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Jazmine Venegas - Todd Venning - Revay Wilson - Matt Workman

**CAST**

Anna Kroup .................. Eurydice
T. Bohrer .................. Her Father
Mike Riffle .................. Orpheus

**A CHORUS OF STONES**

Kathryn Stilwell .................. Big Stone
Nikola Vukovic .................. Little Stone
Catherine Crow .................. Loud Stone

Arthur Goldfeder .......... A Nasty Interesting Man
Jonathan Wetherbee ........... A Child

**This production runs one hour and fifteen minutes without intermission**

please remember to switch off all cellphones and electronic devices
Sarah Ruhl was born in 1974 in Wilmeth, 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 ‘isthmus’ and ‘peninsula.’ Her teacher, Mr. Spangenberg, 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 theatres 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. Ruhl's plays include Passion Play (2003), Passion Play: A Cycle (2005), and Dead Man's Cell Phone (2005).

Ruhl's 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.

Additional plays by Sarah Ruhl include Melancholy 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.

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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. In 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 lose 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” while actually writing the first draft of the script; however, while rewriting, Ruhl tried not to read any material that was reminiscent of the story. She is also a fan of the Brazilian film, Black Orpheus.

Ruhl is glad she did not read his version until after she had written the play. “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.”

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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 chemo treatments and then decided 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 an amazing play, and Eurydice is an extraordinary character under extraordinary circumstances. She gets to ask all the questions of her father that she never got 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.

Eurydice is about relationships. I have the advantage of being not only the child of a parent, but also the parent of a child. And though I am strongly moved by the Father’s recollections of his father’s life and death, I find that I resonate even more strongly with the Father’s parting from Eurydice as she prepares to leave the underworld—a parting that evokes a flood of memories of sending daughters off, first to college, and then to a married life of their own. I am also touched by Eurydice’s reflections on Orpheus and his music, her awareness of the emotional trials of living with an artist. Being married to a musician, I have felt Eurydice’s frustrations, I have known the challenges she must have encountered in her relationship with Orpheus. It’s a relationship which is, I suspect, nearly as challenging as being married to an actor.
Being a student at the University of Rochester, I often find myself subject to the pressures of maintaining a certain degree of success, balancing the demands of my academic, financial and social life. Sometimes I feel like I’m standing before the ocean, my arms spread wide, striving in vain to keep the constant waves, tossing coals-eyes like my head, from crushing against the shore. Futility as the effort is, cold and shaking as I might be, I feel like I have to hold back a tide which is beyond my capacity to control.

My great-grandmother, someone with whom I was once very close, but who hadn’t spoken to in years, died early in this semester. Classes had not yet resumed, and most of my friends hadn’t arrived back on campus. My usual feeling of isolation became intensified as I listened to my sister’s disembodied voice relaying the information on the telephone: ninety-six years old...dead in her sleep in the nursing home. The day before she had been animate, I later learned—full of life and in complete command of her senses. Her memory and wit were as sharp as they had always been.

Often, when there is too much for me to deal with in my life on campus, I resort to long rambles in Mount Hope Cemetery. The stillness there has always comforted me, and I have never felt the fear of burial grounds that some do. The night I was told, I ran away there to “sort myself out.” I didn’t feel numb. I didn’t feel grieved or broken or bound by regret. There was no wracking sense of loss. My general loneliness was just enhanced, tempered by anger with myself for not being impacted more greatly by the loss. I should have felt so much more in that moment than I did. I should have felt a need to mourn.

Reading the script for *Eurydice* still had not forgiven myself for my coldness. The hollow place my sister’s voice had filled into still remained, was suffused by the same sorrow. I had been fascinated by the way the language was so simple, so beautiful. As I read it, my mind filled up with all the things the characters do in the play never speak. They breathe in the spaces between the spoken words, filling the silences of the work, pouring out between the words, familiar things crafted into a delicate and alien music.

