

THE INVISIBLE QUEEN



by and with **HARVEY PERR**

music by **EVAN LURIE**

8 B.C. AVG. 23-10³⁰ AL44698
337 EAST EIGHTH ST.

".....To get back before dark
is the art of going."

-Wendell Berry

"An hour comes
to close a door behind me
the whole of night opens before me"

- W.S. Merwin

"Make music out of night will change the night."

- Muriel Rukeyser

"It seems
as though, on a journey, we wake in the night...."

-William Bronk

Music: Yiddish. Liturgical and folkloric.

Film: The Lower East Side as it was, sepia-tinted, thirty or forty years ago; the camera strolls slowly through its streets, gently pans the facades of its buildings.

Eventually, in the distance, a young man appears, standing in the middle of a street, singing. We come closer to him until we hear his song - RUMANIA, RUMANIA - and then we retreat from him slowly at first, then with more speed, and, as we retreat, his voice gets louder.

Another neighborhood - a group of men come menacingly towards us.

Still another neighborhood - another group of men come menacingly towards us.

The West Village - a group of gay clones come menacingly towards us.

The camera turns. We are back in the Lower East Side.

Music: Hispanic.

We rush through the streets of the Lower East Side as it is today, faster and faster, until we reach a doorway. The film stops.

The music stops.

The lights come up.

A room. Spare. A table. A mirror on the table. A chair. A wire mesh torso. A door: to enter the room; to leave the room. A suggestion of darkness, of oddness, of elegance. Expressionistic. Cartoonish. A room in the closet of our minds.

VOICE (off-stage)

I need a room.

(Echo)

A quiet room.

(Echo)

And

(Echo)

I mustn't be disturbed.

(Echo)

Do you hear me??

(Echo)

Under no circumstances

(MUSIC)

must I be disturbed.

(Echo over MUSIC. MUSIC stops)

A MAN enters through the door. His clothes are dark. His gloves are white. His face is entirely swathed in white bandages. He wears dark glasses. He carries a battered suitcase.

MAN

What? Who am I? You want to know who I am? Why I'm running away from those men? I get ahead of myself. Why I'm on the run? How it is? Was? Is? Where it's going? Wait. Watch me. I'll tell you. First though. Less light. Set tone. Melody. Celeste. Viola d'amore. Oboe. Clarinet. Two clarinets. Night now. Nothing to be seen. The theme starts.

(MUSIC)

Oh, yes, a window. Imagine a window.

(looks out the window)

Night now. Nothing to be seen. A breeze, at least. Good that. The breeze. After twenty-four bars, chorus comes in. What? No chorus? No celeste? No clarinets! Ah. No money. We can imagine it, though, right? Right. A choral fugue begins. The soprano's voice ascends higher and higher in whole notes. While oboe descends. Darkness. Scream in the night. We do have a soprano? Good. No oboe? No darkness. Just a scream in the night. There. Tone set. How it is. Was. Is. Well. I've come back. To where I've come from. I don't recognize it. And I don't remember it. Well. Night now. Nothing to be seen.

(He starts removing clothes, replacing them on torso; he does this through out this section until he has no more clothes on and reveals that he is entirely swathed in bandages beneath his clothes)

This play. I was in this play. On one part of the stage: a room. In Berlin. 1933. 34. The early thirties. You could tell. By the decor. The clothes. The music. Imitation Weill. Couldn't get the rights to the real thing. And. In this room. A group of people. Jews. Intellectuals. Communists. A queer man. You could tell. By his manner. At one point, he reads a poem. In French. Anyway, this group of people, they're young, they're intelligent, they sit around, their legs crossed, drinking coffee, sipping sherry - in the theater, of course, it's really tea - and - they talk about Hitler and about how people like themselves will be placed in concentration camps eventually, and some of them are very serious, very intense, and some of them laugh, and they all continue to drink their coffee, and one of them gets up and crosses the stage and puts on the radio and first we hear Hitler's voice - of course, it's not really coming from the radio; it's coming from backstage, where the stage manager is playing it on tape - and then this person switches the dial and we hear Wagner and he switches the dial again and we hear this imitation Weill because, as I said, we couldn't get the rights to the real thing.

THE YOUNG MAN from the film enters through the doorway and sings RUMANIA, RUMANIA.

