

**The Fluidity of Collaboration:
Directing Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice***

by

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Abstract

The Fluidity of Collaboration: Directing Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* explores the development of my directorial practice as I directed *Eurydice* in the UBC Department of Theatre and Film 2015-2016 season January 21 – February 6, 2016 at the Frederick Wood Theatre.

The first sections of this document consists of the original script analysis I submitted as the basis for the production. This analysis traces my thinking about the play from first impressions and dominant images, through character and structural breakdown, the given circumstances of production and my intended approach to the text.

The second section describes the process of producing the play, from the initial design concept meetings, the design refinement, budgeting and finalization process, casting, rehearsals and production. The bulk of this thesis, the second section focuses on how collaboration with designers, actors, coaches, stage management and technicians changed my thinking about the play. I also discuss the challenges that we faced through the design and rehearsal process, and how I attempted to overcome these challenges.

The third section is a self evaluation, written after the run of *Eurydice*. In the evaluation, I compare my original intentions to the reality of the production, note the elements of the production I thought were generally successful, and examine the less successful aspects of the play. Specifically, I note the way that collaboration with the team of theatre artists that brought *Eurydice* to the stage changed my initial vision for the play. This collaborative effort brought many exciting and innovative ideas to the show, but it also diluted some of the thematic content I wanted to forward. Thus the overall question of this thesis is an exploration of the impact of collaboration on theatre creation.

Preface

This dissertation is an original, unpublished and independent work by the author, Keltie Redfern Forsyth.

This document comprises the written portion of a project that includes the preparation, analysis, rehearsal and performance of Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* directed by Keltie Forsyth and presented as a part of the UBC Department of Theatre and Film's 2015 – 2016 season.

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And finally, thanks to all of my family, but especially my parents, Heather and Ken, and my husband Alex, without whose support I could not have seen this to the end.

*For Alex, my rock.
Heather and Ken who never stop believing in me.
And for Gerry, the first poet I knew.*

Introduction

Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* was first produced at the Madison Repertory Theatre in 2003. Since then, it has been produced hundreds of times in professional, academic and amateur contexts. This production played at the Frederick Wood Theatre and ran from January 21 – February 6, 2016 at the University of British Columbia as part of the Department of Theatre and Film's 2015 – 2016 season. The cast featured Mariam Barry, Daniel Curalli, Rowan Denis, Michael Fera, Seamus Fera, Bronwyn Henderson, Sarah Hicks, Cassandra Phillips Grande, Meegin Pye, Kelsey Ranshaw, Taylor Scott, Joylyn Secunda, and Francis Winter.

The Stage Manager was Megan Lai, assisted by Kanon Hewitt and Sony Tsai.

The production design team consisted of: Heipo Leung, set design; Alix Miller, costume design; Jessica Lai, sound design and composition; and Robert Gardner assisted by Tori Ip, lighting design. Technical Operators were Ed Dawson and Nicola Wanless. Running crew was Ashley Kim, Yuki Hoshino, Melicia Zaini

Other significant contributors to the program were: Department Head Stephen Heatley, directorial thesis advisor; Professor Jacqueline Firkins, costume design advisor; Andy Horka, sound advisor; Professor Robert Gardiner, set advisor, Gayle Murphy, voice instructor; Marijka Asbeek Brusse, stage management advisor, Lynn Burton, head of props; Jim Fergusson, technical director; Lorraine West, scenic artist; Jodi Jacyk, head of costumes; Nicole Sekiya and Andrea Rabinovitch, communications and marketing; Jay Henrickson, production manager and Cameron Cronin, department administrator.

Chapter One: Play Analysis



Figure 1: Orpheus Arrives in the Underworld

*J. Secunda, M. Barry, M. Pye, S. Hicks, C. Phillips Grande, K. Ranshaw,
M. Fera, B. Henderson, S. Fera, T. Scott.*

Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

Part 1: Initial Response to the Play

My primary interest in the piece is rooted in its imagery. After reading it once, there were so many images that stayed with me: Eurydice with the umbrella in the raining elevator, the Father dancing alone as he imagines that he is at his daughter's wedding, the string-room in the Underworld, Eurydice and Orpheus walking away from each other as she descends back into Hades, the child master of the Underworld becoming a ten-foot monster and letters delivered by an earthworm. These images all carry with them a strong emotional resonance: Eurydice arriving in the raining elevator the loneliness of arriving in an unfamiliar place, the Father's isolation his longing for his child, the string-room his attempt to protect the child who cannot remember him.

In addition to its link to the emotional substance of the play, the visual and poetic imagery in *Eurydice* gives it a sense of whimsy that I find engaging in all of Ruhl's work. The contrast of the intense emotional story-line that tackles love, grief, and loss in a narrative that deals with marriage, death and rape with the sense of wonder and quirkiness that pervade the text appeals to me. There is a lightness to the play both in its

humour and quirky rhythm that makes the more intense themes engaging and palatable.

The core of the story – a young woman with idealistic ideas about love and life who is exposed to violence and loses herself but is able, with her father’s love, to become a more mature, more selfless person – speaks to me.

I am also fascinated by the Nasty Interesting Man/Lord of the Underworld and the role that he plays in the piece as the potential lover-come-attempted rapist. This is a theme that isn’t talked about a lot in the critical response to the play, but that haunts me. The Lord of the Underworld as a ten-foot-tall child, driven only by egoism and selfish desire, should be the stuff of nightmare.

Dominant Images:

1. Orpheus and Eurydice on the invisible boardwalk - they are so small, the world is so big, but they are the centre of it in their youthful love.
2. The absent Father leading his daughter up the aisle and dancing at her wedding, but alone because he cannot reach her.
3. The Father writing a letter to his daughter from the Underworld - and she receives it!
4. Eurydice looking down from the Nasty Interesting Man’s apartment high in the sky - there are many stairs but no elevator, she can see the world at her feet, but in scale, she is so small.
5. Eurydice falling down all of those stairs.
6. The Stones in Hades - in my mind they are as full of judgement and the knowledge of their own superiority as teenaged girls.
7. Eurydice arrives in Hades in a raining elevator, holding an umbrella.
8. Her father builds her a room of string - it is a tiny haven in a vast, threatening landscape.
9. The Father teaches Eurydice to read. It is a slow and painful process.
10. The Nasty Interesting Man reappears as the Child Lord of the Underworld on a red tricycle - he is as full of sexual threat as the Nasty Interesting Man, if not more. He lacks self control. He knows he is the centre of the universe.
11. Orpheus in a storm.
12. The Father and Daughter in love and companionship in the Underworld.

13. Orpheus matches the pitch on his guitar to the sound of a raindrop. This opens the gates to Hades.
14. The Stones weep.
15. The Father walks Eurydice to Orpheus as though down the aisle. We imagine that it is the best and worst day of his life.
16. Eurydice calls Orpheus' name. He turns. Time stops. In that moment they simultaneously live and let go of their lives together. And then they walk away from each other and do not look back.
17. The Father dismantles the string room. His heart is broken.
18. Eurydice finds her father insensible on the banks of the river of forgetfulness. She tries to teach him speech. In that moment, she is the parent and he the child.
19. Eurydice writes a letter to Orpheus. It is a farewell.
20. Orpheus arrives in Hades in the raining elevator. He sees Eurydice, has a moment of joy, then forgets her.

Part 2: Type or Genre of Play

This play is a tragedy. Ultimately everyone loses because of their own human frailty. Fearful of what is to come and uncertain about Orpheus, Eurydice calls his name and falls back into Hades. Her father, lacking the patience to wait for her to return to the Underworld in a later death, dips himself into the river and denies himself companionship and Eurydice protection when she returns. Orpheus, instead of living the rich and full life Eurydice wishes for him, kills himself to join her, but only after she has forgotten him. Grief, loss and near misses permeate the play, and the tragedy at the end of the play is, in typically Greek fashion, of the character's own making.

Because the play is a tragedy, I will leave a lot of rehearsal time to grounding the emotional story and developing the relationships between the primary characters. In design, we will focus on creating a visually rich world which will support the emotional and thematic elements of the script.

Part 3: Style

The play's style is poetic, but Ruhl finds ways to inject an earthy sense of humour and emotional realism. This style will affect how we approach the overall aesthetic of the piece. The play will not be set in a specific time and place, but exist much more on a metaphoric plane. The set will be fluid in look and in its ability to change location and

time smoothly. The costumes too will reflect an internal truth of character, rather than attempting to achieve consistency of time and place.

In rehearsal, we will approach the poetic language as we would more naturalistic dialogue; it needs to be grounded in motivation. We will always ask what the character is trying to achieve that demands this kind of language. Because the characters switch fluidly from poetic to more naturalistic dialogue, we will look at what demands poetry or bluntness in the situation, rather than trying for a “style”.

In addition, I will be making a stylistic choice – to make the chorus of Stones a chorus of nine rather than three. This enlarged chorus will be on stage more than the Stones are as written in the script. They will be responsible for changing the settings, as necessary, and creating the soundscape for the piece. This may include managing impromptu “instruments”. This chorus will in part define the style of the piece. Part of my inspiration for this is Jillian Keiley’s “Performer-Centered Theatre”, a style she has come to call “Keileyography”, a theory of performance and design that seeks to create meaning with metaphor and transformation rather than realism. I believe that one of the key elements of staging *Eurydice* is the successful transformation of space, and I’m interested in using actors with basic tools – like fabric or paper – to create a visually fluid staging that underscores the poetic nature of the text.

Part 4: Space

The play will be in the Frederic Wood Theatre. It is a 400 seat proscenium theatre with a deep stage. The space has a fly gallery, which has not been used in some time, a built-in revolve, and a scrim.

Because we won’t be rehearsing in the space until the technical rehearsals, it may be a challenge to grow the show to fit the larger theatre. The audience in the Freddy Wood is wider than the proscenium arch, which means that sightlines will be a concern if we want to utilize the full depth and width of the stage. Because of this, I am interested in playing with staging that uses the additional chorus members as a background that uses the stage’s depth to create a sense of vast or infinite space.

Part 5: Audience

The audience for the Freddy Wood season ranges from students to hard-core theatre patrons. The age range will be fourteen and up, and they will come from a variety of ethnic, cultural, political and linguistic backgrounds. Most will likely be well educated,

and we are hoping that a high number will be students in the English and Classics Departments. Because we are on a University Campus and assuming that the audience will in general be well read, it's safe to assume that a good number of them will be familiar with the Orpheus myth.

Because the audience comes to the Frederic Wood Theatre aware they are seeing work whose primary purpose is training, I don't feel the need to "serve" a specific community with this production, the way one might if working in a theatre that is entrenched in a specific location, cultural tradition or community, or that has a targeted mandate or outreach goal.

Part 6: Given Circumstances of Production

- We are on a University Campus, which means there are specific guidelines to work inside. It also means we have the support of the Department's human and technical resources.
- All but one actor will be a student. This means some elements of rehearsal take a little bit longer, and the cast may have less independence when it comes to prep work and warmup. The students are still developing their process, which can be very exciting, since they are also flexible and eager to embrace new ideas, but they also may require more guidance. We will also have to work around classes and exams.
- The set, costume and sound designers will be students. Because these designers are students, they won't have as much experience dealing with the practicalities of the process, including what are likely to be the tight budgets.
- The additional actor that will play the Father will have to be non-equity or have a role in the department. It will be a challenge to find someone with the experience who is willing and able – because of CAEA – to work for the money that we have in the budget to pay them.
- Limited budget: This is nothing new, but the addition of six actors will stretch the costume budget and most good solutions for the raining elevator will take up a big chunk of the set budget.
- Rehearsal time: two weeks of full time rehearsals (35-42 hours/wk), followed by two and a half weeks at 24 hours/wk. This is not a lot of time for a show with as many elements as *Eurydice*, especially since we are trying to create so much with the chorus, which will take time. The two and a half part time

- weeks will be valuable, since the last two hours of full rehearsal days can be less efficient as the team starts to run out of stamina.
- There is a large break in the middle of the rehearsal process. This could be really exciting, because the cast will have some time off to sit with the play over the Christmas break. I hope this time off where they will be passively processing through the first two weeks of rehearsal will help ground them in the work. We will, however, lose some rehearsal time to catch up after the break, as they will also have forgotten things.

Part 7: Time Period

There are two indications of period in the play. In the first scene Ruhl indicates that Eurydice and Orpheus are dressed in bathing costumes from the 1950s. Eurydice arrives in the Underworld at the top of Movement Two in “the kind of 1930s Suit that women wore when they eloped”. In addition to those two indications, we know that water pumps, elevators and tricycles exist in this world. Cell phones are never mentioned. Nor are computers.

Given the poetic nature of this script, I don’t believe it is set in a very specific place or time (there is also no indication that we are in Greece), but instead exists sometime in a metaphorical space, though perhaps a metaphorical space in the 20th Century, since there is 20th Century music, costume and technology referenced. That having been said, besides the costumes that are described by period in the text, the designers should be free to take inspiration from a number of periods.

Part 8: Emphatic Element

The emphatic element of *Eurydice* is the language. While the story and rhythm of the text are important, it is the language that sets the piece apart. The way the text moves from poetic and imagistic to down-to-earth and funny is the distinctive element of the play. While there is striking visual imagery in the piece as well, it serves to underline the heightened language rather than overshadow it.

Characters in the play are largely defined not only by how they speak, but by their relationship to language: The Father and Eurydice share a love of language, the Stones advocate silence even while they are speaking, the Child Lord of the Underworld uses language as a weapon, while the Nasty Interesting Man is a “smooth talker” and Orpheus struggles to express himself in words.

Memory, identity and sense of self are all tied to language in the piece. Eurydice remembers who she is after hearing Orpheus' name. The Father, Orpheus and Eurydice all seek to bridge the gap between the living and the dead with letters, and the Child Lord of the Underworld grows because he says he is. His power stems in part from the fact that in a world of silent dead, he controls the language, and while he has language, the Father can protect Eurydice from the Child's advances.

