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eurydicy
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BEN STANTON (Lighting Design): Off Broadway: Sandra Bernhard: Everything Bad & Beautiful (The Daryl Roth), Play Yourself, Light Raise The Roof, Besley, OH!, and Threw Pitchfork (NYTW), The Thugs (Soho Rep), The Triple Happiness and The Dear Boy (Second Stage), Orange Flower Water and Stone Cold Dead Serious (Edge Theater), Finer Noble Gases (Rattlestick Theater), Esotera, Indoor/Outdoor (DR2), Orange Lemon Egg Canary (PS122), Black Russian, A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream, The Listener, Edward II (juilard), Caligula (AUDELCO Nom. Classical Theater of Harlem). Regional: Godspell (Paper Mill Playhouse), Love’s Labour’s Lost (The Huntington Theatre), The Cook (Hartford Stage), The Crucible (Actors Theater of Louisville), Bus Stop and The Chekhov Cycle (WTF), Loot (The Intiman).

DAVID HANBURY (Composer) is an actor, playwright, and composer who has collaborated and created original works in New York (International Fringe, Art Attacks Puppetry Slam, High Life/Low Life @ The Marquis), Providence (Trinity Repertory Company, Petrifiable Theater, Brown University), and Boston (Boston Center for the Arts, Mobius Arts Center, The Comedy Studio). His one-man show Personal Instrument which used heavy metal guitar virtuosity to explore issues of identity and the artist’s life was nominated for an Independent Reviewers of New England Award and toured to San Francisco’s New Conservatory Theater Center. He wrote original guitar composition for that show and has also written folk songs, choral pieces, instrumental scoring, and pop punk noise for plays as varied as Twelfth Night, Blood Wedding, Yesterdays Window, Poona the P@dag, and God Save Gertrude. In 2005 he received his MFA in Acting from the Brown University/Trinity Rep Consortium. He is currently starring in the heavy metal comedy cabaret, Stairs to Hell at Club Snitch in NYC.

A Selection from Bertolt Brecht’s Concerning a Drowned Girl

Evenings the sky grew dark as smoke,
At night the stars held light suspended.
And early it grew bright and still for her
Morning and evening were not ended.

This production has been made possible through the combined efforts of ENG 170 & 270 (Technical & Advanced Technical Theatre), ENG 172 (Intro to Stage Lighting & Sound) and ENG 290 (Plays in Production)

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Sarah Ruhl was born in 1974 in Wilmette, Illinois. Ruhl began playwriting when she was in the fourth grade. The play was a courtroom drama about landmasses simply because she loved words like ‘islands’ and ‘peninsula.’ Her teacher, Mr. Spengenburger, decided not to produce the play. However, Ruhl would go on to study playwriting at Brown University under Pulitzer Prize winning playwright, Paula Vogel. Ruhl earned a B.A. in English in 1997 and an M.F.A. in playwriting in 2001.

While working between degrees, Ruhl spent much of her time in smaller theaters in Chicago and New York. Additionally, she was a Kennedy Center Fellow at the Sundance Theatre Laboratory in 2000. Ruhl achieved widespread recognition in 2004 with her play The Clean House, a comedy about a physician who cannot convince her depressed Brazilian maid to clean her house. The Clean House won the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for Best Play Written in English by a Female Playwright in 2004 and was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2005. In September 2006, at age 32, Ruhl was honored as a MacArthur “Genius” Fellow. In the MacArthur Foundation announcement, she was described as a “playwright creating vivid and adventurous theatrical works that poignantly juxtapose the mundane aspects of daily life with mythic themes of love and war.”

Additional plays by Sarah Ruhl include M Melanieholy Play (2002), Orlando (2003), Passion Play: A Cycle (2005), and Dead Man’s Cell Phone (2005). Her plays have been produced across the U.S. and Europe at such venues as Lincoln Center Theater (New York), the Actor’s Centre (London), the Goodman Theatre (Chicago), and at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre, among many others. Eurydice had its premiere at the Madison Repertory Theatre in Madison, WI in 2003. Ruhl currently resides in New York with her husband Tony and their newborn baby, Anna.

