

M. *mfp*
clear,

Vc. *senza vib.* *heavy bow* *poco sul pont.* *molto vib.*
mfpp cresc. *(f)* *fff*

Pno. *mp* *fp* *pp* *ff* *fff*
Red. →

51 4 *p* *p* *mf*

M. *p* *p* *mf*
clear as a ho - ri - zon, his step lands

Vc. *light bow* *molto sul tasto e flaut.*
sul tasto *poco vib.* *senza vib.*
p *ppp*

Pno. *harsh*
p *mf*

56 *p*

M. *3*
hea-vi-ly on

Vc. *p* *5* *mf* *3*

Pno. *p* *softer* *pp (shadow)* *5* *3* *p* *p poco espress.* *5* *5*

60

M.

Vc. *senza vib.* *5* *pp* *mf*

Pno. *3* *5* *intensify* *mf* *5* *5*
change ped on each chord

64 5 *mf* *with repressed emotion* *3*

M. Where I fol-low him through fo - rest's slaugh - ter
must the

Vc.

Pno. *sub. p (dolciss.)* *p* *5* *pp* *mf* *bell-like* *5* *5*
molto ped.

67

M. *dim.*
through the fo - rest's slaugh - ter slaugh - ter

Vc.

Pno. *pp* *mf*

70

M. *p* *pp*
slaugh - ter slaugh - ter

Vc. 0 slow bow *pp*

Pno. *mf* *p* *pp*

73

M. *p* my fa - ther's daugh - ter my

Vc. senza vib. 3

Pno. *pp* 5 5 5 *mp* 5 5 *pp* 3 3 3

76

M. fath - er's daugh - ter.

Vc. *mp* *p* 5 5 5 5

Pno. *mf* *p* 3 3

78

M.

Vc.

Pno.

mf dim. mp pp

p dim.

3 3 3

6

81

M.

Vc.

Pno.

Where...? Where...?

p

p *pp*

mp mp dim. p

pp

p mp

3 3 3 3 3

p mp

sul pont. senza vib.

84 *pp* 7

M. *pp* Where's the oak tree?_

Vc. nat. poco sul pont. *ppp*

Pno. *pp* *p* 5 5

87

M.

Vc. fade to white noise (on the bridge) *pp*

Pno. *pp* *ppp* *pppp* 3 5