Part 9: Theme or Idea

Grief, Memory and Hanging On

The dominant theme of the piece is around grief and its relationship to memory. Even at the beginning of the play, Eurydice is hanging on to a connection to her father, represented by her craving for water. (She eggs Orpheus to swim with her, leaves her wedding twice to go to the water pump, and asks the Nasty Interesting Man for a glass of water.) She leaves her own wedding to go to the Nasty Interesting Man's apartment because he has a letter from her father. She is looking for a more tangible piece of her dead parent than she can have and this, in part, leads to her death.

When she arrives in the Underworld and has forgotten who she is, she is content, but with the return of memory comes sadness at the loss of Orpheus. In the end, the Father chooses forgetfulness rather than grief, as does Eurydice, though her motivations are more complicated.

Orpheus too hangs on. When Eurydice dies, he does not grieve and move on, he holds onto the idea that he can bring her back. We see him reach out to her in letters, in song, through books and even on the telephone. This inability to let go is ultimately as fatal for him as it was for her, even though Eurydice urges him to move on. After his failed attempt to bring her back with him, he commits suicide, believing he will be with her. Instead, he finds her lost in forgetfulness.

In this play, I believe Ruhl is saying that hanging onto the memory of a loved one because of grief can be immensely destructive, and she is advocating the necessity of moving on, no matter how painful.

Sexual Violence and Loss of Innocence

There is a second theme that I'm interested in exploring in the piece, and that is Eurydice's loss of innocence as it's effected by the threat of sexual violence. At the beginning of the play, Eurydice and Orpheus are youthful virgins beginning to play at

romantic love, but not ready to embrace it fully. She is drawn to the Nasty Interesting Man, who argues that she needs a man with broad shoulders rather than the child-like Orpheus, and he has enough appeal (he is interesting, after all), to lure her back to his apartment. Eurydice dies trying to escape his rape attempt, and when she arrives in the Underworld, her father takes her under his wing, returning her to a childlike state. The Father's presence protects her from the advances of the Child Lord of the Underworld (who was also the Nasty Interesting Man), who has all of the desires of an adult, but none of the self control.

In the Underworld, Eurydice begins to doubt the "rightness" of her match with Orpheus, and her thinking is coloured by her experience of sexual violence – the idea that maybe a romantic relationship isn't something she wants in her life. Or at least, not something she wants with Orpheus. When Eurydice sees Orpheus as he is leading her up to the world of the living, she's not sure she recognizes him, becomes fearful and runs back toward her father. It is partly this fear – that the man waiting for her is a danger not a haven – that causes her to say his name so he turns around.

After Eurydice is deprived both of the chance to live again and the protection of her father, the Child Lord of the Underworld, now ten feet tall, declares that he will force her to marry him. And without her father, she doesn't have the power to resist him, despite the more mature understanding of love and relationships expressed in her final letter to Orpheus. She dips herself in the river of forgetfulness to escape this third attempted rape.



*Figure 2: Eurydice meets the Nasty Interesting Man
F. Winter, K. Ranshaw
Photo Credit: Javier Sotres*

Themes:

Grief and Memory:

- Eurydice, Orpheus and the Father can all be accused of hanging on to grief. They are all unwilling to grieve and move on but instead are hanging onto memory, trying to recapture their loved one.
- The Stones advocate that you grieve, and then let go, which is the role of the river of forgetfulness. You wash grief away in a river of tears.

Loss of Innocence:

- Eurydice and Orpheus, the epitome of innocent lovers – all of their intentions romantic and their flirtations sweet rather than sexual.
- The Nasty Interesting Man embodies a loss of sexual innocence that Eurydice isn't ready for yet, but which is intriguing to her. After her death, escaping his attempted rape, that threat is no longer intriguing. He instead appears as an overgrown but lusty child, with all of the threat of sexual violence, but neither the appeal or the control of the Nasty Interesting Man.

- When she meets her father in the Underworld, Eurydice has a chance to recreate her childhood, or the childhood experiences that she didn't have with her father. She hangs onto this even when she shouldn't, which is part of why she's hesitant to follow Orpheus.
- Eurydice (and to a lesser degree Orpheus) move from a very naive idea of romantic love to a more mature perspective over the duration of the play. From the childish proposal to the letter to my husband's next wife is a big leap. Eurydice goes from an ideal love through questioning that love to a more mature, balanced idea of what love is.

The Forms of Love:

- Fatherly love
- Romantic love
- Mature, nurturing love
- Lust

Part 10: Action of the Play

STASIS:

When the play begins, Eurydice and Orpheus are on the cusp of adulthood, exploring the beginnings of romantic love. The Father is already dead and in the Underworld, but he retains his memory, which is against the rules for the dead.

- Eurydice and Orpheus declare their love and get engaged.
- Eurydice's father writes her a letter from the Underworld.
- Eurydice leaves her wedding to get a glass of water. At the water pump, she meets the Nasty Interesting Man.
- The Nasty Interesting Man finds the letter from the Father. (TURNING POINT)
- Eurydice leaves the wedding a second time to go to the water pump.
- The Nasty Interesting Man tells her he has a letter for her from her father back at his apartment.
- Eurydice goes to the apartment with the Nasty Interesting Man.
- The Nasty Interesting Man tries to rape Eurydice.
- She plays along long enough to snatch the letter and head for escape.
- She falls down the stairs and dies. (TURNING POINT)
- Eurydice arrives in the Underworld. She does not remember who she is or how to speak.
- She is greeted by three Stones and by her father. She does not recognize him.

- Her father builds her a room out of string. (TURNING POINT)
- Orpheus writes Eurydice a letter saying he's going to find her.
- The Father brings Eurydice the letter from Orpheus and reads it to her.
- Orpheus' name brings her memory back. (TURNING POINT)
- The Father teaches her words and tells her stories of his childhood.
- Orpheus sends Eurydice the collected works of Shakespeare.
- She gets the book, but cannot read it.
- Her father teaches her how to read.
- In the Underworld, the Father and Eurydice bond over stories and singing.
The Stones tell the Father that singing is not allowed and he has to go to work.
- Eurydice and the Father stop singing. He goes to work. (TURNING POINT)
- The Child Lord of the Underworld appears. He is also the Nasty Interesting Man
- He makes a pass at Eurydice, who rejects him. He threatens to dunk her back in the river.
- In a storm, Orpheus tries to match the pitch of the rain drops to open the way to the Underworld. He succeeds. (TURNING POINT)
- Orpheus arrives at the Gates of the Underworld.
- The Child tells him that he has to lead Eurydice up from Hades without looking back at her.
- The Father leads Eurydice to Orpheus and says goodbye.
- Eurydice goes to follow Orpheus, but isn't sure she recognizes him and doesn't want to leave her father.
- The Stones convince her to follow Orpheus.
- She catches up to him and says his name.
- He turns around and looks at her. (TURNING POINT)
- They speak for a moment out of time, then walk away from each other, he back to the world, she to the Underworld.
- The Father, unable to bear Eurydice's loss, dismantles the string room and dips himself in the river of forgetfulness.
- Eurydice returns to find the string room gone and her father insensible lying by the bank of the river.
- She tries to get him to remember.
- The Child Lord of the Underworld enters and declares that he is going to marry Eurydice against her will. (TURNING POINT)

- She asks for time to get ready, and he goes.
- She writes a letter to Orpheus apologising to him, telling him to move on and giving instructions for his new wife.
- She dips herself in the river and lies down next to her father.
- Orpheus arrives in the Underworld, is momentarily happy seeing her, but the elevator begins to rain, and he forgets.
- He finds the letter, but is unable to read it.

STASIS:

Orpheus, Eurydice and the Father are all dead. They have all lost their memories and connections to each other. Eurydice has escaped marrying the Child Lord of the Underworld, but at huge cost.

Part 11: Dramatic Metaphor

For me, this play is like waves on a beach. The landscape of the beach remains very much the same as the waves come in and out, but with each wave, things also change. Small waves will change the pattern of the sand, stones, shells, seaweed and sticks washed ashore, while a huge wave will wash away or bring in a whole tree. When the tide is out, the beach can stretch out in sand and rock and tide pools, all is exposed, but when the tide comes in, all we see is the surface of the water.

The myth provides the structure of this piece. In its outlines, we know what is coming in the story, but the details, the pattern of sand and stone and seaweed are distinctive. Some details are shells (Orpheus proposes with a string for remembrance) and some are whole trees (Eurydice meets her father in the Underworld), but together they make up a complete landscape that both resembles and is distinct from previous incarnations of this story

Like so much in the face of a huge ocean, the characters in *Eurydice* are often tiny figures in a massive and intimidating world. They have some control over their destinies – they can walk into the water or away from it – but there is a larger tide of fate that makes their choices small, though not meaningless.

Water is important in *Eurydice*, not only as a metaphor and design element, but also in the structure. The transitions between scenes should be “fluid” according to Ruhl; the play itself has the rhythm of water, with each scene washing effortlessly into the next.

Part 12: Mood

This is a sad play. A play whose heart is grief, loss and memory, but I don't think I would characterize the prevailing mood of the piece as sad.

The initial moments of the play are whimsical and sweet. Orpheus pledges his love to Eurydice with vast, beautiful and impossible clichés that underscore their naiveté and romanticism but are simultaneously charming. There is something nostalgic in this first scene – suggested by the costume direction of 1950s swim suits – for a more innocent time.



Figure 3: The Father Gives Eurydice a Letter
M. Fera, K. Ranshaw, S. Hicks, R. Denis
Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

The letter the Father writes to Eurydice too is nostalgic. He writes, “there is no choice of any importance in life but the choosing of a beloved.” A sentence of stiltedly old-fashioned construction and embodying the same romantic ideal. The Father also indulges in whimsy both in his letter and, later, his imagined presence at the wedding both mourning the loss of a daughter and celebrating her happiness.

The mood begins to shift when the Nasty Interesting Man appears. He brings a darker, earthier element onto the stage. He is sinister. There is a creeping sense of doom that intrudes when he appears and increases when Eurydice is in his apartment, facing his unwanted advances, until it peaks at her death.

When Eurydice enters the Underworld, the mood becomes unsettled. Ruhl describes the Underworld as more like Alice's Wonderland than Hades. When she arrives, Eurydice does not know who or where she is. Her only company are strange talking Stones. When the Father arrives, he is deeply unsettled by her inability to recognize him, which leads to a strange game of make believing that he is first a train porter then someone in a hotel.

After her father builds her the string room and she remembers who she is, the scenes between her and the Father have a growing sense of comfort and security. This is contrasted with Orpheus' increasingly desperate attempts to connect with her.

The comfort of her life in the Underworld is disturbed yet again, this time by the Child Lord of the Underworld. His arrival marks a shift in mood from the growing comfort of her home with her father to a space under siege of his swagger, desire and heavy metal music.

This feeling of imminent threat leads us to Orpheus' journey to the gates of hell. The unsettled and threatening nature of the Underworld exerts itself through Orpheus' conversation with the Child – the rules here are without logic, senseless, arbitrary and changeable, but the consequences for going against those rules could be dire. When the focus shifts to the Father and Eurydice hearing of Orpheus' arrival, some hope infuses the play. Eurydice is eager for Orpheus, but as the realization that she will lose her father for a second time settles in, the mood balances between the grief of farewell and the joy of reunion. But a sinister note also intrudes here. Eurydice doesn't recognize Orpheus. She has doubts.

After Eurydice follows Orpheus up and touches him on the shoulder, there is a brief moment of joy, recognition and reunion before the awareness of failure comes crashing down. In this moment, the world spins out of control, and the language with it. As Eurydice is pulled away (mentally), and Orpheus desperately tries to hold on to her, the mood becomes sombre. It isn't frantic. The events are inevitable, but sad nonetheless.

This feeling deepens as the Father prepares to dip himself into the river of forgetfulness, unable to bear the thought of returning to life in the Underworld without Eurydice. When she finds him, that sadness transforms into a more violent grief, which grows until the entrance of the ten-foot-tall Child. He brings with him the threat of violence.

After he leaves, when Eurydice writes her final letter to Orpheus, the mood is again sad, but it's a more wistful, calmer kind of sadness which intensifies with Orpheus' arrival and moment of recognition before he too is lost to forgetfulness.

The predominant mood through the piece is a kind of whimsical take on strong emotions – joy, hope, sadness, grief – which serves to lift the mood of many of the sadder moments and, more importantly, gently mock the human condition in the happier moments.

Part 13: Characters

Eurydice

Qualities

- Young
- Lover of language, ideas and books
- Holding on to her father
- Craves Water
- Innocent
- Naïve
- Clever
- Cunning
- Curious
- Restless
- Active
- Vital
- Self Involved

Metaphor

- Eurydice is a flowering plant with a bud that is nearly, but not quite open. As the play progresses, the flower opens, and at its point of greatest beauty, it is frozen.

Rhythmic or Musical Quality

- Eurydice's rhythmic quality is a quick, light, somewhat erratic series of notes which grow in depth and weight as the melody continues.

Major Desire

- To have Orpheus and her father with her.

Main Action or Change

- She goes from having a romantic, if unrealistic and selfish, version of love to understanding love's danger and its selflessness.
- From youth to maturity.

Orpheus

Qualities

- Innocent
- Lover of music
- Not well spoken, someone to whom words do not come easily
- Persistent

Metaphor

- Orpheus is a melody on the wind: audible but just out of reach.

Rhythmic or Musical Quality

- Orpheus is a composition that appears simple at first hearing, but exposes layers of complexity. His rhythm is slow but uneven.

Major Desire

- To spend his life with Eurydice.
- To create music.

Main Action or Change

- Orpheus seeks a way to bring Eurydice back to him.
- When he fails, he kills himself to be with her.

The Father

Qualities

- Intelligent
- Loving/Caring
- Protective

- Cunning
- Lonely

Metaphor

- The Father is a song from childhood whose melody you remember while forgetting the name and lyrics.

Rhythmic or Musical Quality

- The Father is a familiar lullaby. A slow, steady, strong heartbeat.

Major Desire

- To keep Eurydice safe and see her happy.

Main Action or Change

- The Father goes from being sad that he isn't alive to have a relationship with his daughter to her protector and companion in the Underworld. He encourages her to go back to Orpheus, but can't bare her loss.