**Sarah Ruhl**

**Artist Bios**

**Sean Daniels** (Director) just wrapped up three seasons as the Associate Artistic Director and Resident Director of the California Shakespeare Theater. He is also an Associate Artist of the Geva Theatre Center in Rochester, NY and spent a decade as the Artistic Director and Co-Founder of Dad’s Garage Theater Company in Atlanta, GA. Directing Credits at Dad’s: O Happy Day and Out Of The Trees (world premieres by Monty Python’s Graham Chapman), Cannibal! The Musical (world premiere by “South Park” creator, Trey Parker); Say You Love Satan (world premiere by Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa); 43 Plays for 43 Presidents; Carrie White: The Musical; Action Movie: The Play, Assassins, Poor Superman, and Strange Snow. At Cal Shakes: The Comedy of Errors, Otello, The Merry Wives of Windsor & The Life And Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby Parts 1 and 2. At Geva: The Race Of The Ark, Tattoo & Noodle Doodle Box. At Alliance Theatre: Bat Boy: The Musical. For the Neo-Futurists: ‘Tron and The Santa Abductions (world premiere by Sean Benjamin). He’s also directed workshop productions for Geva, Magic Theater, Playwrights Center and Ars Nova. Sean has been named “One of the top fifteen up & coming artists in the U.S., whose work will be transforming America’s stages for decades to come.” and “One Of 7 People Reshaping & Revitalizing The American Musical” by American Theatre magazine. In Atlanta, he was named “Best Director of 2000 and 2001” by Creative Loafing, and in the Bay Area he has earned the Bay Area Critics Circle and Dean Goodman Choice Awards for Best Direction and Best Production. His production of Nicholas Nickleby was named to the Top Ten of 2005 by every major Bay Area newspaper.

**Daniel Meker** (Set Design): Moonlight & Magnolias and The Rink (The Cape Playhouse); Hello Dolly (Hangar Theatre); Great Goolgey Moe (The Sage Theatre, NYC); The Consul and Owl Creek (Ithaca College); Scenery & Lighting; Noodle Doodle Box (Geva Theatre); Tony & The Supremo and The Dresser Boy (The Kitchen Theatre); The Soup Comes Last (5EES9 Theatre). Lighting Design: Bill W & Dr. Bob (New Rep); Auntie & Me (Merrimack Rep); The Magic of Christmas 2005 (Portland Symphony Orchestra); The Blovin of Battle Gall (Irish Arts Center); The Korean Contemporary Dance Showcase 2006 (Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College); Cool Winter Dance Festival 2006, The Dance Dance Dance Festival 2005 (world premiere by “South Park” creator, Trey Parker). He’s also directed work The Santa Abductions (Hangar Theatre). New York: Othello (Shakespeare and Co.), The Merry Wives of Windsor (Shakespeare and Co.), The Comedy of Errors (Yale Rep). All in the Timing, Sleuth (Hangar Theatre). New York: Mary Stuart (Pearl Theatre), Mayhem, Spain (SPF), You’ve Never Done Anything Unforgivable (NY Fringe), Hard Lovin’ Ever After (Active Eye Co), Two Rooms (Checkpoint Productions). Film: Laurie Anderson’s Hidden Inside Mountains. Jessica received her MFA from the Yale School of Drama, where she designed costumes for The Great Magician and Rough Magic, sets for Dance the Holy Ghost, and sets and costumes for The Home (Summer Cabaret).

We two alone will sing like birds in the cage. When thou dost ask my blessing, I’ll kneel down And ask of thee forgiveness; so we’ll live, And pray and sing and tell old tales...
The basis for Sarah Ruhl’s *Eurydice* is the Greek myth concerning the tragic love between Orpheus and Eurydice. Orpheus, the deity of the arts of the song and lyre, was the son of Apollo and the muse, Calliope. He married Eurydice, a nymph, under the blessing of Hymen, who offered no happy omens for the couple at their nuptial. Shortly after the marriage, the shepherd, Aristaeus, saw Eurydice while she was wandering with fellow nymphs. He was struck by her beauty and made advances toward her. Eurydice fled from him, but in doing so, stepped upon a serpent that bit her. Shortly after, she died.