MAN

I told you I don't want to be disturbed.

THE YOUNG MAN leaves.

MAN

Really. Anyway. This part of the play is in German. The actors are German. They speak in German. Except for the queer man. Who reads this poem in French. Meanwhile, on another part of the stage, another room - now, this is the part of the play I was in; this part's in English; I don't speak German - a room, here, now, 1984, New York, America, what have you, another group of people. A woman. A black man. An Hispanic. An Asian. That's the part I was playing. A queer. A sardonic alcoholic. Great. The theatre. True democracy. All these different people. Gathered together. In one room. On the same journey. Imagining they are really connected to one another. Great. So. Did you hear that?

(MUSIC)

There are madmen in the streets. Outside this window. Lunatics. Dark now. Nothing to be heard. They'll be back. They're out there. Now. Nothing to be heard. Nothing to be seen.

(MUSIC stops)

No. Continue.

(MUSIC)

Imagine an aria. Singing. A long, winding aria. So. We're young, we're intelligent, we sit around, crossing our legs, uncrossing our legs, in tweed jackets, drinking coffee, swilling Scotch - of course, it's really tea - and - we talk about Reagan and about how people like ourselves will be placed in concentration camps eventually, and some of us are very serious, very intense - I have lines like: "I am so American. I have sentimental attachment to psychological melodrama of my childhood" - and some of us laugh, and one of us gets up and crosses the stage and turns the television on and first we see Ronnie. Waving. Switch channels. It's American flags and fireworks and music from Star Wars. Switch channels.

At this point, the MAN's clothes are on the torso and the torso resembles The Invisible Man. The MAN is swathed in bandages.

MAN

Clarinet solo here. Duet. For two clarinets.

(He removes bandages from face)

There.

(Through the next section, he slowly removes the bandages from his body until he is naked - except for his gloves)

Switch channels. It's The Auschwitz Follies of 1941. In which a group of teenagers, in an effort to put off their trip to the gas chamber, put on a show. Comic turns by guest artists.

THE YOUNG MAN enters and, in a more aggressive, macho stance, sings RUMANIA, RUMANIA. The MAN tries to get him out the door and succeeds, but only after a struggle.

MAN

Switch channels. Cross legs. Uncross legs. Coffee. Scotch. Switch channels. I got up. Turned to the director. "Boob," I said. His name is Boob. "Boob, I want out. I've had it. This tweed jacket. Crossing my legs. Uncrossing my legs. Playing a chinaman. Maybe, just maybe, if I could play the queer. Not that it's a great part. All that eyelash-fluttering and lip-smacking at the thought of submitting to brute force but at least he gets to say - I'm tired of being a man and that's the point of the play, isn't it, that we're tired of being men, we've been oppressed by men, and we're tired of it. Isn't that why you did it? Boob? To get that point across. Here are these Germans. We know what happened to them. And he we are. And we're warning the audience that it could happen to us. Isn't that it, Boob?" "Nemo, we already have someone playing the queer." "You've got a straight man playing the queer, Boob. And me playing a chinaman. What do I know about chinamen? Charlie Chan. Bird's nest soup." "But, Nemo, you don't look queer." "Do I look Chinese?" "You're just being difficult, Nemo. Of course you don't look Chinese. But with makeup!" "All right, Boob. I tried. But it's not even the kind of theatre I want to do." "Oh. Really? Well! Tell me, Nemo, what kind of theatre do you want to do?" The moment I was waiting for. Now. Viola d'amore. And celeste. Gentle harmony at first. Increasingly more dissonant. Pulled out this book. This book brought to every rehearsal. Pulled it out, opened it to the right page. Book mark right there. Started reading. Wait. I have a copy. In here. Somewhere.

He goes through his battered suitcase and comes up with a book, book mark in place, turns to the appointed page.

MAN

(reads Response to a Request by Robert Walser)

"You ask me if I have an idea for you, a sort of sketch that I might write, a spectacle, a dance, a pantomime, or anything else that you could use as an outline to follow. My idea is roughly the following: Get hold of some masks, half a dozen noses, foreheads, tufts of hair, and eyebrows, and twenty voices. If possible, go to a painter, who should also be a tailor, and have him make a series of costumes, and be sure to obtain a few good and solid pieces of scenery, so that, wearing a black overcoat, you can walk up some stairs or look out at a window, then utter a roar, a short, leonine, thick, heavy roar, to make people really believe that a soul is roaring, a human heart.