The Nasty Interesting Man/The Child Lord of the Underworld

Qualities

- Lust
- Desire for power, for information, for control
- As the Nasty Interesting Man he is also intriguing
- As the Child, he has tenuous self control
- Dangerous
- Unpredictable
- Strange

Metaphor

- The Nasty Interesting Man is a trap baited with a puzzle.
- The Child is a typhoon.

Rhythmic or Musical Quality

- The Nasty Interesting Man is a dark and sultry rhythm, with lots of bass. Music that you move your hips to.
- The Child is Glam Metal.

Major Desire

- To rape Eurydice.

Main Action or Change

- While he takes three forms, the Man, the Child and the Monster over the course of the play, all three want to rape Eurydice.
- The character changes from the Nasty Interesting Man, the sophisticated seducer, to the Child, who is all desire with no control, to a ten-foot tall monstrous version of the Child, who has the same desires and lack of control, but more power.

Other

- I think there is some value in underscoring the connection of the Man and Child besides just that the same actor plays both – the audience should be clear that the Man is an incarnation of the Child, rather than that it is a theatrical convention that the same actor plays them both.



Figure 4: The Stones Point Orpheus to the Path out of the Underworld

J. Secunda, M. Pye, M. Barry, D. Curalli

Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

The Stones

Qualities

- The Interpreters
- Petty
- Rule Keepers
- Social Police
- Bratty children at a birthday party
- Powerless
- Like to be right (morally) also, correct
- Unsympathetic

Metaphor

- The Stones are a judgemental audience who are eventually won over by the play.

Rhythmic or Musical Quality

- The Stones are competing rhythms that occasionally meld to create a powerful beat.

Major Desire

- The Stones want the Underworld to remain unchanged.

Main Action or Change

- The Stones exist to inform newcomers of the rules of the Underworld and keep everyone in line, but they don't have a lot of power – they are commentators rather than enforcers.
- When Orpheus arrives in the Underworld, they are so moved by his music that they weep and encourage Eurydice to escape.
- By the end of the play they are more sympathetic to Eurydice, but don't have the power to help her.
- From emotionlessness to feeling.

Other

Big Stone

- Is not quite as bright as the other two Stones.

Little Stone

- Is more emotionally susceptible than the other two.

Large Stone

- Issues commands.
- Often has the last word.
- Is the ringleader.

Part 14: Structural Elements

Eurydice is an unconventionally structured play. The first Movement has seven scenes, the Second Movement has twenty scenes, and the Third Movement has three scenes.

But in many ways, Eurydice follows the traditional three-act structure.

In Movement One, we have the exposition. We meet the hero (Eurydice), the love interest (Orpheus), the mentor (the Father) and, of course, the villain (The Nasty Interesting Man/Child Lord of the Underworld). We learn that, though Orpheus and Eurydice don't share all of the same interests, they love each other and they decide to get married. The Nasty Interesting Man lures Eurydice up to his apartment, expresses his sexual interest and she dies trying to escape him. This is the inciting incident.

In Movement Two, Eurydice's situation has gotten worse. She doesn't remember who she is, a complication. Fortunately, her father finds her, shelters her and leads her to her own memory with the help of Orpheus' letter. In addition to helping her remember and teaching her to read and write again, the Father teaches her about who she is with stories of his childhood and their shared history. In the meantime, Orpheus has determined to come get her from the Underworld and is trying to figure out how to reach her (another complication). In the second movement, the Nasty Interesting Man appears as the Child Lord of the Underworld and again threatens her with sexual violence. At the end of the second movement, Orpheus has found his way into the Underworld. Movement Two is the development stage.

In Movement Three, Orpheus strikes his deal with the Child Lord of the Underworld to lead Eurydice out. The crisis occurs when Eurydice isn't sure she's ready to leave her father to chase what might be a stranger back to the world of the living. The climax occurs when Eurydice touches Orpheus and he turns. They share a moment, but then are forced apart. Eurydice returns to her father, but he has dismantled the string room that was her shelter and bathed in the river of forgetfulness. This leaves Eurydice vulnerable to the threats of the Child, who plans to force her into marriage. To escape this fate, she writes a final letter to Orpheus, urging him to move on and marry again.

This letter shows how much emotional maturity she has gained, no longer holding on and expressing a more adult version of love. After writing the letter, she too enters the river of forgetfulness. The final resolution comes when Orpheus enters the Underworld, has a moment of recognition of Eurydice, then he too forgets. This final moment piles tragedy onto tragedy, since Orpheus has a choice about his fate.

While the play follows a three-act structure, there are unconventional structural elements to be aware of. The movements are not balanced. The first movement contains seven scenes over twenty-six pages, the second twenty over thirty-six pages, and the third only three scenes over twenty-three pages. These scenes range in length from a couple of lines to the final two scenes, which are each eleven pages. The long second act contains some scenes between Eurydice and her father that plateau the movement of the plot. While I think they can have strong forward momentum, they may act as a structural challenge.

The other structural challenge of the piece is in the long resolution: a lot happens after the critical moment where Orpheus looks back at Eurydice. While these are important plot points to tie up, it may be a challenge to keep the momentum moving through this section.

It will be important when rehearsing the play not to forget to maintain the momentum of the piece. There are several longer scenes that we may rehearse as a unit, but when rehearsing the short scenes in the second movement that need to be fluid and fast in their transitions, it will be important to rehearse them together, not in isolation. For example, I believe it would be a mistake to rehearse all of the Movement Two Orpheus scenes together, without integrating the alternating Father and daughter scenes because we might lose the fluidity of transition.

Part 15: Directorial Approach

The primary qualities of the play that have informed my approach are: the rhythm of the text, the metaphorical nature of the setting, the fluid movement from place to place and the importance of developing relationships grounded in emotional truth. This is, after all, a play about love, loss, memory and grief.

Staging and the Expanded Chorus

The first three qualities inspired my primary departure from the text: to cast six additional actors who will join the Stones as a chorus. These actors (and the actors

playing the Stones when they are not in a scene) will support scene changes, foreground the main action, move properties as necessary, act as human props and provide the majority of sound in the piece. I was inspired in this decision by the work of Jillian Keiley and her Keileyography, a technique of using a large chorus to fundamentally change the stage space without changing the set (Devine, 31). Inspired by her ideas about the magic of theatre coming from wonder the audience feels watching space and objects transform on stage (Keiley, 99), I am interested in introducing some basic materials – fabric and paper – that the chorus can use to change the space. We will also explore transforming mundane objects – the water pump, tin buckets, etc., to help create the soundscape for the piece.



Figure 5: Orpheus Travels to the Underworld
C. Phillips Grande, S. Hicks, R. Denis, D. Curalli, S. Fera, T. Scott, B. Henderson
Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

Grounding the Play

The fourth quality, the importance of the character relationships, will affect my approach to the piece in rehearsal. No matter the metaphorical landscape full of magical transformation that is the background of the piece, it needs to be grounded with

emotional depth and honesty. This means that, despite all we are trying to do with spectacle, the majority of our rehearsal time will be spent on developing the emotional life and needs of the characters. To do this, I will be following a rehearsal model that I experimented with in the spring this year working on *The Dumb Waiter*. We will be using a process that combines the later work of Stanislavski with a Brechtian approach. These two philosophies seem at odds, but this process attempts to harness what is best from both approaches.

We will begin rehearsals not with around the table text analysis, but with a more general conversation about the given circumstances of the play, each character's background, need, worldview and obstacles. Then we will use an improvisational technique where we decide what the given circumstances are for each scene, then improvise the scene. We will continue to tweak the given circumstances until the progression of the improv matches the progression of the scene. Then we will do the scene as written in the text, taking what was learned from the improvisations into the scene. This technique is valuable bringing the emotional life of the characters and their relationships and bonds into focus for the actors in a visceral, experiential way, rather than by intellectual analysis of the text.

Once we have worked through the text this way, we will apply a more analytical approach. For each decision a character makes, we will list all of the decisions that they are not making, all of the things they are not doing. This technique helps the actors articulate what they were already doing in the improv to make it more deliberate and more motivated. After this, we will block the play scene by scene, though past experience with this technique has led to this being more a process of refining what the actors are already doing than creating everything from scratch.

This is a time-consuming process, but I believe it will lead to a richer result that will ground the play in the emotional reality of the characters. The *Eurydice* rehearsals will be my first time working with this technique with a larger cast, and I will also be balancing rehearsing the scenes with developing the chorus' choreography and sound. This balance will be a challenge, but one that should be solvable with detailed and well thought out scheduling.

We will use this process to strike a balance between the more dreamlike, metaphorical elements of the play and the grounded emotional truths of the characters.

Tempo, Rhythm and Tension

One of the greatest challenges of the piece will be to keep the play on tempo – moving quickly enough to build the tension without rushing through moments that are more delicate. One of the most important ways to do this will be to treat the play as a fluid piece with major shifts only between the Movements. Scenes will shift quickly, with changes of light, but characters will not always move on and off stage. Eurydice, the Father and Orpheus will probably all be on stage through most of the second movement.

We will also address this in rehearsal by running the play many times not with the goal of achieving repetition, but with each run intended to emphasize a different element of the text. My hope is that this will help us figure out what is most necessary for each element or character, or in each scene.

Overall, my approach with this text is to create a rich and developed world onstage that is true to Ruhl’s “more like Alice in Wonderland” directive in the script notes. I will seek to create magic and spectacle with the help of the larger chorus. But this magic and spectacle will exist to support the more important element of the play: the story of a young woman who learns how to love selflessly through the love of her father.

Part 16: Design Words

- Fluid
- Watery
- Blue
- An underwater cave
- Tiny figures in an immense landscape
- Music under water

I have also created a board of images on Pinterest, which can be linked to at:

<https://www.pinterest.com/keltiebrown/eurydice/>

Part 17: Audience Orientation

The space is a proscenium with fixed seating. I will stick with the traditional layout of the space. I don’t think at this point that the actors will enter the auditorium. We want to create a rich and magical world on the stage, one that has different rules than our world, and I think it will break the sense of that space to have actors step off the stage.

The challenge will be to draw the audience onto the stage (in terms of their engagement, not physically) in the large theatre with the very wide audience.

Part 18: The World of the Play

Physical:

- The physical space of the play moves from the seaside, to the Underworld, to a wedding to a water pump, to a high-end apartment, to the Underworld, to the gates of the Underworld.
- Each of these settings has a slightly magical, unreal quality. We need to be able to transition fluidly from one to another.
- There are also some things that Ruhl allows us to decide – where is the water pump, we know it's outside near the wedding, but we don't have any other information. It is also in view of an "interesting" apartment that is very high up.
- The physical setting of the piece is largely metaphorical, it is both an opportunity and a challenge to determine how we place each of these settings in the space of the stage but also in the physical reality of the play.

Emotional/Metaphorical:

- Innocent romantic love at the seaside.
- The Father's love reaching up from the Underworld.
- The joy of a wedding simultaneously felt in the worlds of the living and the dead. In the Underworld, it is accompanied by loneliness.
- The joy of the wedding leads to sorrow, feeling the absence of the Father; this happens at the water pump, where sadness comes up from the Underworld like water from the ground. And Eurydice is always craving water, subconsciously reaching for her father.
- Lust with the arrival of the Nasty Interesting Man, both his and Eurydice's. His danger has appeal, but in the apartment, she is trapped alone with the man and danger/fear overcomes curiosity.
- Forgetfulness, emotional emptiness, the Underworld creates and reflects a non-feeling brought about by forgetting. This is emphasized by the Stones' snide attitude toward any expressed emotion.
- Paternal/Familial love which is kindled in the string room, the representation of the Father's protective love.
- Orpheus' ongoing love – which escalates into the storm.

- The Child Lord of the Underworld's lust – his loud music, garish colours and red tricycle intruding on the grey space of the Underworld.
- Romantic Love and Fear: Eurydice's fear of a more adult love creates the gap between her and Orpheus.

Part 19: Special Problems

- Raining Elevator
- Casting the Father
- Scenes change location and place quickly
- The Father builds a room of string on stage, then it has to last for forty minutes on stage, then he takes it down.
- Eurydice falls down a flight of stairs
- There is a ten-foot monster version of the Child Lord of the Underworld.
- Staging the metaphorical – Ruhl's stage directions often represent a metaphorical rather than physical reality, so there will be a challenge trying to stage the piece in a way that makes clear that metaphorical reality.



Figure 6: The Father Builds a Room Out of String

M. Fera, K. Ranshaw

Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

Chapter 2: The Process

Part 20: Initial Design Meetings

The two meetings that comprised the initial design process were a chance for me to engage with the designers about the thematic elements of the text. I wanted to talk to them about the thematic elements of the play that were the most important for me.

The set designer, the costume designer, the assistant lighting designer and I held the first meeting a week after the designers got the script, on September 23. The date felt a bit late to me, given that Brad and I had decided to move the final design deadlines up by two weeks, which would allow more students to work on the build for the show. I was happy enough to try to make earlier deadlines work, since the earlier I had the design in my head the better, but the earlier move also meant that the designers hadn't had as much time to live with the text as I would have liked. This may have been a blessing though, since I had the chance to communicate to the designers the themes and ideas that I think are most important in the text.

In preparation for the meeting, I put together a board on the website Pinterest (<http://www.pinterest.com/keltiebrown/eurydice/>). The board is a collection of images that resonated with me in the context of the play. During the course of this meeting, not only was I able to share and articulate the most important themes and ideas in the play, I also walked them through the Pinterest board and talked about the visual language of the piece. Both designers came with some great questions about the text – What is metaphorical and what is literal in my mind? What is the role of period? What is the aesthetic feel? – that helped me to articulate in more concrete language some thoughts and images that were floating around my head.

My goal in this initial meeting was to ensure the designers and I were on the same page about the play without talking about the practical design ideas I'd already been thinking about. I wanted to give them a chance to bring their ideas to me before I started imposing specific design choices. At this point in the process, I didn't have a good sense of what I wanted out of the set. Every time I thought about staging the play, it was on a bare stage, so I was looking forward to seeing what ideas for set the designer would bring to me. After the meeting, I also sent the designers the *Eurydice* Performance Analysis that I wrote in the fall of 2014 and some of my research material about the play, mainly interviews with Sarah Ruhl. I was hoping some of this material might help frame the play for them as it had for me.

