

# DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE

Extensive performance notes as to the relation between text and music are given in the harp score. Generally, the music follows and underscores the text, except where noted. Text cues are given for the harpist as guidelines, but may be adapted at the discretion of the performers.

Music start cues are underlined.

No staging direction is given. If a more gestural or physical rendition is desired, the music may be extended ad lib as needed.

Column at right is provided for notes.

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*[Music starts]*

They say that in the beginning there were four worlds.

The highest world is Olympos,  
Home of the Gods,  
Home of the Great Mystery.  
Source of Light, Purpose, Order,  
Wisdom, and Divine Love.

The second world, sometimes called Earth, is the place of the Heroes, where the Initiates of the Mysteries and those who serve them live. The Gods give these Men and Women the fertile fields of Earth, and the fruits of the vine. And in return, the people strive to fulfill the will of the Gods and accept their destinies with grace. Their struggles and sacrifices are much needed by those Divine Beings above.

The third world is the Underworld, the place of Sleep or Death. Here those who have left Earth are caught in their weaknesses, in gloom and darkness—in fear, anger, or vengefulness.

The fourth world is Tartarus, the realm of those who have lost all freedom—those who have resisted the Gods' Laws and so must perform the same action over and over for aeons and aeons until the Gods see fit to release them.

This is the whole Cosmos—worlds in the act of becoming.  
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Do you ever think about the seasons? And why we have them?  
We certainly rely on them; we depend on them, year in, year out, like night and day, poverty and plenty.

What if I told you that it wasn't always this way? Once there was only summer. Back when the Goddess Demeter and her lovely daughter Persephone lived together year round. In those days the summer was endless and everything was plentiful. But things changed: each year when everything dies, it is because the Goddess Demeter cries for her daughter's return. [*wait for music*]

Golden-tressed Demeter—the Lady Goddess of fruitfulness, she who glories in the harvest, she who allows the grain to grow, she who is known for giving splendid gifts, she who separates the wheat from the chaff ---she has a daughter, the lovely Persephone. And Persephone is missing. Where has she gone?

Some say it all started with Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love and Beauty. Aphrodite wanted to increase her influence, to expand her realm.

But where was Love needed?

One day Aphrodite was sitting with her son Eros, the God of Love. She looked down and noticed Hades, the powerful God of the Underworld. It had fallen to him to preside over that realm when he and his two brothers Zeus and Poseidon drew lots to divide the worlds. Hades, the One-Who-Receives-Many-Guests, was without a wife.

“Eros,” she said, “it troubles me that some of the Gods lack Love. See our friend Hades below? Why should he be alone? Why should his realm be without Divine Love? Pierce him with one of your arrows and let him fall in love with tender Persephone.

Eros let the arrow fly. It fell from the divine world of Olympos. It fell through the world of Men and Heroes. It penetrated the darkness of the Underworld, and found its mark in the heart of Hades [*wait for music*] And that arrow of Love carried with it the Light of all the worlds through which traveled. When it entered into him, his heart opened, and the fire of Love consumed him. [*wait for music*]

Ohhhh! A new, strange sensation—a pain, an ache—burned in him.

He felt he was missing something... What was it? Ah! He needed a Queen! Of course! A woman to rule by his side! [*wait for music*] He looked up from his shadowy world, and his eye fell upon trim-ankled Persephone, as she picked flowers in the field with her friends. In that moment he loved her passionately. He had to have her!

He went to his brother Zeus, the Lord over all the Gods, the Loud-Thunderer, to petition his case. “I love Persephone,” he said, “Will you grant her to me? Will you help me?”

Zeus, who sees far and wide, gave the match his blessing! He ordained the marriage! Zeus got the help of Gaia, the Earth Mother of All, who created an extraordinary flower—the narcissus---to lure Persephone off alone.

She saw the flower, and it drew her. She wanted it. She strayed far from her companions. “Oh, I’ve never seen such a lovely blossom!” It dazzled her, it intoxicated her! She bent down and was just about to pluck the flower when...

A chasm opened in the Earth! Up rushed Hades’ chariot, drawn by magnificent black horses. The majestic lord grabbed Persephone. Persephone cried out! But Hades, the One-Who-Is-Known-By-Many-Names, carried her off to the Underworld.

The Earth closed over them. [*wait for music*]

Then all was still.

But Demeter felt her daughter’s distress. In her heart she could hear her cries. Where was she? She had disappeared. Her friends had no idea where she had gone.