"I ask you to attend to this cry, put elegance into it, make it sound pure and right, and then, as you like, you may reach up to one of your tufts of hair and lay it, doucement, on the ground. This, if done gracefully, will have a horrifying effect. People will think that pain has made you stupid. In order to obtain a tragic effect, you must employ the nearest as well as the remotest means; I say this so that you'll now understand that it would be good, next, to put your finger into your nose and pick around with it vigorously. Some spectators will weep when they see this, such a noble, somber figure as yours, behaving so rudely and deplorably. It depends on what sort of face you make and from which angle the light shines on you. Be sure to dig your electrician in the ribs so that he'll take the right amount of trouble, and above all coordinate your features, your gestures, your arms, legs, and mouth.

"Remember what I told you before; namely - and you'll know it still, I hope - that it is possible for one eye alone, open or closed, to achieve an effect of terror, beauty, grief, or love, or what have you. It doesn't take much to show love, but at some time or another in your, praise God, disastrous life you must have felt. honestly and simply, what love is and how love likes to behave. It is the same, naturally, with anger, also, and with feelings of speechless grief; briefly, with every human feeling. Incidentally, I advise you to perform athletic exercises often in your room, to go for walks in the forest, to fortify the wings of your lungs, to practice sports, but only select and balanced sports, to go to the circus and observe the behavior of the clowns, and then seriously to consider by which rapid movements of your body you can best render a spasm of the soul. The stage is the open, sensual throat of poetry, and, dear sir, it is your legs that can strikingly manifest quite definite states of the soul, not to mention your face and its thousand mimings. You must take possession of your hair, if, in order to manifest fright, it is to stand on end, so that the spectators, who are bankers and grocers, will gaze at you in horror.

MAN

(continuing to read)

"So now you will have been speechless, will have, lost in thought, picked your nose like a rude and unthinking child, and now you begin to speak. But as you are about to do so, a greenish fiery snake crawls and licks its ~~wy~~ out of your pain-contorted mouth, which makes all your limbs seem to tremble with dread. The snake falls to the ground and coils itself around the tranquil tuft of hair, a shriek of fright as from one single mouth goes through the whole auditorium; but already you are offering something new, you stick a long curved knife into one eye, so that the knife's point, dripping with blood, appears from the lower part of your neck, near the throat; after this, you light a cigarette and behave in a curiously cozy way, as if you were privately amused about something. The blood that soils your body becomes stars, the stars dance around the whole stage area, burning and wild, but then you catch them all in your open mouth, and make them disappear, one by one. This will have brought your theatrical art essentially to a degree of perfection. Then the painted-scenery houses collapse, like frightful drunkards, and bury you. Only one of your hands is to be seen, reaching up from the smoking ruins. The hand is still moving a little, then the curtain descends."

(as he closes the book)

Closed the book and walked out on the rehearsal, out of the theater, quite still, with great dignity, till I heard someone coming after me. And I started to run. "How It Is/Was/Is" That's the title. It's still in rehearsal. Hasn't opened yet. Watch for it.

(At this point, the MAN is naked; he reaches into the suitcase and takes out a candleabra and places it on the table, puts candles in and lights them. Then he removes makeup from the suitcase and places it on the table. He sits down at the table and begins to apply makeup. In the background, faintly, we hear the soprano solo.)

SOPRANO SOLO

Comes the dawn
Comes the dawn
Comes the dawn
Comes the dawning of the day
Comes the day
I sing a song
And the song I sing's
A song that sings the coming of the day
"Make music out of night will change the night."
On the rim of the sea,
The sea there,
Beyond the olive trees, down the road, around the curves,
through the olive trees there,

out of the night and into the light,
 Even in Winter,
 The sun comes up.
 The dawn. The sun comes up. The day.
 Even in winter.

MAN

(talking through most of the above)

We were children together. We went to school together. We went on double dates together. We came out together. We read Das Kapital to each other. From the beginning, he said we were different. Being gay, he said, was not a sexual aberration. It was part of being different. I loved Moon. That was his name. Moon. "Face it, Nemo, we're different!" When we were very young, we wore our mothers' clothes and danced in front of the mirror. When we were older, I said, "Remember, Moon, when we were very young, we wore our mother's clothes and danced in front of the mirror? Even then, we were different." He didn't want to be reminded of that. The pictures we found, in his father's drawer, of beautiful women. Who turned out to be men. He didn't want to be reminded of that, either.

