

Ancient Offerings: Vudu Sister's new release offers a modern twist on ancient myths

Burnt Offerings is the new release from Vudu Sister, a unique record featuring modern retellings of ancient myths in Latin and ancient Greek. With his signature gothic folk stylings, Keith J.G McCurdy eloquently spins a new take on tales as old as time. This project immediately caught my attention. Who is this hyper-educated madman? And why write lyrics in dead languages?



McCurdy, reached by phone, says he's always loved mythology and Tolkien. "While taking some mythology courses in the University of Rhode Island (URI) Classics department, I fell in love with Latin and Greek languages," said McCurdy.

McCurdy's mentor, Dr. Daniel Carpenter, encouraged students to create projects using Latin and Greek. McCurdy had the idea to write songs after trying his hand at poetry, and was awarded a grant from URI to help with the recording costs.

The cumbersome songwriting and translation operation required a specific plan of attack for each song.

“The process was a lot more mathematical than for writing a regular song,” said McCurdy. “These all began with the melody, and in some cases it made more sense to start with the Greek or Latin words first, and sometimes the English.”

Inspired by Ovid’s *Heroides* poems, told from the viewpoint of women in myth, the record puts the female perspective at the forefront. The subjects feel of particular significance given our society’s reckoning with the issues of sexual assault and gender inequality.

“Scelera Malorum,” or “the crimes of wicked men,” is told from the perspective of the furies in their role as arbiters of vengeance in retribution for crimes against women: “Blood the price, from lawless fire/Having been extorted, is a harsh payment/Out of sleepless hate, from reckless rage our violence.” Angela Degaitas and Rachel Rosencrantz provide backing harmonies, representing the three furies along with McCurdy.

Four out of the five songs are in Latin, with the exception of “ἡ Κλυταιμνήστρα” in Ancient Greek. In it, Clytemnestra kills her husband out of revenge for the slaying of their daughter. “On the surface, ‘Clytemnestra’ doesn’t sound all that musical, so I did this one as kind of a challenge,” said McCurdy.

“Credite Mihi” (“Believe Me”) recounts the story of Cassandra, cursed with the gift of foresight. This was my favorite of the batch, with its Eastern European lilt and catchy melody.

It should be noted that these are all McCurdy’s original songs, not recreations of ancient music. “I thought it was important to do this in a contemporary vein, and in a way that is consistent with my own style,” said McCurdy. He cites musical influences like Sicilian folk and the Greek genre rebetiko.

Much like the subject matter, the music has a classical sounding pedigree, with a string-heavy instrumentation of guitar, double bass, violin and viola. Sonically and thematically, *Burnt Offerings* picks up where Vudu’s 2016 *Mortis Nervosa* album leaves off, as that record drew from ghost stories and folk tales.

“Flores Lecti” gives a sweet and sour effect, moving from somber 6/8 to an upbeat, almost poppy chorus. But in true downer mythological fashion, this chorus turns out to mean “I became a bride of death/Who is forever a maiden,” describing how Persephone is taken by Hades at the apex of youth and beauty.

“Amor Carmen Novercae” is a macabre waltz that is anchored by an enchanting violin. The album features excellent “hands off” production with minimal effects.

McCurdy realizes the barriers to entry with *Burnt Offerings*, and isn’t expecting listeners to learn Ancient Greek. “I’m well aware that it’s potentially alienating, and that a lot of people won’t go that deep into the subject matter,” he said. “There’s a hope that the songs will stand on their own melodically, and are still able to capture or evoke some of that emotion.”

Though I admit that it is more difficult to connect with music you don’t understand, I found the arranging, melodies, and all-around musicianship impressive. Even more impressive is McCurdy’s will to take on this gargantuan project and breathe new life into these age-old stories.

Burnt Offerings, along with translations, is available for download at Bandcamp.