Carrying two blazing torches, Demeter searched for nine days, neither eating nor drinking, nor bathing, asking everyone, “Have you seen my daughter? Do you know where Persephone has gone? Have you heard anything about what happened? Will you tell me right away if you find some clue? Have you seen Persephone?” [*etc. ad lib to audience*]  
She looked everywhere. No one told her anything. [*wait for music*] Her despair grew greater and greater. Finally in desperation she appealed to Helios, the sun god, who sees everything.

“Helios! If ever I have pleased you, show me your respect, and answer if you have seen my child, who was taken against her will. Tell me which of the mortals or gods has done this?”  
And Helios said, “I shall tell you, as I do respect you and I feel your anguish. No one less than Zeus the Cloud-Gatherer is responsible. He gave your daughter to Hades to be his beautiful wife. Hades seized her and brought her below. But do not be troubled--stop your weeping! Hades is a worthy husband, from the same seed as Zeus! He has his share of honor.” And with that, he continued his journey across the sky.

Ohhh.....[*music cues next text*]

In the midst of her grief, a great anger arose within her towards Zeus who had allowed this to happen. In her rage, Demeter left Olympus.

She wandered for days on Earth, disguised as an Old Woman. No one recognized her.

Finally she came to Eleusis, a town of generous sacrifices, where she rested by a well under an olive tree. Some daughters of Keleus, the royal lord of the town, came to draw water, and they found her there. They could see the suffering in her face.

Good Mother, what has befallen you that you sit here so sadly?"

"Ah, children, since you ask, I will say. Doso is my name. I have escaped from Pirates who wanted to sell me into slavery. I am a stranger here. I hope to find some good household where I can mind the children or do the housework."

They brought her to their home. As soon as she walked through the door her radiance filled the room. Even though she was dressed poorly, Keleus and his queen Metaneira could see that she was of noble birth, and they welcomed her. Metaneira offered the Goddess her own seat, but Demeter refused. She just stood there silently. Finally one of the household women, Iambe—who had a lot of common sense-- set down a well-built stool for her, and threw a fleece over it. The goddess sat, sad and unsmiling.

They offered her food and honeyed wine. But all Demeter would drink was barley water, flavored with mint. She sat with her eyes down without moving, for a long time.

Again Iambe could sense what the Goddess needed, and she knew her duty. She told Demeter amusing bawdy stories to cheer her.

Finally Demeter laughed...and it made her feel better.

Metaneira came to her. "See our young son," she said. "We will be so happy if you can care for him." Demeter agreed to be his nurse and she picked the boy up. It made Metaneira's heart glad to see the child in the Goddess's arms! [*wait for music*]

So Demeter cared for the boy, anointing him with Ambrosia by day, bathing him with her fragrant breath....and secretly putting him in the red hot coals by night, to give him immortality! The boy prospered, and all were amazed at how he grew and thrived. [*wait for music*]

But for some strange reason, Metaneira grew uneasy. “What is this nurse doing with my son?” she wondered. She sensed something unusual. So one night she crept out of bed to spy on Demeter. She saw the Goddess put the baby in the fire!

Metaneira screamed! [*wait for glisses*]“My child! This stranger is making you disappear in the flames!” She wept, full of anguish.

Demeter became angry. She grabbed the child from the coals. Then she let the old age fall from her, and showed herself radiant and beautiful-- the great Goddess manifest! The awestruck queen fell to her knees. [*wait for music*]

“Ignorant are ye mortals and without understanding! Ye know not whether Good or Evil approaches! You have made a big mistake that cannot be undone. I would have made this child immortal, but that is not to be!

I am Demeter. To still my wrath, you must build me a temple. Later, when I am ready, I will teach you the rites.

As for the child, he will have blessings, since he once sat on my knees and slept in my arms.” Then the Goddess left.

Metaneira knees buckled and for a long time she could not speak, the shock was so great. She didn’t even heed to her child on the floor, who was crying. His sisters heard his wails and rushed in.

□

They picked up the poor child—but now no one could comfort him, as he was accustomed to being held by a Goddess! The women prayed all night. In the morning Metaneira told Keleus, and Keleus told his people.

Everyone was terrified. Right away they built the temple [*wait for music*]

Demeter went to the temple and sat there. She stopped nourishing the Earth. Nothing grew.

There was nothing to eat. Famine spread and mankind suffered. [*wait for music*]

Zeus became disturbed. He felt concerned that the race of Man might perish. And then who would there be to give sweet offerings to the Gods?