One thing I left unaided, these years between my great-grandmother and myself, where distance turned into neglect or forgetfulness...all the things I would like to have impressed upon her will never die. They don’t have to. Like the stone monuments in a cemetery, the comforting and immutable faces of the tombstones and cement plaques they are not for the dead, but for the living. I did not feel a loss at this death, because nothing was lost. I still love that woman who fell bound by regret. There was no wracking sense of loss. My general loneliness was just enhanced, tempered by anger with myself for not being impacted more greatly by the loss. I should have felt so much more in that moment than I did. I should have felt a need to mourn.

The concept of the Greek Underlife, especially the Greek Afterlife, is a kind of Underworld for her, she replies, “Yes, without the moral and spiritual structure that an Underworld implies. But I’ve written plays since I’ve been here. And I’m starting a third. The world seems to be generous in surprising ways when you try to do hard things for love. Which is not always the lesson that the Greeks teach us.”

Deciding that the physical reality of the play required a tight touch, she re-read Alice in Wonderland because “it’s the world we live in turned upside down”—an inspiration she translated quite literally into the Underworld. 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 vaudeville all at once.”

But inspiration came in all forms, from the specific and spontaneous—like the tricycle, a found object added during a workshop—to the conceptual, in the form of Ruhl’s own musings upon “the nefarious category of ‘interesting,'” which led to the character of the Nasty Interesting Man. “There is a certain kind of person who forever delights in ‘interesting’ over ‘good’ or ‘bad,’” Ruhl observes. “It is an empty category of intellectual experience. [In the play] Orpheus is more interested in dividing the world into ‘beautiful’ and ‘not beautiful’, but it’s harder for Eurydice to accept that. The Nasty Interesting Man is a projection of Eurydice’s desire. He uses the word ‘interesting’ to suck her in.”

Sometimes the inspiration was subtler, less direct: the string room, for example, was to Ruhl the image of building a nest—a parent creating an invisible, spiritual home for a child, “the ability to build security out of thin air.” (She speaks with amusement of talksbacks held during workshops: “the play, when people would ask her shy she wanted to ‘work with string’ when avant-garde director Richard Foreman ‘had already taken string to such extremes.’

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 contemporary expression of approaching the Greek Afterlife, especially since traveling in elevators can be very disorienting—the door always opens to a place other than where it closed. Ruhl is now fascinated by elevators; whenever she sees one she wonders, “Would this elevator be in the Underworld?”

If some of these images seem more symbolic or poetical, there’s a reason. Ruhl’s original life plan was “to get a Ph.D. and become a professor who wrote poetry.” With that in mind, she was studying English and Creative Writing at Brown, focusing on non-dramatic forms (“bad fiction,” she calls it). A graduate student instructor encouraged her to study playwriting and Ruhl quickly became smitten with the teaching and work of the renowned Paula Vogel, who runs Brown’s playwriting program. After graduation and stints in both Chicago and New York, Ruhl returned to Brown to attend the graduate playwriting program there, where she studied with Mac Wellman. A year after grad school, she moved from Providence to L.A. for love; she “can’t think why else anyone would move to Los Angeles.” When asked if Los Angeles is “in some sense” her new Underworld, she replies, “Yes, without the moral and spiritual structure that an Underworld implies. But I’ve written two plays since I’ve been here. And I’m starting a third. The world seems to be generous in surprising ways when you try to do hard things for love. Which is not always the lesson that the Greeks teach us.”

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 wake. Orpheus, the bridegroom, all but out of his mind with grief, went into mourning, carrying his complaints to the ends of the earth and beyond, even down to the shadows below, where the insubstantial spirits shimmer. There, he sang out in pain and anger.

“Gods of the dim domain to which we are all consigned sooner or later, hear me...I am here to follow my wife, my bride...I have tried to bear it, to come to terms with the world’s inherent unfairness, and master my grief, but I cannot. I cannot go on this way. In the name of love, I am here to throw myself on your mercy...”

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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.