

Semmelweis

Music by Raymond J. Lustig
Libretto by Matthew Doherty

1. OPENING

Chorus:

Day... What is the day
City girl... You're a city girl
You know the way
What is the day

2. EARTHWORKS

Chorus:

On the earth
On the earth
Give birth
On the earth
Give birth on the earthworks
That roll down from the city wall
Look out from the earthworks
Look out
On the earth
You're a city girl
Unless you know
Or wait until it's midwives' day
What is the day
In the doctors' ward
They make you stay
And likely as not
You'll die that way
Stay away
What is the day

3. ETIOLOGY **[instrumental]**

4. MARKET SQUARES

Woman (solo):

In the market squares in Buda and Pest
Old women cut snips from folded paper
And the shape of a mother would unfold
And trailing from her
Were children you had not seen
Invisibly built by that quiet machine
And one wrong cut would cut through everyone
And it seemed like something they had never
Learned but knew in their hands how to make
And make and make.
And I never asked the price
Just watched
Watched them weave with their scissors
Something too delicate to take

5. BEST IDEA

Semmelweis:

I could hang myself upon this wall
It wouldn't be so strange
To see me thus arranged
To see me thus arranged
It wouldn't be so strange....

Come and talk with me
All the lives I will set free
Come here and talk with me
And what I will be

I could hang myself upon this wall
It wouldn't be so strange
To see me thus arranged alongside
the most brilliant things of all

Even as a child taking stock
I watched my hands replace the tins
The shelves we made our living in
And knew my hands and mind could be
What filled much grander galleries

Filled much grander galleries
Filled the grandest galleries

The warm hand that wrapped my own
When I was nothing in the town
The clumsiness of learning on a body
What goes wrong
My clumsiness is gone

Did you ever have a best idea
Did it ever seem so clear
That all the engineers
Of what we hold so dear
Were only peddling souvenirs?

6. MY DOCTOR'S HANDS

Chorus:

My doctor
Pure
My doctor's hands
My doctor
My doctor's hands....
built a fist around a cobblestone
Pure Pure
My doctor's hands were pure.

7. IT'S NEVER A CHOICE

Woman (solo):

It's never a choice
You see who you see
And soon you belong
To the one who trains himself on you
O how you glow
Something planted in your body
Where it grows
And pain goes everywhere it goes
It's never a choice
You see who you see
And soon you belong

To the one who trains himself on you
Is your body a cathedral
Or candlelight
Passed hand to hand
Against the dark

It's never a choice
You see who you see

So give birth in the cathedral
And quietly there
You are candlelight
A single star against the dark
That rolls down from the city wall

8. OUT IN THE YARD

Chorus:

Out in the yard
Out in the yard
Where the bodies go
Out in the yard where the bodies go

What's the difference?

9. ARCHAEOLOGY

Semmelweis:

On the streets of Vienna
You were a living city
On this table
Antiquity

I come down from the street
Where the lamps are lit
And sweepers sweep
This day for you could be a thousand years
Your ruined city waits
For the careful turning of a spade
Wipe the ash from your skin

And down into the ground
Give this mystery to me,
Archeology
I dig down, and down
Down and down through the layers
And in a ruined tomb I found my own
My own self lying there
My own self lying there

A careful spade
Still turning in my hand
Still turning in my hand

10. SKIN SO FAIR

Chorus:

Is it our hair
Is it our skin so fair
Or something in the springtime air
Through the open window
In the halls
The ringing of a bell
All the things we just can't bear
Something in our breasts
What we lack or have too much
Foreign hands that touch
Our skin so fair
The springtime air
The turning of a tide
On our backs or on our sides

All you imagine onto me
If I was in the other room
Up and down the stairs
While they were lying there
Your hands that stocked the empty store
The bodies who were here before
Have they met across time
Or were they ever there
Is it our hair
Is it our skin so fair
Something in the springtime air

On our backs or on our sides
When you find it
What has led you there?

Semmelweis
Semmelweis
What's the difference, Semmelweis?

11. AS IF YOUR BODY WERE A CATHEDRAL

Chorus:

As if your body were a cathedral lit by candlelight
As if your body were a cathedral.....

Ligamentis discitis
Et neuritis
Tuberculosis
Cujus sistema simpaticus
Apoteca Catullus
Oedema conventio
Scandalum lumbago
Diabetes
Testosterone lumbago
Rododendron absurdum
Ipso facto
Sinus sinus cosinus
Cotangens et cotangens dinosaurus

12. SCIENTIFIC STRUGGLE

[Instrumental]

Semmelweis (spoken):

You cannot stay.

Woman and Chorus (spoken) :

You cannot stay.

13. DARK DISGRACE

Semmelweis:

Any who see me
In my dark disgrace
See a man from another place
Where we think we know
We think we know
Why we do what we do

We don't know
I don't know

The women stay with me
Stay with me
And their bodies glow
Their bodies glow
In my mind their faces
Like children grow

I do not myself know how to make
I do not build or prosper
Soon I am thirty, and unwed too *line changed
God's own house I have rummaged through.
Is there a ship to take me there
Or a train
Away from here
Where I might meet
My own self on its way to me
My own self....