Our second design meeting, held on October 5, was scheduled to be a lighting meeting, since the lighting designer, who is a member of the faculty, wasn't able to attend the earlier concept meeting. The set and costume designers both attended, and the set designer brought a preliminary set design with her, which meant the meeting ended up being primarily about set. The lighting designer and I met for about thirty minutes before the other designers arrived. We spent this time in a recap of what I had said to the set and lighting designers the previous week. He had some very specific questions about the elevator – is it real and is it really raining? I felt that it was both real and really raining, and the lighting designer told me that he thought an elevator that flies in and rains is not only possible, but reasonably affordable in that space. We talked about the best uses for video projection being to texturally support the mood, rather than projected rain or a string room. I was glad that the lighting designer and I had the chance to have that conversation, since it gave me a lot of courage to move forward pushing the flying raining elevator.

After we finished talking about lighting, the set designer came with a fully formed set proposal, complete with rough model. One of the things I respect immensely about this designer is her ability to take one idea and play it out into an interesting metaphorical concept. The set she proposed, however, was not only technically unworkable, it also was based on the concept of “play,” which I don't think is a central concept of this piece. I was grateful that the lighting designer was there, since he's also the set design supervisor. He told her flat-out that the design wasn't workable in the space, but we started looking at some of her other “play” sketches.

I found this quite challenging, since I don't want to categorically shut down a designer's ideas, but the more we explored the “play” concept, the less I could see the play. Tonally, “play” as a set concept says joyful, open, expansive and loud, adjectives which don't fit in with the tone I see as dominant in *Eurydice*. While I agree there is a sense of whimsy in the text (I would be disappointed if the set was conceptualizing “sadness” also), “play” is far too light, with an upward and happy momentum. I think the set designer was a little thrown off by the mention of Alice and Wonderland in the script and the stills from the Alice movies that I had posted in the Pinterest board. But Wonderland isn't so much a playful, lighthearted place as a place where the normal is perverted into something as unfamiliar and unsettling as it is whimsical.

Either way, this design and my reaction to it sparked a long conversation during which I tried to be clear about what I was envisioning in terms of tone without going into the details of what I'd like to see on stage. One of the ways we found to communicate about this was for me to describe how I envisioned each location not as it might be on stage, but as it would be if that location was in the world – or maybe in a movie. That way I could communicate specifics of location, without demanding specifics in design.

This conversation did prompt me to share my idea about the Stones being inspired by teenage girls with the costume designer. I decided that my fear of being dominating in design conversations might have muddied what I was trying to communicate about what I wanted in the initial meeting. Maybe it's best if you really want something just to say so.

We had a third preliminary design meeting at Koerner's Pub on October 10. The sound designer joined us for the first time. After catching her up on the conversations we'd been having about the text, I ran the idea of live sound past her. She was excited by the idea and said she was willing to spend the extra time in rehearsal that live sound would require. I essentially asked her to act as designer and musical director, and she agreed. The set designer brought her thought board, and the two of us looked through it, pinpointing images that were resonant for both of us around the play.

The costume designer also brought some preliminary sketches and thoughts about period, which were useful. The placement of Eurydice in an idealized mid-20th century America makes a lot of sense to me. The naiveté that Orpheus and Eurydice have about love and the gender politics at play in the script seem to me to have resonance with this period. Statements like, "A wedding is for fathers and daughters. They stop being married to each other on that day" more closely reflect the 1950s than the 2010s to me.

Having that meeting over a glass of wine helped the four of us to have a more relaxed and open conversation about where we were headed with the aesthetic story of the play.

Part 21: Set Design

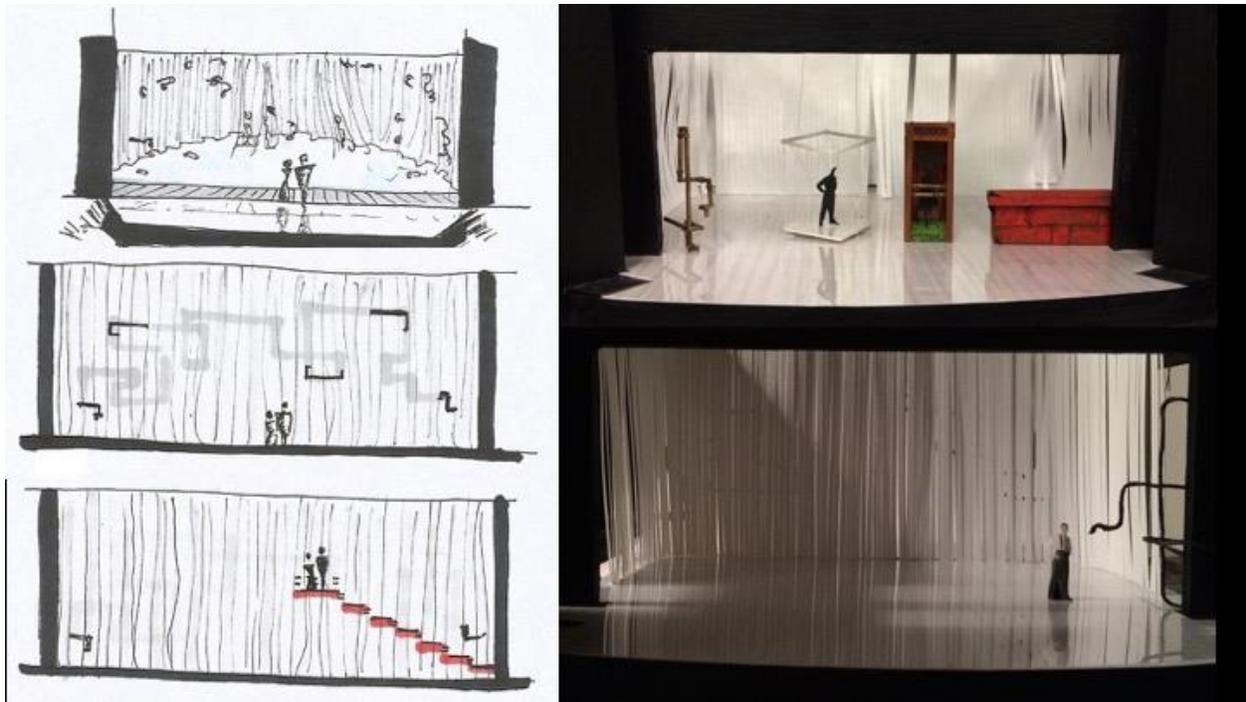
After I shot down the "play" design, the set designer and I met three more times before the preliminary design presentations. In the first of these meetings, on October 11, we started to talk about incorporating fabric or string into the set that could be manipulated by the chorus to create a kind of fluid architecture. I had initially been

thinking that we would do the show on a bare stage and the chorus would be responsible for changing the nature of the space with large pieces of fabric or string or paper. I wanted the water pump, the elevator and the string room to be the only scenic elements on stage. I was attached to using the cyclorama that was already in place at the back of the theatre to create a sense of infinite space, as much as possible in the theatre. While I was hesitant to communicate these ideas in the initial meetings, I realized that I did need to be a little more upfront about what was already in my head. The set designer wanted more than the bare stage I'd been imagining, but we started a productive conversation about an actor-manipulated design that also fit into her aesthetic sensibilities.

Two days later (October 13) the set designer and I met (at the pub again), and she presented me with a complete design model that included a stage wrapped at the back with string or fabric, two traveling scenic panels, an elevator that flies in and a river the width of the stage x 6' x 2" deep with a mirror underneath. This set was beautiful, not at all what I'd pictured and way too expensive. The river was amazing. In the model, there was no way for an actor to safely cross the river and, since it was just behind the proscenium arch, it took up most of the useful acting space on the stage. With the addition of some stepping stones though, I would have been willing to work with it. It was just that cool, but I also knew it wasn't in the budget.

There were elements of the set that I liked less. The circular up-stage wrap felt a little too cocoon-like. It seemed soft, gentle, comedic and not at all infinite. It also prevented use of the cyc. Instead of telling the designer "no," I told her to go ask the TD how much it would cost. I estimated \$6000 – roughly four times the budget; he thought \$10,000.

When we met on October 19, the set designer had two potential designs, both with rough models, to pitch to me. One was a scaled down version of the river set with a square wrap cyc, two travelers behind the proscenium, and an elevator that wasn't the full flying raining elevator, but instead an elevator top that would fly down above the actor and rain. The other was six traveler panels and the flying elevator box. Both sets had the same system for creating the string room – a frame that would fly in – and a red platform that would be the Nasty Interesting Man's room. This room was eight feet high with a three by three platform on top and nine stairs for the actors to go up and down.



*Figure 7: Set Design Sketches
Credit: Heipo Leung*

After negotiating that the red room would be four feet off the deck and much larger to safely accommodate two actors moving through the scene, I told her that I needed to think about the two options. The set with the six travellers was basically what I had asked her for. It used the cyc, was very transformable, made use of the entire depth of the stage and could disappear, giving me just a bare stage. This very simple set would also mean that we could probably afford the flying, raining elevator, which was also a priority. The other set was beautiful, but felt limiting, and it wasn't infinite space. I'd been thinking about the Underworld as a landscape that never ended and of Eurydice and her father in the string room as two tiny figures floating on a vast ocean. I didn't want to say "no" to the wrapped set, which was clearly her preference, without some serious thought. I told her I needed to think about both.

I felt like I had these two plays in my head, one on each stage. Neither felt completely right to me. I'd told the designer about my concerns that the wrapped stage didn't feel like infinite space. She told me she thought it did. I said no. She said yes. We never did agree. But after a night of thought, I started to see the play on the wrapped stage. I saw the tiny actors against the verticality. I saw the chorus upstage creating depth. I saw the hugeness of that space as the beach and the framed wedding. I still wasn't sure. I called

the lighting designer and asked about lighting each set. He told me he was excited by the big white box because it was different. I talked to my advisor, who ever so gently reminded me that I was looking for a sense of infinite space. He also made an excellent suggestion. He told me to walk the show through on both stages and see what worked.

So, the set designer and I sat down with both sets and walked through the play. Where would the travellers be in each scene? Where might scenes take place? What might the entrances and exits be? How would she fall off the (now much larger and lower) platform? Where would the Stones first appear? Where would the elevator descend? Two things became very clear over this exercise: first, we needed the raining elevator if there wasn't a wall on stage because there was no way to get Orpheus in at the end of the play without him being seen; second, I had no idea what I would do with six travelers. I'd been seeing the play primarily on a bare stage and I wasn't using most of the travelers most of the time. We did, however, need two to cover the string room at the gates of hell.

The next day, I emailed her and told her to present the wrapped stage at the final design presentation. I told her if we had to make a financial choice between the wrap and the flying elevator, we were taking the elevator, but otherwise to go ahead costing the wrap. The play that I'd started to see on the wrap had taken shape during our walk through and now, I couldn't get that version of the play out of my head.

The set design negotiation may have had the most impact on my thinking about the play of any other part of this process, which is why I've written about it at such length. It was the most difficult collaboration, but it was also one of the most productive. To some degree, I saw the play before I started working with the designers, and after their ideas were thrown into the mix, I stopped seeing the play for a while. It was when I started to see it again more clearly and more specifically on the Frederic Wood stage that the *Eurydice* that was *ours* not *mine* started to take shape.

The production process for set was surprisingly smooth after the preliminary design meeting on November 2. The set designer did research into possible materials for the backdrop. We both preferred string curtains, which would have brought an interesting depth (maybe even sense of infinite space) to the stage, but the string was far too expensive. She also looked into fabric and Typar, a home building material that is relatively inexpensive and should already be fire resistant. After looking at a sample of

the Typar, we decided that it would be our primary material for the backdrop and travelers. This decision meant that we could also afford the flying, raining elevator.



*Figure 8: The Stones Costumes and Sketches
M. Barry, J. Secunda, M. Pye
Photo Credit: Javier Sotres, Sketches: Alix Miller*

Part 22: Costume Design

Unlike with set, the costume design process was relatively straight forward. Most of our costuming challenges came later in the process.

After the initial meetings, I didn't meet with the costume designer until shortly before the preliminary design meeting. Once we had talked about period and I shared my

vision of the Stones as teenage girls designed for a Tim Burton film, she moved forward from there. At the initial design meeting, she presented a series of sketches that resonated with me. Most interestingly, she had begun working with a water-damaged paint and fabric texture. We had talked about how important water as it links to memory is to this play, and she ran with it as a design concept. I liked the concept; her designs showed a thoughtfulness about the nature of the characters as well as interest in thematic ties in colour and shape. Budget was an issue with costumes. I had, after all, added six cast members to the play, but her approach was both aesthetic and pragmatic.

There were a few concessions we had to make on costumes. I had initially envisioned the chorus as repetitions of the Stones, an expansion of the Stone chorus rather than a unique entity, but we didn't have the budget to custom-make outfits for nine Stones. We also discussed some elaborate makeup options for the Stones and the chorus, including makeup that would have made them look like cracked rocks, but budget, time and access to skilled labour all prevented anything too intricate. Makeup was also a negotiation. The costume designer had originally envisioned the Stones and chorus with simple black rings around their eyes. I felt that the "dead people makeup" wasn't a strong enough statement. We traded images back and forth until we landed on strong, geometric images for the Stones and water drips for the chorus.

Other costuming challenges also centred around budget. The initial costume for Eurydice's father was a suit, but because there was no suit that could fit the actor in stock (and suits are expensive), the costume was redesigned to be slacks and a sweater. I was happy with this decision. This actor as the Father is softer and gentler than I had initially envisioned, and the sweater suited that take on the character better.

Once I saw the costume sketches the play began to take an even clearer shape in my mind. Now three weeks out from rehearsal, I really felt like the play was in my head, it just needed to get out.