Following Eurydice’s death, Orpheus played his lyre and sang, creating nothing but sad and mournful songs. Nymphs and other gods wept at his music and tried to give him advice. The only way for Orpheus to lighten his painful loss was to descend into the underworld where his wife resided among the dead. After finding his way in through a cave, he passed by many crowds of ghosts and presented himself before the throne of Hades and Persephone, god of the dead and queen of the underworld. There, he sang and played his lyre for them. Through his music, Orpheus softened their hearts. Being the only person to have ever softened their hearts, Hades and Persephone agreed to allow Eurydice to return to earth with Orpheus. However, her departure from the Underworld was based on one condition: that Orpheus must walk in front of Eurydice and not look back until he had reached the upper world. To his anxiety, Orpheus looked back, and Eurydice vanished. After this loss, Orpheus renounced the love of women and took only youths as his lovers.

Before Sarah Ruhl’s adaptation, this Greek tale of love and loss had been adapted in many different forms and mediums. The story has been told in film, such as Marcel Camus’ 1959 feature, *Black Orpheus*; drama, including Tennessee Williams’ *Orpheus Descending*; and opera and musicals, such as Stravinsky’s *Orpheus* and Philip Glass’, *Orphée*. It is also suggested by some musicologists that the second movement of Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto was modeled after the story. The myth can also be found in references in modern television, music, and various other art forms. However, the majority of these works tell the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice as the myth was told: from the point of view of Orpheus.

Sarah Ruhl has taken the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, and included in it the character of Eurydice’s father. She explores the human qualities of the myth and investigates the relationship beneath the surface of the two tragic young lovers. Ruhl delves further into the Eurydice character by allowing the story to enter the underworld with her. Down there, we meet Eurydice’s father, a figure not mentioned in the myth, but an integral part of Eurydice’s life. Ruhl retains much of the original story and has even included a Greek chorus of stones in the underworld. However, with her adaptation written in a poetic, yet modern language, she achieves more than a simple tragic story. Her play is concerned with love and loss and what it means to love loved ones. It is also a highly personal story that builds on the myth and Ruhl’s own relationship with her father.
The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is iconic in western art and literature. The list of artists that have taken on the doomed lovers’ tale reads like a who’s who of culture: Ovid, Anouilh, Cocteau, Rilke, Berlioz, Gluck, Haydn, Offenbach, Stravinsky, Weill, Rodin and Rubens. Most of these artists are male, and concerned more with Orpheus than Eurydice. “So many major authors felt the need to grapple with it,” says Chicago-born playwright Sarah Ruhl, “Orpheus became a metaphor for themselves.”

Would it be fair, then, to consider Eurydice a metaphor for Ruhl? “The whole play is a prism which refracts and is in some ways transparent in terms of my life. But Eurydice has her own soul, which is separate from mine. We are different. For example,” she offers with understated humor, “I’ve never been dead before.”

The transparent relationship of the play to Ruhl’s own life is centered on death: her father died of bone cancer when she was 20. “My father was a very gentle man. It was inspiring to see how gracefully he handled being sick. I partly wrote the play to have more conversations with him,” she says, “but I wasn’t consciously aware of that at the time.” She has given Eurydice’s dead father a prominent role in her re-telling of the myth and, as she wrote, she gradually became aware of art imitating life. Sarah’s father, like Eurydice’s, taught his daughter words, although the purpose and setting were very different. “My father would take me to a pancake breakfast every week and teach me some new complicated word. It probably warped me for life—a seven-year-old, knowing words like ‘ostracize’.”