To Venice I think,
It's better if I go away.
To think
If there is another way.
They say it's
Better if I go away

14. EUREKA

Semmelweis:

I could hang myself upon this wall

It wouldn't be so strange
To see me thus arranged alongside
The most brilliant things of all

I gazed up for an hour all alone
When they want you they will bring your
Body home.

In a stranger's voice I heard
Spoken in no tongue I know
Murmurs from across the sea,
That still somehow were made by me --
In clear but broken semblances, intact
As separate languages,
My mind a coach on two roads at once.
Riding over
Cobblestone and
Mountains both
That turned together into nonsense
And this truth -- that now I see
Will be visible to all
But now only to me

Did you ever have a best idea
Did it ever seem so clear
That all the engineers
Of the knowledge we hold dear
Were only peddling
Souvenirs.
Only Souvenirs.

I can see the fallen world anew
And see the lines the masons drew as all askew
And I can see a world that's true
A world so observed as makes my mind unnerved
Our learned truths are artifice
And I am somehow an artist who
must make the mundane startle us

-
I took my book out in the rain.
I had to see where I went wrong
Or should I just go right along

And found the page

Where I had sketched the veins of streets
And pages full of women's names
Death figures copied from the wall
It looked so strange.
I watched the rain become the street
I was going home
I was going home

-
And we are not the saviors,
We who rummage through
The bodies, looking for the truth.
The ones who spread
Dangerous stories
Will find an enemy in me.

15. I AM THE EXPERIMENT

Maria:

I am the experiment — child after child
Born into the clean hands of their father
And their mother still alive.
How desperately he tries
To prove himself,
How desperately
He tries to prove himself,
To start again in my body
Another child
And sling another arrow
Through the apple on my head
And walk me around,
Not dead
Not dead.

16. INSTRUMENTAL - MADNESS 1.

17. THE DANGEROUS ONES (Not used)

Semmelweis:

Am I to you
A dangerous one
Has a revolution come
Is my hand a gun
For writing something true
Or for not letting you
Be the one the truth goes through
Have I built or have I just undone
A baby is spun
From me into the moon-stoked blood
Is she now a dangerous one
Am I guilty if I run
Or because of where I stood
I am suspect for the crowd
Or is it because I'm only one
Am I to be shut down
For being right or was I wrong
Because I spoke too soft for you
Or did I speak too loud
Rebellious blood
Outside the drinking hall
And in the hospital
A baby falls
Into the hands of a dangerous one
So many loyal wounded to treat
They do not send their hands into the dead
So the living women
Are allowed to go on like their children
Living and living
Until the revolt is contained
And the dangerous ones
Can turn their hands again
To the dark awful mystery
That even now is visible to me
Whose fever cools beneath a sheet
What now to do
And I to you
Am I such a dangerous one
Who so loves the world
That she gives birth on the street?

18. ONCE A CANDLE LIGHTS A CANDLE

Chorus:

Once a candle lights another candle
The first one can go out
My mother the same
Lived until I was born

Once a candle lights another candle
The first one can go out
Now where the
Baby was it is myself in there

Once a candle lights another candle,
The first one can go out.
My flesh I too
Must abandon completely
Once a candle lights another candle

18. THE ONLY ONE / OUR SKIN SO FAIR reprise

Semmelweis:

Out in the past, where bodies go
The Finding of San Marco moved me so
In a notebook page, ruined and dried,
I still can hear that rainstorm
And came home to find you gone

You were my best idea.
Where I find you lights my ruined mind
Why did you bring me here?

Dark figures changing on the wall
I can't recall, I can't recall

Now I hear them listen, listen
close to what I say
only now to prove me mad
and keep me locked away

Women:

Come down from your cross
You were nothing at all

Women:

Come down from your cross

what is the day
you know the way

Stay
You know the way

I am the experiment
I am the experiment

Happens to a body that resists

Is it our hair
Is it our skin so fair
Something in the springtime air

Something in the springtime air

Father
The lives that I set free
Come back to talk to me
Come down
Nothing

Through the open window
In the hall
The ringing of the bell
In the hall

Back to me

Am I to you
A dangerous one
Has a revolution come
How was I the only one
The only one who knew
Dark figures changing on the wall
I can't recall, I can't recall

See what happens to a body that resists
That is your empire of genius men,
Of murderers.

Now I hear them
listen, listen close to what I say
It's my blood you wash your hands with,
You are small against today
And if you are alive because of me
Am I not your father
The lives that I set free
Come back to talk to me
Come down from your cross
You were nothing at all

You were my best idea
Here and here and here
Where I found you lights my ruined mind
You started me, you started me
And just some words would make it so

All the lives that I set free
Come back and talk to me
Dark figures
Changing on a wall. We killed them all,
We killed them all.
And I could hang myself upon the wall
Beside the darkest things of all

And with you I am not so out of place
My mind is a disgrace
I was going home
I was going home
I am the experiment

With you

You started me, you started me
Now finish me
I'm gone without you here
And I could hang myself upon this wall

Started me
Finish me
Gone, here
And I could hang myself upon this wall

An unfinished man they took away
My best idea, you've gone and this is me.



19. SKIN SO FAIR - REPRISE

20. LAST MOVEMENT

[Instrumental]