Part 23: Sound Design

At the preliminary design meeting, it was clear that our sound design plan was basically, "Uh, some live stuff." So the sound designer, her advisor and I met the following day to talk in more detail about the role of live sound in the play. I had some very specific ideas about what I wanted: the bird and beach sounds behind umbrellas in 1.1, the chorus making party sounds, the chorus singing "Brazilian mood music" in the Nasty Interesting Man's apartment, the chorus singing the "symphony for twelve

instruments” that Orpheus plays at the gates of hell, and the use of some kind of mic that would be subtle but support the actors over the music and give us more flexibility for the chorus to make quieter noises upstage.

The sound designer and her advisor came with a lot of good questions I hadn’t really thought about: what did a voice symphony for twelve instruments sound like? What would the chorus use besides their voice to make sound? What was the nature of sound in the rest of the play? My answer – “I don’t know, water and pipes for the Underworld, I guess” – led us to a long and fruitful discussion of what kinds of sounds you could make with water, buckets and plumbing. After an hour, we had a rough concept for instruments made out of PVC piping and other water related found materials. One of the problems that I saw was creating the heavy metal music that the Child enters to, and we watched the opening of the documentary *It Might Get Loud*, where Jack White makes a guitar out of an old piece of wood, two nails, a glass bottle, a guitar string and a pickup. This was the basis of the inspiration for the single string guitar and amp in the red wagon.

At the design costing meeting three days later, the sound designer and her advisor had produced two instruments: the bass clarinet sounding “hell-a-phone” and the “screech-a-phone,” a piece of copper pipe with a trumpet mouth piece. They also had plans for our slide guitar; a “slap-a-phone,” also made out of PVC pipe; a “vibe-ra-phone,” a rhythmic instrument like a xylophone but with PVC pipe; and an as-yet-unnamed instrument that was a pipe with the bottom end immersed in a bucket of water that you could blow across the top of and change the pitch by changing how deep it went into the bucket. There was a lot of excitement in the meeting about their demonstration and ideas. There was also some concern that all of these instruments would go over the sound budget.

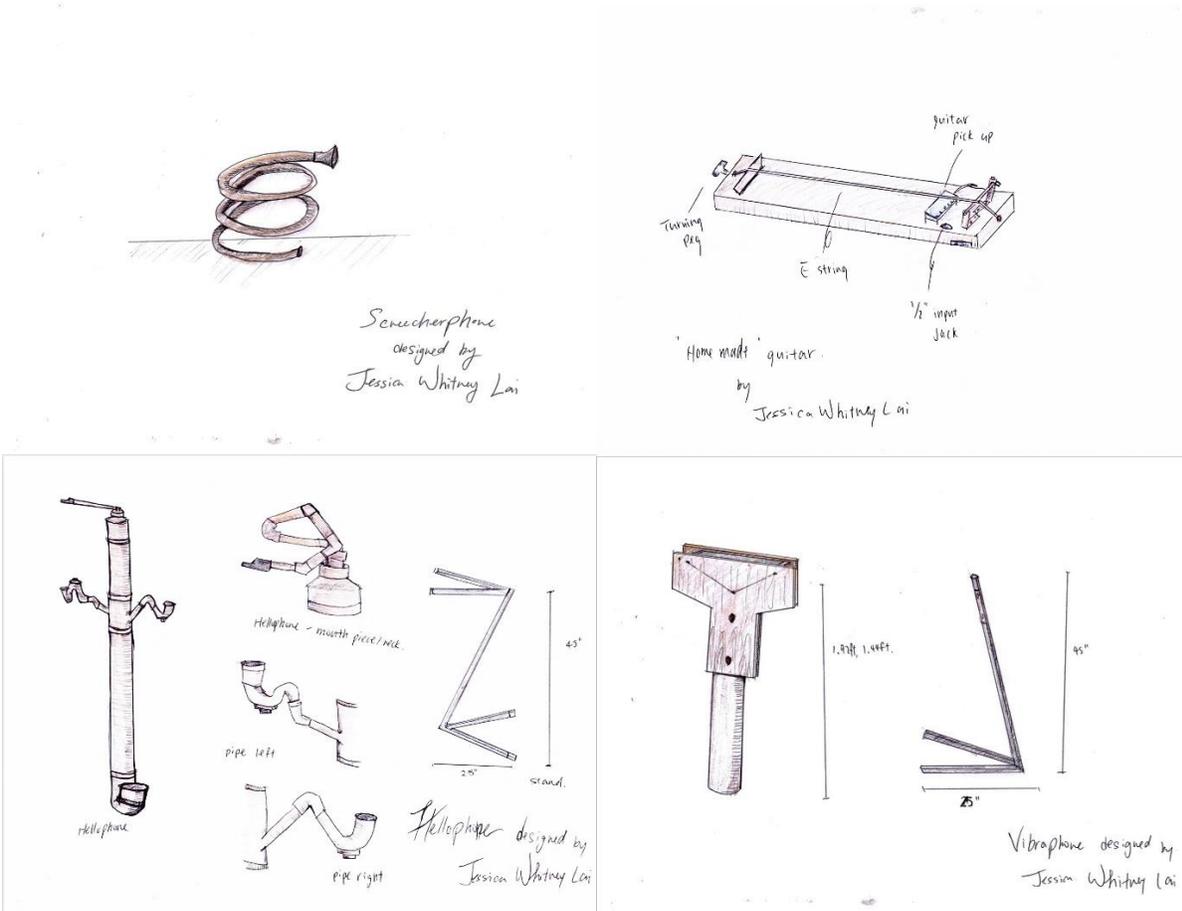


Figure 9: Instrument Design Sketches
Credit: Jessica Lai

At the final design meeting, the sound designer and her advisor came with a problem: that in order to get the slap-a-phone in the right tonal range, the pipe would need to be about ten feet long. After the meeting, we stayed behind with the set designer to discuss integrating those long pipes into the set design. She liked the idea. She and I had talked about ways of bringing rusty pipes into the design, but there was no room in the set budget for another element. This could allow us to integrate the pipes and not go over budget on set. We agreed at the end of that meeting that we would go ahead with the pipes if there was room in the sound budget. A week later at the first production meeting, I asked the sound team about the pipes, and they seemed to have forgotten. I was a little frustrated at this, but we again agreed to try to move forward on it. By the second production meeting, it was clear that it was getting too late to make a change that had huge implications for set and was still so up in the air. I decided to let that idea go.

The songs were composed by the second week of rehearsal, and the sound designer and her advisor spent four hours of each rehearsal day with the chorus, teaching them the songs. They were acting both as the design team and musical director on the show, and I was grateful for the hours they put in. I found bringing live music and singing into the show was stressful for me. I'm not a musical person, and I don't have the skills to fix issues with singing. While the sound designer and her advisor were doing a great job, not all of the chorus were singers, and they were doing difficult four part harmonies without instruments to give them pitch. The first "show and tell" of the songs to the downstage cast and me was painful for everyone. The songs were off key, I was panicking a little, the sound designer and her advisor didn't feel like I was getting a good sense of the songs, and the chorus felt like they were failing. I can be a bit of a control freak, and it makes it easier for me to trust someone to do something when I know that I can probably fix it if they screw it up. With the sound, I don't have the skills, so it was harder to let go. At this point though, I was committed.

This came to a head for me in the third week of rehearsal. As we were working on integrating the chorus music in to the play, I was increasingly frustrated with one of the members of the chorus who was struggling most with the music. I wasn't frustrated because she was struggling with the songs, but because her insecurity about singing was blocking her contribution to the rest of the show. We were trying to refine the chorus' movement. I had cast her because she's a fantastic physical actor, but even when we were working on movement in rehearsal, I felt like she was offering nothing. I spoke to my advisor about this problem, and he advised that I face it head on. I was thinking I'd let it resolve itself over the break, but I'm glad I listened to the advisor. When I took the actor aside during a break and asked if everything was okay, she burst into tears and told me she was very frustrated with the singing and didn't understand why I had cast her since she wasn't a singer. I told her that I thought she could do justice to the songs if she worked hard, she had plenty of time to practice and that if she was still struggling with the singing at opening, I wouldn't let her make a fool of herself. She needed to hear that I wasn't judging her for the singing, and she did become an important member of the ensemble after this.

Part 24: Casting – Outside and Inside Actors

It's October: I get to hire an outside actor to play the Father! I think it's the only choice that makes sense, given how young all the men in the program are and how important that role is to the play. It's also a privilege that's not granted to many MFAs, and I don't want to screw it up.

I've asked everyone I can think of to play the Father. There are a few things I know: the people I most want don't have time to do it or are members of Canadian Actors' Equity and can't do it. I don't know many actors in Vancouver, I've exhausted the people suggested to me, and I'm afraid I've left it too late and don't have a fallback plan. I'm almost panicking, but I don't want to show anyone in case they realize I'm in totally in over my head and they should never have entrusted me with a spot in their season.

These are the kind of thoughts that plagued me through the fall until I settled, mid-November, into a fatalistic kind of calm. A “whatever happens it's too late now” attitude. For me, finding an outside actor to play the Father was a big part of embracing that fatalism. This actor is the real-life father of one of the intermediate students in the BFA acting program. When the student heard (from me in early October) that we might be looking for an older actor to play the Father, he told his father, who was a former BFA grad himself. When the email from the student very politely asking if I would consider auditioning his father dropped into my inbox, it felt like a bit of a miracle. I asked the actor if, instead of doing a formal audition, he would read with the actors called back for Eurydice.

I held auditions over three days. On the first, I saw the audition monologues of the intermediate year men, one of whom was going to be playing either Orpheus or the Nasty Interesting Man/Child, since there is only one man in the senior class. On the second day, I did a group audition with all of the students in the senior and intermediate years – twenty students in total – for the roles of the chorus and Stones. Each student sang thirty seconds of a song, then we worked on some choral movement.

Up until the week before auditions, I had no idea how I was going to audition the chorus. I'd never auditioned actors for non-text based roles before, and I had no idea how to frame the day. A week before auditions, I did a chorus workshop with Helen Eastman, a visiting scholar from England who specializes in ancient Greek theatre and the chorus. In the workshop, we practiced a choral movement technique called flocking, where the leader of the movement direction and style changes depending on the actors' relative position to each other. This allows for spontaneous choral movement. I used this exercise as the basis for our chorus auditions.

After we had “flocked,” I had volunteers do their audition monologues while the rest of the group listened as a chorus. I was interested in who could be chorally in response without pulling focus from the speaking actor. These exercises helped to inform which

actors I selected for the chorus members, though I also took singing ability heavily into account in most cases. In this group audition, we also explored the text of the Stones from Scene 2.1. The actors worked in groups of three for fifteen minutes on the text, then came back and presented their take on the Stones.

For the core cast auditions, I saw all of the women in the senior class read the Father sides with the outside actor, then the four actors I wanted to call back read with each of the four men going out for Orpheus and the Nasty Interesting Man/Child. During auditions, the actor interested in playing the Father showed an emotional connection to the text and willingness to explore that assured me he would be a good choice for the Father.

Casting was a process of negotiation between me and Evan Frayne, the other MFA candidate this year. After auditions, I put together an ideal cast, sent it out to Evan and the faculty, then we met to negotiate casting. Evan and I have been working together, sharing the same resources and talking about directing for eighteen months; we know each other's sensibilities quite well. I was less prepared for the priorities of the department. There was a real push for the chorus to consist only of members of the intermediate class. While I was happy enough to comply, the department is usually pretty good about letting us know about these spoken/unspoken expectations beforehand, and in this case no one had said anything. Still, the negotiation was fairly seamless, and I ended up with a cast that, while it wasn't the cast I originally proposed, kept the actors I felt were most important to the success of the piece in the roles where they were most suited.

Part 25: Meeting with Helen Eastman

On November 2, in the middle of the design process, I met with Helen Eastman, who led the chorus workshop I talked about above. She had read the script and agreed to talk to me about it and about the added chorus. The conversation was pretty general. I walked her through my thinking about the chorus so far: that they were there to change the bare stage, that I was working with a concept of foregrounding and backgrounding to take advantage of the depth of the space, that they would do the sound. We talked about Eurydice's fall from the Nasty Interesting Man's apartment. She had done a similar fall off a ladder in *Prometheus* and talked about ways of getting rotation into the fall. She also gave me the idea of making Eurydice disappear magically behind a traveler. We talked a lot about theatre magic and the small ways we create wonder on

stage. We talked about the metaphorical river of forgetfulness being a chorus bucket brigade always in motion on stage.

I'm including this meeting as its own section because, although it wasn't a core part of the process, it was the moment that I stopped thinking about the play in practical terms. I stopped asking myself what the bare minimum requirements were for staging the play, and I started thinking about magic. I remember walking out of the meeting inspired and conscious that, during our conversation, I had switched from my practical brain to my creative brain. I believe that if it were not for this half hour discussion about buckets and falls and travellers, the play would not have been as successful.

Part 26: Rehearsals – Active Analysis

Active analysis is a rehearsal technique that I first came across during my MFA. The technique is based on Stanislavski's later work. Tom Schulte's academic research centres around the productive tension between Stanislavski's naturalism and Brecht's alienation. He uses rehearsal techniques derived from both directors' work to help the actors reach a detailed, precise and more fully lived approach to characters. I used this technique last year when rehearsing *The Dumb Waiter*, and I found it particularly effective. Replacing traditional round the table text work with active analysis gives me a framework to explore the text at first in a less intellectual way. My work tends to be quite intellectual, and my approach to scripts is intellectual, so text work for me has traditionally been an intellectual exercise. As a result, the actor's work is also far more driven by intellect than instinct, which weighs down the text. Active analysis frees me from the temptation of intellectualizing the play with the actors because all of the initial talk of the play is about given circumstance and objective, rather than theme or idea.

We began active analysis on the first day of rehearsal. Because it's a new and potentially intimidating exercise for most of the actors, we used the time after the first read to demonstrate active analysis with the actors who played Eurydice and the Nasty Interesting Man/Child, who had both done active analysis with me before. We focused on Scene 1.3, where Eurydice meets the Nasty Interesting Man at the water pump. We read the text of the scene, then discussed the given circumstances including the characters' ages, histories, immediate circumstances (what drove Eurydice from her wedding to the water pump), life philosophies (what does this character think success/happiness in life means), objectives, obstacles and stakes. Once we had settled on the circumstances we were going to move forward with at first – I always repeat that

we never need to get stuck with any of these circumstances if they're not working – the actors improvised the scene using those given circumstances. In this exercise, the actors are not obligated to use any of the words from the text or try to make the scene follow the course that it takes in the text. Instead, we continue to tweak the given circumstances and improvise the scene until the improvisation naturally takes a course similar to the scene. Once that is starting to happen, we go back to the text and read the lines, using the given circumstances that drove a scene that most closely resembles the scene in the text. This technique gives us a broad, general picture of what is at play for the characters. The work at this point tends to be a wash of larger objectives, but I find that broad understanding serves the actors moving forward and gives them a strong sense of ownership over the characters.