Ruhl uses the word “subterranean” several times in discussing the process of writing Eurydice. Her relationship to the original myth is intuitive, not analytical. “I kept thinking about that moment when Orpheus looks back—to lose so much in such a small moment.” Her most direct literary inspiration was the Rilke poem “Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes,” and she read the section about them in Ovid’s Metamorphoses (see accompanying text), but mostly she was relying on the basic myth we all know from oral tradition. “There’s not a lot in the original Greek—Ovid has two pages, that’s it. There was a play, but it didn’t survive. There are a few mentions in Virgil. And of course there’s plenty about the cult of Orpheus, but Eurydice didn’t get much consideration in that.”

Ruhl tried not to read any material that was reminiscent of the story while actually writing the first draft of the script; however, while rewriting, she saw Cocteau’s “brilliant, gorgeous” Orphée, and loved the “obvious, crude theatrical special effect.” She is also a fan of the Brazilian film, Black Orpheus, as well as Anouilh’s stage play. Ruhl is glad she did not read his version until after she had written her own, “or I probably would have been too daunted to write at all,” she says.

Although she was not strongly influenced by other artists’ renditions of the myth, Ruhl had inspiration along the way. She wrote the first draft of the play in one month for a new plays festival at Brown University, and then spent two years rewriting it. It was during those two years, once her own relationship to the story was clearly established, that she reached out more consciously toward other sources. Her eye was drawn to anything her own relationship to the story was clearly established, that she reached out more consciously toward other sources. Her eye was drawn to anything.

After reading the script for the first time, it really made me think about saying ‘goodbye’ and how much ‘goodbye’ can affect people’s lives. Saying goodbye is something we do every day, and yet it is often passed off as a simple ending to a conversation. When there is no opportunity to properly say goodbye, such as between Orpheus and Eurydice, it is regretted. When I was about twelve or thirteen years old, my mother underwent major surgery. Following her surgery, she had further chemotherapy and then had to stay at home to rest. Every morning when I left for school, we said goodbye, but I always felt melancholy at leaving. Every morning I worried that something serious would happen to my mother during the day. The ‘goodbye’ could be indefinite. Eurydice is able to resonate because, although it has its magical and fanciful moments and setting, it is still a very human world that we experience throughout our lives. Much of it is concerned with saying ‘goodbye,’ and the tragedy that ensues from ‘goodbye’. My mother recovered well, thankfully, so ‘goodbye’ was just for the day.

Eurydice is a remarkable play, and Eurydice is an extraordinary character under extraordinary circumstances. She gets to ask all the questions of her father that she never get to ask while they were alive. I realize that I may not be as lucky as Eurydice and meet with my father in the underworld, so after weeks of rehearsing, I went home and started to ask those questions. It’s amazing what doors can be opened in your perception of a loved one with their stories of the past. Story telling is such an important part of our relationships, especially of those relationships with people of another generation. My parents have so much information that I haven’t yet tapped into, and Eurydice made me realize that you have to start asking the important questions...now.

Up until very recently, I had been fortunate enough to never experience loss in any great sense. However, in the last year I have been confronted with grief and loss on a very large scale. I don’t think I would have been able to bring as much to my character before this year’s experiences. I also think the play has really helped me to cope with my feelings on a new level; it forced me to address my own fears and conceptions about death, and deal with the losses I have suffered.
Jean Gabin in Jean Cocteau's

Reflect on grandmother and myself where distance turned into neglect or forgetful
The things I left unsaid; those years between my great-

Alien music.

Pouring out between the words, familiar things crafted into a delicate and
The spaces between the spoken words, filling the silences of the work,

Language was so simple, so beautiful. As I read it, my mind filled up with
Remained empty. I was surprised by how moved I was by the script. The

Ninety-six years old...died in her sleep in the nursing home. The day be
Might be, I feel like I have to hold back a tide which is beyond my capac

Like I'm standing before the ocean, my arms spread wide, striving in vain
To the pressures of maintaining a certain degree of success, balancing

Being a student at the University of Rochester, I often find myself subject

"Sort myself out". I didn't feel numb. I didn't feel grieved or broken or

On campus, I resort to long rambles in Mount Hope Cemetery. The still

Close, but haven't spoken to in years, died early in this semester. Classes

Classes had not yet resumed, and most of my friends hadn't arrived back on

Comforting cold and immutable faces of the tombstones and cement stat

They don't have to. Like the stone monuments in a cemetery, the

Gods of the dim domain to which we are all consigned sooner or later, hear me ...I have tried to

There, he sang out in pain and anger.

