

Sense of Self

Libretto by Kendra Preston Leonard

Music by Lisa Neher

SETTING: A gym or track or athletic training facility, or a room in MAYA's or NAOMI's home equipped for exercise. The singers can be on bikes up on trainers, stretching, or doing other activities appropriate for a coaching session. MAYA is moving about, cycling, doing squats, lifting weights, stretching, or similar.

1. Recit: Damn it! I hate this!

After a moment, MAYA quits what she was doing, clearly frustrated and agitated.

MAYA (*angry and upset*) Damn it! I hate this!
I wanted this to be the year— the start of bigger things.

NAOMI (*sympathetically*)
Me too.

Did you hear back from your doctor?

MAYA
The date is set
for my surgery.

But I have to tell the surgeon
what I want to do.

(a little irritated)

It's like a menu:

(counting it off on her fingers or gesturing to her body, becoming agitated)

Lumpectomy and radiation,
single or double
mastectomy.

NAOMI
No matter what you choose,
I'll have a plan—
We're going to put you back on top of the
winners' stand.

2. Duet: I'm used to the way I move

MAYA (*with a sense of discovery, as if understanding in a new way for the first time*)

I'm used to the way I move,
where my muscles lie,
how they work when I swim,
how my bones connect
with ev'ry ligament and ev'ry tendon.

NAOMI (*with confidence*)

You'll learn that again, you can do that:
you have the patience and power
and persistence.

NAOMI and MAYA

We're athletes: we live for what our bodies can do.
We make our bodies consistent,
reliable, predictable.

MAYA

Everything I do is for my body- to make me
stronger—

NAOMI

—to make you stronger,

MAYA

—to make me faster—

NAOMI

—to make you faster—

MAYA

—to make me better—

NAOMI

—to make you better,
to keep yourself healthy.

MAYA

—to keep myself healthy.

NAOMI

I'm ready to help you fight;
I'm ready to make you better—
again.
you have the patience
and power
and persistence.

NAOMI and MAYA

We're athletes: we live for what our bodies can do.
We make our bodies consistent,
reliable, predictable.

MAYA

All of the training,
all of the races,
out on the road,
out on road, the bike,
out in the water—
that's my core;
that's who I am.
No matter what I choose,
I have to change my body.

3. Recit: You'll get it done, whatever you choose

NAOMI (*lightly*)

You'll get it done, whatever you choose, and we'll
work hard, together, to get you back in shape.

MAYA (*being rhetorical*)

Do you really know how it works?

NAOMI (*a little taken aback, both by MAYA's tone
and her question*)

I thought—

MAYA (*with a little anger*)

It's not just "get it done" and it's over—
my chest will be weak, and if
I get implants—
they'd cut into
my pecs; it could affect
how I breathe!

NAOMI (*gentle, but she still doesn't get it*)

I'm making plans, Maya:
physical therapy,
superfoods and massage—

*MAYA breaks away from NAOMI, then turns back to
face her.*

MAYA (*frustrated*)

That comes later, Naomi.

Right now I—

I have to decide—

4. Aria & Finale: If the surgeon removes just the lump

MAYA

If the surgeon removes just the lump—
it's out, it's quick, it seems easy...
but what if they find more,
or they come back in a year?

(with a deep breath, looking at her body)

Maybe the best thing is the single mastectomy.
That one breast gone, all taken away, never to get
lumps again.

(getting anxious again)

Reconstruction, though, seems risky;
I use those muscles for swimming and running,
and I need upper-body strength
for the bike.

I could opt out,
it could just be flat there,
with a carefully made scar.

What would that do
to the way I train and move,
to my ability to compete?

(with a deep breath)

So I could do that, just the one.

*(with growing urgency, moving around the space, breathing
becoming a little short and panicky)*

But what if.

What if right now cancer cells are growing,
spreading, invading, metastasizing?

Maybe removing both breasts, and being sure, is
what I need—

*NAOMI tries to touch MAYA to help reassure her, to
calm her down, but MAYA rejects her, flinging her hand
away or moving away.*

(to NAOMI)

No!

I have to decide!

All the things I want to do:
I could die
before I race again.
Before I run another mile,
swim another lap,
ride another hour.

I could die before I raise a child;
die before my parents do.
There would be no one
to hold their hands,
no one
to help them dress,
no one!

And there. It's done.
The date is set.
I want them to take
all of it,
both breasts,
all the nodes.

NAOMI *(gentle and understanding)*
I'll be here.

MAYA
The date is set.

*The two women embrace or show some other sign of physical
support.*

I can do this. I can have a different body.
I can be myself, and learn my body
anew.
I am living for my body, for myself.

MAYA and NAOMI TOGETHER
We're athletes: we live for what our bodies can do.