After we demonstrated the active analysis approach in the first rehearsal, there was a lot of relief among the actors. While most actors seem to think the exercise is an interesting one, actors who are not improvisers often find it an intimidating way to approach a text. During the demonstration, we were able to show that there is no *right* answer and if a scene gets stuck or goes off the rails, there are no consequences, we just talk about what went wonky and try again with a different objective or obstacle. We worked on active analysis for the first four eight-hour rehearsal days, ending the fourth, our fifth rehearsal day, with an active analysis run – an improvised run of the whole play. This was a chaotic exercise that freaked the actors out a bit; they were afraid they would miss something important. They did, and then I got to tell them it didn't matter, that we were in process, not looking for a performance-ready product. One of the elements that I appreciate so much about active analysis is that it forces rehearsal to be focused on process, what Stanislavski calls the *root* (versus the *result*). It facilitates a low stakes exploration of the text that gives the actors room to make discoveries intuitively.

The notable results of the active analysis process were:

- Starting to develop the complex relationship between Orpheus and Eurydice: in our given circumstances, we decided they had had a friendship since childhood, one that had formed just after Eurydice's father died. This friendship had only recently developed into something romantic, a development neither was completely comfortable with. As a part of developing this relationship, we did an improvisation of the two of them meeting as children, which gave a strong depth to the relationship we were trying to build.

- The driver of tension in the Orpheus and Eurydice relationship is a fundamental difference in how they communicate (Eurydice loves words and ideas and books and Orpheus is only articulate in music), and Eurydice's fear that music will always be more important to Orpheus than she is.
- It was a struggle to find the balance between affection and tension in the Orpheus and Eurydice relationship. Generally, in the active analysis exercises, one or the other took precedence, and neither scenario felt quite right.
- We played with a range of ages for Eurydice. While we agreed that she's probably around nineteen in the play, when the actor playing Eurydice approached the character with a younger physicality and mental maturity – a girl just experiencing sexual awakening – the scenes with both Orpheus and the Nasty Interesting Man rang more true. It was a challenge for the actor playing Eurydice to explore a character without sexual confidence or cynicism. She'd been playing brittle older women almost exclusively for the last three years and didn't have a lot of confidence about playing a character this young. Active analysis allowed her to explore some of these characteristics with a lot of freedom, and she started to find a character body.
- With the Nasty Interesting Man, we explored what it means to be a god, even one with limited power. We didn't only tweak his objectives, obstacles and stakes in different improvisations, we also explored how much knowledge he had going in to the scene, what his history of embodying the Nasty Interesting Man on earth was, how much awareness of the Child self he retained, etc. We determined that the Nasty Interesting Man, like most Greek gods, has more knowledge than humans and could trick people into doing what he wanted, but he can't compel Eurydice to act. She has to make the choice of her own free will. I've never worked on a play with a supernatural character in it before, and we had some strange and unexpected conversations along these lines. I didn't feel as prepared as I should have been to tackle these questions, but the actor and I already had a good working relationship and could discuss some pretty strange ideas openly and with a sense of fun.
- I didn't find a way to make the active analysis work as useful for monologues and solo work. During this period, we did string together a set of given circumstances for Orpheus' monologues in the second movement – what happens just before/in between each one, what drives him immediately to write

each letter – but improvisation wasn't an effective technique for exploring these moments.

- The relationship between the Father and Eurydice developed a lot during the active analysis. We explored the extent to which the Father's objectives are selfish – to get her to remember him, to keep him company, to convince her to stay – and which are selfless – to convince her to leave and go to Orpheus.
- We worked a lot with changing the objectives of the Stones. It's not always clear from the text whose side they are on. After looking at their scenes with both objectives geared at helping Eurydice and her father and also preventing them from connecting, we took a different tack. We began playing with the idea that strong emotion is uncomfortable, even painful for the Stones. They are curious about the Father and Eurydice but are always trying to keep the emotional level in the scene. Like the Nasty Interesting Man, they have no control over what the Father and Eurydice are doing, but they can try to influence it. Once Orpheus comes down to the Underworld, they want Eurydice to go with him because they want to get rid of the music, which causes them to cry, and Eurydice, whose pain over choosing between her father and Orpheus is also hurting the Stones.
- While we were improvising with the Stones, I was also looking for inspiration around blocking and movement quality. Often, the movement of the Stones was messy or confusing on the stage, fine for an improvisation, but I wasn't sure what to do with them when we started blocking. There were a few moments in the active analysis improvisations that were completely magical, and this was when they moved either together or right after each other.
- During the active analysis work with the text of the play (which I started to call the downstage play), I had the chorus improvise the "upstage play" with a focus on creating sound. I encouraged them to improvise sounds with both their mouths and buckets to underscore what was happening in the downstage play. Some very interesting rhythmic moments came out of this work.
- At the same time, the chorus and I were having an ongoing discussion about who they were in the context of the play and what they wanted. I shared with them that my thinking about the chorus had changed significantly since I first conceived of the idea, and I wasn't sure who they were. I asked them to pay attention to their natural reactions to the downstage play and told them we would figure it out together.

During this period of rehearsal, I was exhausted all the time. I was not only trying to give some attention, help and inspiration to each of the thirteen actors in the play, I was also building the world of the play in my brain. Each day of active analysis gave me more to think about. Every day I left with more questions than answers, but every day the play took a clearer shape in my head. In the evenings, I fell asleep on the couch twenty minutes after I got home, and every night I dreamed about the play. I don't know if it was the sheer volume of preparation and amount of time I'd spent thinking about the play or the energy it took to keep thirteen actors engaged, but I have never been so immersed in and exhausted by a rehearsal process in my life. I couldn't think about anything else.

Part 27: Rehearsals – Blocking



Figure 10: Eurydice and Orpheus Walk Away

K. Ranshaw, D. Curalli

Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

Before we started blocking, I had the whole play in my head. We blocked in two days and did a stumble-through at the end of the second day. I didn't have any of the blocking written down in advance – maybe that would have helped my exhaustion problem – and the process of blocking mostly felt like downloading what was in my brain to the actors. Very little of the blocking that we did in that first week of rehearsals changed for the downstage play, including the choral movements of the Stones, and their synchronized head turns and gestures. The active analysis exercise and the

labourious set design negotiation had given me a real sense of what the play looked like on that stage. Getting the blocking out of my head and into the actors' bodies also cleared some space in my brain to think about other things, and my exhaustion lessened a bit.

Blocking also brought to the forefront the big question about the chorus. I knew exactly what they were doing in four or five scenes, but I didn't have a strong sense of their role through the rest of the play. We also skipped the lifts, dances and falls until the movement coach was able to come in and work with the cast. When she did, the dancing, lifting and falling came easily, but the chorus less so. She took what I had done with the chorus already and made it cleaner and sharper. But again, we got into this conversation about who the chorus was and what they were doing (besides playing music, singing, catching Eurydice and clearing props). I had initially envisioned the chorus as a structural element of the play; they would use lengths of cloth, paper, string and their bodies to transform the empty space I had imagined doing the play on. Now, the stage, though still empty, had a completely different character than the minimalistic black box I had imagined. Also, most of the time the chorus would have been supporting a string room or creating a path or a wall, they were busy with singing and instruments. The sound designers and I agreed that the instruments would only be used in the Underworld, so I did have the chorus' bodies to work with whenever we were in the world of the living, but I had no idea what to do with them. Cathy took the idea of dripping water and used it to give the physicality of the chorus a shape: they would flow from the instruments in the Underworld to a clump in the living world and melt down into a choreographed pose. This worked to underline the transitions between locations, particularity in the second movement.

Part 28: Rehearsals – Not... But...

When we began working with the Brecht-inspired Not...But... exercise, the songs were composed, the instruments were built and the sound design team was working with the chorus on learning the songs. This worked well, since Not... But... isn't as useful if you have no lines. When you Not... But..., you go through the text line-by-line and the actors list everything their character is not doing. Then, they say what the character is doing. When you run each scene, the actors take the time for the character to consciously make the decision not to do all of the things they may have thought of doing and do the thing they do instead. For example, when the Nasty Interesting Man

invites Eurydice up to her apartment, she doesn't go with him, ask him why, slap him, ask him his name or leave, but she does give him the reason she can't go with him.

Some notable discoveries with Not... But...:

- The Nasty Interesting Man scenes developed a lot of life and sense of sexual threat because he took on actions of seduce, threaten.
- Not... But... helped clarify the Father and Eurydice relationship as it develops in the Second Movement. It gave a shape to the slow and delicate progression of that relationship. I've always believed that one of the major potential pitfalls of the play is the potential to stagnate here. I think we found the tension between the two of them that keeps the relationship, and thus the play, moving forward.
- Scene 1.1 became very pointed and about the conflict. The exercise also brought into focus just how long it takes Orpheus to get to the point of proposal and why.
- The Stones don't do a lot of things. It seems like a silly realization, but for the actors, it underlined their powerlessness and emphasized the moments they do take action. This helped them find their overall arc in the play.

After a week of Not... But..., the scenes were slow, deliberate and pointed. Since nothing is said casually when you approach a text this way, the play is heavy and intense, but the actors' work is very specific. It's this specificity that I wanted the actors to keep while moving away from the deliberate pace. The last time I worked with Not... But..., we did a clown run the day after our Not... But... run in order to explode both the slowness and the pointed intensity. For *Eurydice*, a clown run didn't seem like a workable idea. I was worried the cast was too big and it would turn into unproductive rather than productive chaos. Instead, we moved on to integrating the work the chorus had been doing with music then went on break over Christmas. In retrospect, this might have been a mistake. The cast lived with that deliberate pace through a ten-day break, and I'm not sure we ever did get the play up to pace.

Part 29: Rehearsals – Working Through

After finishing the Not...But... exercise, we worked through the play scene by scene. We started this process after the ten day Christmas break. Not all of the actors were back from holidays, so instead of running the play, which I would have liked to do on the first day back, we jumped right in to scene work.

We began with Scene 1.1, Eurydice and Orpheus on the beach. This is the scene that establishes Eurydice and Orpheus' relationship, both their love and Eurydice's doubt. I

scheduled an hour to work through the scene. I had asked the actors to cut their break short to rehearse on the Saturday before classes went back in, and I felt a lot of pressure to justify that request, so I wanted to bring as many of them in for as much of the day as possible. Also, I had promised the chorus we would figure out their role more clearly, and I wanted to get on that. So, I scheduled an hour to work through 1.1, a decision that would haunt me all the way through rehearsal. I had expected after the active analysis and Not... But... exercises that the scene work would be focused on cleaning up the chorus, tweaking details, focusing moments and working on pace. That was true for most of the play, but we hadn't cracked 1.1 before Christmas. I just didn't realize that. In that hour, we barely got through the first beat of the play. Off the top of the play, Orpheus doesn't speak and Eurydice responds to his gestures. The actors and I were struggling to justify Orpheus' silence. After some discussion, we started to work with the idea that he is playing a game with Eurydice. This brought a lively energy to the beginning of the scene. That was as far as we got with that scene that first day.

The next rehearsal, we had the full cast back and ran the show. Most of the work we had done held up well over the break, but Scene 1.1 stuck out. It felt like the actors were flailing and there was very little tension in the scene. Earlier in the process, we had discussed that the reason they only skirt the edges of a fight is that Eurydice is willing to let small irritations go, but in the scene that translated into a complete drop of tension. Every time Orpheus hurt her, she instantly forgave him. The actors really wanted the scene to be all about love, but if Eurydice has no doubts there is no play.

I didn't get a chance to look at the scene again for two days. In retrospect, I should have made the scene a priority, but there were so many other elements to integrate that also felt like priorities. For the second time, two days later, I didn't schedule enough time to work on the scene. We moved away from beginning with a game and instead made Orpheus' silence a symptom of being so caught up in the music in his head. This motivated a little more tension in the scene. We continued to work on making those moments of hurt real. I was asking the actors to do a very challenging thing, to commit completely to love, then hurt, then anger, then forgiveness, then love again. It isn't easy to hold all of those things at once, but I think it may be what the scene requires.



Figure 11: Orpheus and Eurydice on the Beach
D. Curalli, K. Ranshaw
Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

During this time, I also had a lot of input on the scene from both my advisor and from the voice coach, who worked on the scene with them to open their breath. This input was valuable, though not always in harmony. Everyone I talked to about the scene, including my dad who came and saw a run, had a different opinion about how to weight the scene – toward love or doubt. All of this helped me, but I wish it had come earlier. By the time we moved in to the theatre, we still hadn't found the balance in the scene.

Part 30: Challenges – The Chorus

The chorus was the most constant challenge for me during the process. When I first started thinking about adding a chorus to the play, they were the main architectural element. They were the string room, the elevator, the river, the gates of hell. This idea came out of reading Jillian Keiley's ideas about the magic of theatre being rooted in transformation. I thought this was particularly relevant in *Eurydice*, which requires so

much fluid transformation on stage. I went into the design process with this idea still in mind. I don't think I communicated it as well as I could have to the set designer. Regardless, we went down a path with the set design that was not as conducive to actor manipulation as I had originally imagined. At the same time, I decided to do the sound live, which meant the chorus was much more engaged with sound-making and singing than with movement.

I had originally thought of the chorus as an extension of the Stones, and I saw the Stones as much more a part of the chorus. In this early concept, the Stones would also have been a part of the wedding party and taken on other choral roles. In that version of the play, the expanded chorus of Stones is then telling the story to the audience and helping to act it out. As the roles of the chorus changed and the Stones became much more their own entity, this changed.