And, concerned for her, or not quite believing

A long way they traveled, almost all the

But inspiration came in all forms, from the specific and spon-

Sometimes the inspiration was subtler, less direct: the string room, for

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From the metamorphoses

Hymen went...to preside at Orpheus' wedding, which didn't go well. A bad job all around...The bride, on the grass among her attendant naiads, stepped on a viper, whose sharp and envenomed fangs killed her at once. The wedding abruptly turned to a funeral. Orpheus, the husband, all but out of his mind with grief, went to mourn-

Orpheus' lyre draws from the insub-

...Orpheus' lyre drew from the insub

Me remain with her."

But inspiration came in all forms, from the specific and spon-

Deciding that the physical reality of the play required a light
touch, she re-read Alice in Wonderland because "it's the world we live in
turned upside down"—an inspiration she translated quite literally

She also found inspiration in Samuel Beckett.

"How could one consider using a chorus of stones without thinking a little
about Beckett...his understanding of silence, stillness and vaude

But inspiration came in all forms, from the specific and spon-

Some sources of inspiration remain a mystery to her. She has

No idea where the elevator came from, but it does strike her as a con-

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Sarah Ruhl turns the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice inside-out and upside-down in her moving play about love and loss. She fills the piece with imaginative elements that challenge directors and designers. From creating the physical reality of the Underworld to costuming a chorus of stones, the artists who work on this play must decide how to make Ruhl’s language come alive. Yale Repertory Theatre production dramaturg, Amy Boratko, talked with Sarah Ruhl about Eurydice and how the text supports the realization of productions.

Many artists have written adaptations of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. What compelled you to write this story?

I first saw the play in the moment when Orpheus looks back at Eurydice. It’s such an iconic image—very mythic and primal. A lot of people have retold the myth from Orpheus’s point of view, but I wanted to follow Eurydice from that moment. I wondered how Eurydice experiences the Underworld. What is this place like for her? I thought that meeting her father would be a natural thing to do in the Underworld. My father died when he was 52, and my desire to have one more conversation with him inspired the relationship between Eurydice and her father in the Underworld.

But Hades normally conjures up tortured images of Sisyphus rolling the rock up the hill or thirsty Tantalus surrounded by water. How did you create an Underworld that would allow Eurydice to talk with her father?

I’m fascinated by the Greek concept of the Underworld. The shadowy netherworld is a morally neutral place for the Greeks. Theatrically, it’s a place with its own rules where anything can happen. I was really drawn to the idea of the river Lethe and forgetting. To what extent is language the thing that one has to lose in order to forget memories? You have to forget memories to be happy in the Underworld. For the Greeks, it’s not a sad place to be.

A chorus of stones inhabits this Underworld. Who are these strange figures, and how do you put them on stage?

In the original myth, the music Orpheus plays at the doors of the Underworld is so beautiful, “even the stones weep.” I was interested in that part of the myth. “They can—and have been—done in a number of ways. In one production, they were lifeguards. In another, they were bratty English school children. Once, they were actually played by children. I’ve seen them played like teenage slackers, couch potatoes. I’m still waiting for the production that actually has them dressed like stones. I’m fascinated about what each director has known about the stones.

What else did you learn about the play from your first collaboration, and how has that affected your approach two years later?

Giving a director your play is like handing over your baby. I try to write with as much accuracy as to what I’m actually seeing as I write a play, but I don’t necessarily expect it to be realized in a particular way. I hope the stage directions and the images I use in the text will help the designers understand what the world of the play is.