Zeus sent each one of the Gods and Goddesses,

one by one, to ask Demeter to restore the Earth and return to Olympos.  
[wait for music]

But Demeter's mind was not persuaded. She remained in her temple, grieving, and the Earth stayed barren...and desperate.  
[wait for music]

Finally Zeus could allow this no further. The Gods depended upon the labors of Mankind. In his wisdom he summoned Hermes, the messenger of the Gods.

"Hermes, go below to Hades. Gently convince him to release Persephone. Bring her out of the misty dark realm into the light, to her mother's presence."

Fleet-footed Hermes set out. He traveled through the worlds to the place of the Dead. When he arrived, he found Hades sitting on his bed with his revered wife, the beautiful Persephone.

"Hades!" said Hermes, "Lord of those who have perished! I bring you a message from Olympos! Persephone's mother Demeter is very angry, and in her wrath she is preventing the seeds from growing. The entire race of man is in danger of starving! As you know, if Mankind perishes, the immortals will lose their sacrifices and honors! The great Zeus orders you to allow noble Persephone to leave your side and return to the Gods, so she can rejoin her grieving Mother!"

With a knowing smile, Hades nodded, "I obey. Persephone, go to your Mother. But remember! As Zeus's own brother, I am a fitting husband for you. Here you are mistress of all that lives and moves. Here you have the greatest honor of all the Gods."

Persephone sprang up for joy. She had been suffering in the darkness, which was not natural for her. She was eager to see her mother again.

Now, that clever Hades! So sly! He gave Persephone a few sweet pomegranate seeds to eat so she would come back to him. Although nothing had touched her lips since she had arrived in the underworld, she ate them!

Why did she do that?

Then Hermes led her out of the shadowy world realm, and took her to the temple where Demeter sat. The two women flew into each other's arms!

“My child, my child! Demeter cried. “I’m so happy you have returned! You must share the whole story with me, every moment! Oh! But wait! Tell me, did you eat anything while you were down below? Please say you did not! For if you did, you must leave me again to return to the under world.”

Persephone answered her, “Ah, mother! When I heard that I could return to you, I jumped up, I was so happy! But... I confess... Hades put some Pomegranate seeds into my hand and ...he compelled me to eat them.” And then Persephone told her mother the story of her abduction and adventure in Hades’ realm.

Hmm. Did he really *make* her eat those seeds?

The two Goddesses talked and talked as they sat in the temple. The fields still stood idle, infertile, with no growth. Mankind still hungered. Had Demeter forgotten? Had she turned her back on Olympos? Was she still angry?

Zeus sent another messenger, the great Goddess Rhea, Demeter’s own mother, to speak to her.

“Come child,” said Rhea, “Zeus, the one who sees far and wide is calling you to rejoin the Gods. He promises you great honor. Your daughter will stay with you for eight months of the year, and only for four months will she need to remain in the Underworld with her worthy husband. Come! Obey! It is time for you to accept what has happened. Let go of your distress and allow the harvest to grow.”

Demeter listened, and right away she uncovered the seeds. The Earth was again rich with leaves and blossoms, fragrant, and fertile.

And now Demeter did something especially wonderful. She went to the kings, the leaders of the people, the lords of Eleusis. She revealed holy mysteries, of which no man may speak. She taught them sacred rites and sacred ceremonies, which connect Mankind to the Gods. After she finished her instructions, Demeter and Persephone went to Olympus to join the other Immortals, and there they stay by the side of the great Zeus.

Persephone knows that when the time comes she must leave the World of the Gods and return to the Underworld, where Hades needs a wife, the people need a queen, and she is blessed with great honors and a worthy husband.

Every year mother and daughter suffer in their separation, and rejoice in their reunion. When Persephone is with her mother, the Earth is plentiful, rich, and life-giving. When she stays with

her lord, the One-Known-By-Many-Names, Demeter is sad, and leaves off her duties. Once again nature is poverty stricken, and the Earth grows cold and hungry. Then the people must reach out to the great Lady Goddess through the wondrous mysteries that she taught them; these revelations sustain Mankind in this time of lack. Perhaps the great Zeus, who sees far and wide, knows that the Earth needs these cycles of winter and summer, abundance and scarcity.

They say that those who shun these rites and take no part in them suffer in darkness. And they say that those who receive these revelations and hold them in their inmost hearts will always be greatly blessed.

The great philosopher Plato claims that Love is the child of Poverty and Plenty.

Remember Aphrodite, who wanted to expand her influence and increase the Love in the world? Tell me, do you think her wish was granted?