Figure 12: The Chorus
T. Scott, S. Hicks, R. Denis, M. Fera, B. Henderson, C. Phillips Grande
Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

Coming into rehearsals, I wasn't sure who the chorus now was in the context of the practical functions they were filling, but the actors wanted to know. I told them how

much things had shifted in my thinking and that I wasn't sure, but we would figure it out together. This was frustrating both for them and for me. Once we had established a physical pattern for them – go to your instruments, melt, go to the centre, melt, and the movement coach had come in to clean up those movement patterns – I felt like I had everything in place to figure it out. We agreed that, like the Stones, emotions made them uncomfortable, but they were curious about them. They were dead people in the Underworld (this dictated at least in part by costumes), and they were following the story, which was what brought them up to the world of the living to watch Orpheus. This approach sort of worked. They found some interesting rhythms and reactions that worked with what they had to do. I was struggling, though; the nature of the melty physicality meant that they often looked bored watching the action. I would try to fix this by asking them to take on less relaxed, less human positions. In combination with the melty physicality, this had them contorted in some very odd ways. Then they had to sing.

It took me until our last week of rehearsal before moving on to the stage to realize that if we were going to fix things we were going to have to scrap what we'd been working with before. This decision came at the same time that the sound team expressed concern that the physical positions the chorus was in were preventing proper breath support for the singing. We moved away from the melty physicality, simplified the movement and rethought their stake in the play. For the last run in the rehearsal hall, I asked the chorus to use the flocking choral movement technique to move from place to place. The location on the stage where they went should be the same, but they didn't have to keep landing in the same poses or positions relative to each other. Then, I asked them to pay attention to who they were actually following through the play and to react instinctively. The run was a mess, their songs were off key and their movement all over the place, but we had broken a pattern that wasn't serving the play. We talked after the run and determined that the chorus had been watching this story unfold over and over, but this time something was different and, like in the play, the difference was the Dad. The chorus found themselves responding most to the Father, and he became their through line in the play.

While I don't think the choral work was as clean as it would have been if I'd had the courage to go back to the drawing board sooner, the changes gave the actors more to work with and facilitated them taking ownership of the roles.

Part 31: Challenges – Stilts

From the first time I thought about staging this play, I had always imagined that, when the Child comes in as the ten-foot version of himself in Scene 3.1, I'd like to put the actor on stilts. In design and production meetings, we agreed that construction stilts would be safest, since none of the actors have stilt training, and construction stilts are very stable. We agreed that for safety, we wanted the actor to have as much training on the stilts as possible, so I asked that we have the stilts in rehearsal very early. The Head of Wardrobe ordered the stilts early, and they arrived before the first rehearsal. There was a remote possibility that the actor playing the Nasty Interesting Man/Child would be out of rehearsal early in January, which made it an even bigger priority for me that he get as much practice on the stilts as possible before the break. To that end, the actor was up on the stilts starting in the second rehearsal. The costume shop provided wrist guards, elbow and knee pads, and an assistant stage manager assisted and spotted him. From the beginning, he was very comfortable on the stilts. He was using them in the scene work from the first week on.

This may be why we all missed the obvious safety concerns at play. I brought up in production meetings that we needed to teach the actor playing the Nasty Interesting Man/Child how to fall safely, but by the time we were in rehearsal and he was working on the stilts so comfortably, I had pushed it to the back of my mind. I've done a very small amount of circus stilt training, and I know how to fall on circus stilts. I didn't know if it was safe to fall on construction stilts the same way, and I didn't have the confidence to teach the actor how to fall on the stilts myself. I should have insisted we bring someone in to teach him early on, but I kept forgetting to bring it up when I thought of it.

When we moved into the theatre, one of the things the actors had to get used to was the glazed floor, which was more slippery than the rehearsal room floor. When the actor felt the slippery floor, he came to me and said he didn't want to use the stilts on the stage floor that evening, since he needed some practice on the new floor and wasn't feeling very well. I agreed that it would be good to wait and that we would schedule some time for the next day for him to practice on the floor.

The next day, I woke to an email from the voice coach, expressing her concern that the actor playing the Nasty Interesting Man/Child still hadn't been trained to walk on the stilts. This was a very reasonable thing to point out, and I believe it was my major

failure that it hadn't happened earlier. I had been caught up in other elements of the rehearsal, the actor had been so comfortable on the stilts and I got complacent. I never should have, not where an actor's safety was concerned. That having been said, what followed was nothing short of ridiculous. The movement coach, sent an email about stilt safety to a colleague of hers who has worked in circus. I don't know what was in the response, but the result was that we were asked not to have the actor on stage on the stilts until she could come in and give us some safety training. We were also asked to buy new knee and elbow pads as well as wrist guards for the actor. The costume designer not only made the purchases but came up with a viable costume alternative that included a helmet – amazing. We brought the circus consultant in on the first day of cue to cue to do a stilt safety lesson with the actor playing the Nasty Interesting Man/Child Lord of the Underworld and the rest of the cast. Because she wasn't a certified stilt trainer, the consultant didn't feel comfortable signing off on teaching the actor on stilts to fall. Instead, she asked me to re-block the scene so the chorus could spot the actor. The chorus did practice catching the actor in a stilt-walker's fall (onto the knees) without the stilts on. We also shifted his entrance to stage left, where his path was both clearer and better lit. This was the most important change we made to ensure the actor's safety.

After their time with the circus consultant, the cast was very tense. The hysterical tenor that had crept into communications about stilt safety had everyone on edge. The chorus who were acting as spotters were very nervous about their role and, since they still hadn't practiced helping the actor fall on the stilts, didn't feel confident in their ability to catch him. Since the circus consultant didn't feel comfortable teaching the fall, the production manager, asked a friend who is experienced working on construction stilts to come in and teach the fall the next day. This friend came in and the actor playing the Nasty Interesting Man/Child Lord of the Underworld and the chorus showed her the fall they had practiced without the stilts the day before. She agreed that would also be safe on construction stilts.

While the actor was getting practice falling on the stilts, I told the chorus that, while their role as spotter was important, we still had to block the scene in a way that didn't feel as though they were five actors waiting for another to fall, but the chorus following the Child. As soon as I mentioned re-blocking the section, one of the chorus members started to cry. In retrospect, I realise that they were so nervous about being responsible for their colleague's safety that they were really on edge. At the time, I was taken aback

and ended up backpedaling a bit: “I’m not going to change too much, but we still need to be in the play” etc.



Figure 13: The Child Monster

S. Fera, F. Winter, T. Scott, R. Denis, B. Henderson

Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

Once they did have a chance to practice the fall from the stilts, they calmed down a lot. The experienced stilt walker was so matter of fact and relaxed – telling stories of falling off six-foot stilts and being fine – that it calmed everyone down. Also, the cast’s first time practicing the fall off the stilts was completely seamless. The actor fell to his knees, tucking his arms and head, and the spotters caught him well before he hit the ground and settled him gently down onto the mat. We practiced a few more times with new blocking and with the actor on stilts pretending to lose his balance. Each fall was safe, controlled and easy. We added the stilt drop to the fight call, and the problem was solved.

This episode was probably the most stressful and frustrating part of the whole process, and the most frustrating part for me is that I could have prevented it so easily. I knew it had to be addressed as soon as we started talking about stilts, and I expected someone else to take care of it and put it out of my mind. I never should have done that. The result was a far too late, unnecessarily hysterical reaction that affected the cast. It was

dealt with by our very supportive production team quickly and well, something for which I'm profoundly grateful.

Part 32: Lighting Design and Projection

While we did talk about the nature of the lighting design earlier in the process, we did the real work of lighting in the theatre the week before cue to cue. This is always the case, but it was more true for *Eurydice* because of the combination of projector use and the special problems of the set. The white set meant that an effective blackout was virtually impossible and ineffective, and because the floor was glossy, stage light reflected off of the floor and washed out colour. This problem was exacerbated because we were relying on projectors to do most of our colour effects and projector bulbs aren't bright enough to compete with stage light.

I didn't have a strong vision for the projectors, though they seemed to offer some interesting options. Early in the process, the lighting team and I decided that the unique properties of the set would mean that a trial and error approach to projections would suit us best. My sense was that we wanted to move away from realistic projected images and backgrounds to a more abstract approach. We were also concerned that the slits cut in the Typar would distort images with hard lines. Starting the week before cue to cue, we began to test ideas for projection on the stage. The first idea the lighting designer showed me was vertical lines of colour, playing with the vertical lines cut in the Typar. These were interesting, and we talked about adding some sense of movement, slowly sliding down. I was, however, pushing for more saturated colours. We also looked at both more realistic sunset images and washes of colour. Again, I was struggling for more saturated colours.

The projection team also created some interesting flowing and dripping water effects, but we couldn't find a way to slow the videos down enough that they weren't distracting without seeing each frame, which makes the video seem to jolt instead of flow smoothly. Our major struggle with these more complex concepts was time. It takes a long time to make changes especially to videos, and since I couldn't articulate exactly what I wanted, the trial and error approach was taking a long time. I was struggling to articulate what I wanted in part because I didn't have a good handle on what the technology was capable of and in part because the images in my head were images of stage light. I have a lot more experience using stage light than projectors, and I realized the effects that I was trying to achieve with projectors were basically effects that very



Figure 14: Eurydice and Orpheus Torn Apart

K. Ranshaw, D. Curalli

Photo Credit: Javier Sotres

saturated stage lighting would give us. Every time we tried a new idea, as soon as we added enough front or side light to actually light the actor's faces, it would wash all of the colour and detail out of the projection. The lighting designer came up with an interesting set of projector spots created with pen drawings scanned into a computer and manipulated. Those became our area spots and the chaotic images that were on the backdrop during the Child's scenes. As we started to run out of time, the process of level set became more about trying not to get the cues wrong than to get them right. The set was unforgiving. If a cue was off, it looked terrible. Cues that worked were often beautiful.

In the end, we created the best balance we could in the time we had. I was tweaking cues with the lighting assistant ten minutes before we opened the doors on opening night, which resulted in the house lights coming on in one cue during the show. After opening, I sent a list of lighting notes to the associate lighting designer. When I saw a performance at the beginning of the following week, not all of the notes had been fixed, and we spent another hour tweaking cues in the following week. I found the lighting process on this show frustrating: we had created a difficult challenge for ourselves with

the white set, and we didn't really have enough time, instruments in the air or gel stock to get what we needed out of the set. We had planned to rely on the projectors, but we didn't give ourselves the time to make them work to their fullest advantage.

Part 33: Getting onto the Stage to Opening

I covered the biggest challenge of getting onto the stage when I wrote about the stilts, but I'd like to address one other: time. I knew going in that we wouldn't have a lot of time to work on the play between moving into the theatre and opening night. We had one spacing rehearsal on the deck, followed by the crew view, cue to cue, then tech, tech dress, preview and opening. During the spacing rehearsal, most of my focus was on the chorus, since we had changed their movement patterns just before we moved into the space. It also took us a long time to integrate the traveler panels in the moments where we needed them to work seamlessly with the action. We didn't finish spacing the show at the spacing rehearsal, which meant that we needed the extra time on stage during the crew view. I did manage to schedule half an hour to work on Scene 1.1 on the day of the crew view, and we continued to make progress. As always, we ran out of time before we really found the rhythm of the scene.

During cue to cue, I did eke out as much time as I could to work with actors on notes, but because we were also still struggling with lighting, I didn't get as much time as I would have liked. I was counting on having some time to work notes after tech and tech dress, but because of the complicated makeup and falls, lifts, etc., most of the actors' call time was taken up before the run. I had seven minutes of time to do notes by the time the actors changed after the dress rehearsal, so for both tech dress and preview, I insisted on doing notes before the actors changed. There were a few things I wanted to work on during this week that I didn't have a chance to: Scene 1.1 continued to be a problem; Eurydice's fall down the stairs didn't look as smooth as I would have liked, since I was originally hoping to have more focused light in that moment than the set allowed; there were a few scenes that hadn't come up to pace after the Not... But... exercise, including the scenes with the Nasty Interesting Man, Eurydice's first monologue when she arrives in the Underworld, the scene where the Father gives Eurydice the letter from Orpheus, Orpheus calling the operator to try to reach the Underworld and the scene between the Child and Orpheus in the Underworld. While I did get a chance to run the latter scene with the actors in the dressing room before opening, most of the other scenes had too much air in them.

I had been hoping to look at some of the other scenes at our rehearsal on the Tuesday of the second week, which is traditionally an Italian run, but the actor playing Eurydice was sick. I did look at the scenes she wasn't in, but it's tough to look at much in *Eurydice* without Eurydice.

While there were many challenges during this period of rehearsal, there were also some triumphs. After our cue to cue, we had a day off. I spent that day trying to figure out how to make the show take flight. I knew we had a good, solid version of the script with a lot of great elements, but I wasn't sure if it would take that leap that moves a show from good to magic. I felt like the potential was there, but I didn't know what it needed to get there. After a frustrating week of fighting with lights and worrying about stilts, I came into the dress rehearsal feeling like if I said the right thing or tweaked the right scene, the play would come alive, but I didn't know what to say or tweak. Instead, I just watched the run. The first movement trundled along, as did the top of the second. Then, about a third of the way through the second movement, something happened, the actor playing Eurydice, just let go. All of sudden the show started to lift, not smoothly or consistently, but it started. She reminded me of something in that run that I had forgotten in the all-consuming labour of building this play: directors can't make a show fly, only actors can.

The magic of theatre is in watching actors surrender to the play, let go and commit. I can't make them do that. I can build a good solid show to act as their foundation, I can set them up to feel confident enough to take that leap, but I can't push them off the ledge. It sounds really cheesy when you put it down in black and white, but that was the most important thing I learned during this whole process. I'll try not to forget it again.

Chapter 3: Reflections

I had a long conversation with a friend after he saw the show about whether this play is a tragedy with some whimsical elements or a whimsical play with some tragedy in it. He thought the former, and I knew I had put the latter on stage.