(The YOUNG MAN enters)

YOUNG MAN

(sings)

Rumania, Rumania, Ru-

(switches)

Don't you want to grow up to be a man, Skee-zix?

Like you, Uncle Walt?

Yes.

Oh, yes, Uncle Walt. How do I do that?

Let's take a walk in the woods, Skee-zix, and talk about it.

Okay.

Now, Skee-zix, isn't it nice here? Oh! Oh! Watch out for that....

Ouch.

Rake! And be careful, that's a...

Ouch.

Porcupine.

Well, Uncle Walt, how do I become a man like you?

You start by not saying Ouch when you're hit in the face by a rake or when you step on a porcupine.

Okay.

And you must stop wearing Auntie Blossom's high heels.

(switches)

-mania, Rumania, Rumania.

MAN

If I told you once, I told you twice. I don't want to be disturbed.

(The YOUNG MAN leaves)

MAN

He met someone. "I met someone, Nibsey." He called me that sometimes. They became lovers. We saw less of each other. His lover left him. He joined a gym. He grew a moustache. He cut his hair. He went to revivals of Judy Garland movies. He met someone. They became lovers. We never saw each other. One day, I saw a parade pass by. There was Moon. "Hey, Moon!" He turned red. He put his arm around a boy, looked straight ahead and marched on by. That's all right, I thought. I understand. He writes marching music, I heard, that gets piped into the baths. The Rand Corporation released a report that says the idea of men marching brings on orgasms. Moon must have read that. That sly Moon!

(The makeup has been applied; he rummages through the suitcase and finds a pair of tights which he puts on slowly.)

Hear that? Outside the window? Lunatics, I tell you! That parade? The one Moon marched in. I forgot to tell you. Fireworks. American flags. The music from Star Wars.

(The YOUNG MAN enters; he waves like Ronnie but when he opens his mouth, it is Hitler's voice; he closes it and when he opens it again, Wagner's music comes out; he closes it again and opens it again and this time it's the music from Star Wars; once more and it's Hispanic music that comes out and, as if in embarrassment, he timidly leaves.)

Bells. I forgot to mention bells, didn't I? Bells would be nice, wouldn't they?

(He stands and looks at himself in the mirror.)

O! O! O! The shimmer of mirage.

(He goes through the suitcase and comes up with a gown and a pair of shoes and sings as he puts them on.)

MAN

(continuing)

More than mirage. I don't know when it got hard. But it got hard. I met someone. He asked me how I survive. I said:

(retreating into the shadows)

"How do I survive?

(music)

"I....

(music)

...steal." He said, "You're joking. Let's get together sometime." We made a date. I was early. It was an unfamiliar neighborhood. It was late afternoon. It got darker. Night now, I thought, nothing to be seen. Still. I waited. It got darker. Suddenly, standing there, waiting, I thought, I know where I am. I was in the garden of my childhood. And just a few feet away, madmen in the street. He hadn't come yet. I called his name. He didn't answer. I called his name again. He didn't answer. It got darker. I had a drug. Earlier, someone gave me a drug. I took the drug. I ran home. I felt odd. I looked in the mirror. I couldn't see myself. There was a knock at the door. "Is it you?" "It's me." But it wasn't him. How could it have been him? He didn't know where I lived. It was a strange man knocking at my door. And a strange man was tapping at my window. And strange men were running up the stairs. I had to take a chance. I opened the door. I ran past them. I ran back to where I was to meet him. He was there. I asked if he could see me. "No," he said. He didn't seem to care. I said, "I'm tired of running. I'm tired of being a man." He said he understood. "I understand." He took me home. He wrapped me in bandages. He gave me these clothes. He said they were the only clothes he had. They were his mother's clothes. He put them in this suitcase. And here I am. I'm safe now. For a while.

(He goes to the window)

Nothing to be seen.

(The YOUNG MAN appears in the doorway; when he opens his mouth, it is the soprano's song which we hear. When it is ended, he closes the door and the MAN comes to the table to blow the candles out.)