I am proud of the version of the play that we created. I watched several young actors do the best work I've seen them do to date. More importantly, I watched them own their characters, their bodies, their voices and the stage more fully than I had previously seen, and I am proud of that. Our *Eurydice* was self-assured, funny, touching, engaging and beautiful; it had something resembling vision behind it, even if it was a far more collaborative than an individual vision. I'm proud of that as well, but as I reread my original play analysis, I know I lost something too.

The play is a tragedy. It's a funny, whimsical and delicate tragedy, but it is still a tragedy. I don't think it needs to be heavy or dark, but I don't think that all of the themes that I believe are most important to the text came through in what I put on stage in January. At its heart, this is a story about a woman in relationship to three men: the innocent husband, the protective father and the sexually, attractive, but dangerous guy. I'm not sure we ever did believe in this *Eurydice* that she was tempted by the Nasty Interesting Man. While some of this was affected by the actors' perception of the character, if I were to do this again, I would spend more time bringing this into the character's given circumstances in rehearsal. Without this element, we didn't have enough tension in the first movement.

The tragic elements of the play were also undermined by interplay between the set and lights. While I'm pleased that I took the risk on the white box set, because of the challenges of lighting it, the Underworld was often warmer, more comfortable and more beautiful than the alienating space I had originally envisioned.

The chorus, too, traveled a long way from the extension of the Stones that I had originally seen them as. In part, this was because they were more engaged with creating music and sound than I thought they would be. While I do miss some of the moodier scenes I had imagined, with groups of Stones going back in to a vast space, I think the soundscape the chorus created was worth changing their role. That having been said, I think the roles of the chorus could have been more clearly defined and stronger if I had listened to the instinct in rehearsal that was telling me what we were doing wasn't

working a long time before. What did end up on the stage was a little more haphazard and general than I would have ideally liked.

Time did end up being a major barrier toward the end of this process. I think the active analysis/Not... But... combined approach to the text yields great results, and I want to keep working with it. In *Eurydice*, however, we ran out of time to bring the play to pace, and I think there was still too much air in the play that went on stage. As I move forward with these rehearsal techniques, I will be looking for a third stage in the process that can shake up the deliberate rhythm that is a symptom of Not... But....

I have a hard time assessing the success of this production because the thematic content that got lost often did so because of the collaborative nature of the process. I worked hard through the fall to say “yes,” to encourage the students to own their designs or their characters. I think that the ownership that the cast and production team had for their work is the greatest success of the production. The show did take flight; it had an element of magic. That may not have happened if I pushed an actor into a place where she was uncomfortable because of a thematic element of the play that isn’t explicit in the text, or if had demanded the water pump be a pump not an abstract pipe sculpture. I took a lot of risks on other people during this process, and I’m proud of that. But I’m happy to admit that I also lost sight of some of the larger thematic elements at play.

Once I brought other people into this process, I was committed to the play we put on stage being ours, not mine, and I don’t plan to stop working this way. I do want to find a way to facilitate that level of collaboration without losing sight of the larger themes at work in the piece, and I will keep trying to find that balance. Moving forward, I have to continue to remind myself that the larger vision is the domain of the director, and no matter how compelling submerging yourself in the rehearsal process is, it’s important to find the time and energy to step back and look at the whole with more objective eyes.

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Appendix A: Director's Notes from the Production Program

"What if lightness is a philosophical choice to temper reality with strangeness, to temper intellect with emotion, to temper emotion with humour. Lightness is then a philosophical victory over heaviness. A reckoning with the humble and small and invisible." – Sarah Ruhl

I'm obsessed with Sarah Ruhl. I have been since I first read *The Clean House* in 2010. By then, she'd already received the MacArthur Fellowship, and *Eurydice* had been produced hundreds of times (this year alone, there will be 24 productions of the play across the US and Canada). So, despite feeling like I'd just made a miraculous discovery, I was really jumping on a quickly filling bandwagon.

The thing I find so engaging about Ruhl's work is the quirky blend of emotional depth, whimsy, soaring imagery and down to earth humour. There is something innately feminine about her work, though it is rarely overtly feminist. Her work embraces a gentler, more emotionally expressive, less linear and more sensual and imagistic quality, and none of her plays more so than *Eurydice*. That might be why it is produced so much. It's not the cleanest, most mature or easily staged of her plays, but it contains a commitment to the haunting imagery, humour and poetic language that characterize Ruhl's work.

So, why this play? And why now? I've been asked these two questions over and over. And I answer, academically and practically and rarely with the whole truth: because it moves me, it delights me, it opens me to my own griefs and my own joys. It removes me from my most cynical self and reminds me of my most idealistic. It fills me with wonder. Because in all of the ways it is imperfect and human, it is, as Ruhl says, a triumph of lightness.

Thanks so much to my MFA advisors: Stephen Malloy for making me question everything, Tom Scholte for helping me find my confidence, Stephen Heatley for supporting me every step of the way, and to my cohort Evan Frayne for his companionship and friendship over the past 18 months. Thanks too the Sydney Risk Foundation and Canadian Federation of University Women of South Delta, whose support could not have come at a better time.

Thanks to the designers for helping me see this play, and to the production team, especially Jay, Jim, Jodi, Brad and Lynn who made the impossible happen over and over again. Thanks to Cathy and Gayle for their amazing eyes and ears. And the biggest thanks I can give to the cast for jumping in with both feet, working hard and making me laugh and cry – occasionally at the same time. It's been a blast guys! And finally, thanks to all of my family, but especially: Heather without whom I would be badly dressed, underfed and homeless; Ken for dog care and breakfasts and shared rants; and

Alex and Link for the kind of love you only get from dogs and the very best of humans.
I couldn't do this without you guys.

I hope you enjoy the show!

Appendix B – Performance Analysis: *Eurydice*

Note: This paper was submitted to Professor Kristy Johnston as part of the course Theatre 562 on 12 December 2014.

Performance Analysis: *Eurydice*

In *Eurydice*, Sarah Ruhl explores loss and loneliness in a sodden reframing of the Orpheus myth. One of Ruhl's most produced scripts, *Eurydice* has enjoyed strong reviews in many of its productions, however, I find a tension between what most critics are writing about themes of the play and the story that unfolds on stage. The play is a meditation on memory and grief, but the story at the heart of the piece – the dramatic arc of the play – focuses on the conflict between romantic and paternal love, all under a threat of sexual violence that is rarely mentioned in the critical response. Using reviews of the work, critical analyses of the script and interviews with the playwright, I will analyse the structure to examine the dramatic conflict at the core of this text and the factors – the style, poetic language and theatrical imagery – that make what is memorable about the text thematic and emotional rather than the story. I will look at the premier production at Madison Repertory Theatre in Wisconsin in 2003, the production at The South Coast Repertory Theatre in Orange County in 2004, Second Stage Theatre in Los Angeles' production in 2012, the remount of the Yale Repertory Theatre Production in New York in 2007 – including select press from the original production – and Vancouver's Secretly Women Productions staging in 2012.

The Play: Inspiration and Reception

The Orpheus myth holds a significant place in the canon of Western theatre practice. The myth of the musician who travels into Hades to find his dead wife, only to lose her on the ascent because he looks back, has been the inspiration for operas, poems and stage adaptations, including plays by Tennessee Williams and Jean Anouilh (Strauss, 234). In *Descent and Return: The Orphic Theme in Modern Literature*, Walter A. Strauss identifies the core theme of Orpheus' descent into Hades as a journey "down to the depths of the psyche, to the depths of being, to death's realm, and back up to life and creation [...] Orpheus is truly a reconciler of opposites" (18). In *Eurydice*, Sarah Ruhl reframes the myth around Eurydice, giving her agency in her own fate and focusing on her journey. Here, Orpheus and his paramour are innocent youths, discovering romantic love for the first time. On the night of their wedding, a Nasty Interesting Man lures Eurydice away from her wedding and tries to rape her. She dies trying to escape him. When she arrives in the Underworld, Eurydice meets her father – a character who does not appear in any other version of the myth, but does not recognize her because she has passed through the river Styx and forgotten everything. Her father teaches her to remember. In Hades, the Nasty Interesting Man reappears as the child Lord of the Underworld and continues his sexual advances on Eurydice. When Orpheus comes for her, Eurydice is torn between her love for her father and her love for her husband. While she is following Orpheus out of the Underworld, Eurydice says his name, he turns around and she falls back into Hades. Her father, devastated at her loss, passes

through the river of forgetfulness and Eurydice finds him lying insensible. When the Lord of the Underworld tries to force her to marry him, Eurydice too passes through the river Styx and forgets. Orpheus arrives in Hades and has one brief moment of joy seeing Eurydice before his memories too are washed away.

In an interview with Wendy Weckwerth in 2004, Ruhl tells her, “I’d seen so many beautiful retellings from Cocteau to *Black Orpheus*, but rarely does anyone look at Eurydice’s experience. I always found that troubling—she’s the one who dies and takes a journey before Orpheus, but we don’t really see her experience” (30). In the same interview, Ruhl identifies Rilke’s “Orpheus, Eurydice, Hermes” as one of the exceptions, a meditation on the myth in which Eurydice is an individual with her own thoughts and feelings. In Rilke’s poem:

Already she was no longer the blond woman
who had sometimes echoed in the poet’s songs,
no longer the wide bed’s scent and isle
and that man’s property no more. (74-77).

By the time Eurydice is making her way out of Hades, she has become a different person: “her death being/filled her like fullness itself.” In the poem, Eurydice has forgotten Orpheus when he comes for her. This is part of what fascinated Ruhl: “I was caught with this idea of memory and language and the idea of Eurydice going into the Underworld and meeting her father

there" (30). What follows when Eurydice reconnects with her father is a meditation on the nature of memory and how memory relates to loss and grief, but there is more to the dramatic action of the play.

The themes of memory and grief seem to resonate most with the critics. Charles Isherwood of the *New York Times* in his review of the Yale Repertory Theatre production enthused, "it may just be the most moving exploration of the theme of loss that the American theater has produced since the events of Sept. 11, 2001." In a later review of the New York City remount, Isherwood identifies the central theme of the piece is that "commemorating life, its pleasures and problems, its transience and pain, is the only way to triumph over death and loss." Of the same production, Anita Gates says the play is "about every death, every loss, every paralyzing pang of grief." Those critics less taken by the play generally take the same core themes away from the piece. Eric Marchese reduced the South Coast Repertory production to "an exercise in personal nostalgia and a way to try to bridge the gap between the living and the dead," and in his review of the Second Stage Theatre production David Rooney states "it's the wrenching pain of remembering, of clinging to something as fragile as love even beyond the seeming finality of death, that courses through Ruhl's imperfect but poignant play." The impact of the piece for these critics seems primarily to be thematic; few talk about the dramatic action. Unlike his American colleagues, Colin Thomas, reviewing the *Secretly Women* production in Vancouver, says, "the main conflict in that

arena is between a woman's love for her father and her love for her husband." He is the only critic of any of these productions to focus on the conflict at the heart of the story, which leads me to ask: What are the elements of this play that leave audiences with an emotional resonance that overshadows the action of the play?

Structure: Conflict and Dramatic Action

While memory is a major theme in this piece, the core of the dramatic action is Eurydice's choice between her father and her husband, a classic theme around growing up and loss of innocence. In "Worshipping the Black Sun: Melancholy in Eugene O'Neill and Sarah Ruhl", James Al-Shamma also hones in this choice as the core conflict in the play:

The Electra complex is in evidence in Eurydice, as the protagonist struggles unsuccessfully to transfer her attachment from her father to her husband; after her time spent in the Underworld renewing her bond with her father, she is unwilling or unable to follow Orpheus back to life. (75)

Both Al-Shamma and Thomas identify this tension between filial and romantic love as the centre of the plot. That Ruhl's inspiration was Rilke's "Orpheus, Eurydice and Hermes" also indicates that this is the central moment of the piece, since the poem is written about the journey out of Hades and the moment Orpheus turns around

(Weckwerth, 30). Leading up to this moment, we see the tension between love for husband and father begin to build for Eurydice:

LOUD STONE. Your husband is waiting for you, Eurydice.

EURYDICE. I don't recognize him! That's a stranger!

LITTLE STONE. Go on. It's him.

EURYDICE. I want to go home! I want my father! (3.2.37-40)

Structurally, the moment when Orpheus turns seems to be the climax of the play. Ruhl's stage directions are uncharacteristically specific and they create a picture full of dramatic tension, with Eurydice walking away from her father and toward Orpheus. At the moment when Orpheus turns, time stops and the lovers have a long conversation that takes place in that moment, before they are dragged apart. Given that Eurydice's fall back into the Underworld is the climax, the play has a long coda: Eurydice's father gives up his memories, the Lord of the Underworld tries to force Eurydice to marry him, she gives up her memories, and Orpheus arrives in Hades. These are poignant moments with strong emotional resonance. In his review in *Variety*, David Rooney states that Maria Dizzia as Eurydice, "is achingly moving at times, particularly in a heartbreaking letter in which she relinquishes her love for Orpheus and provides instructions for his future wife." Anita Gates begins her *New York Times* review with:

I cry at the theater, sometimes even when the play isn't very good. But normally I know when it's coming; [...] as I

watched the final minutes of [...] Sarah Ruhl's "Eurydice,"

the tears came with the suddenness of grief.

This long denouement, filled with moments of grief and loss seems to define what many critics take away from the text because it moves them. In an interview in *Bomb* magazine, Paula Vogel and Sarah Ruhl talk about this phenomenon:

PV. It's about those larger-than-life moments; there's no hiding and you can't work your way up to it in a logical sequence of events. You have to jump in the cold, deep end of the pool.

SR. That's how I experience emotions. They come at you so suddenly sometimes.

One element of this piece that is often ignored in critical response is the role of the Nasty Interesting Man/Lord of the Underworld. He acts as antagonist in the piece, causing both Eurydice's death and her loss of memory, and though it is rarely mentioned in relationship to the play, the threat of sexual violence that he represents pervades the text. The first time the Nasty Interesting Man appears on stage in the third scene of the play, "he looks at her, hungry", and when he lures her back to his apartment with the promise of a letter from her father:

She turns to exit.

He blocks the doorway.

MAN. Wait. Eurydice. Don't go. I love you.

EURYDICE. Oh no.

MAN. You need to get yourself a real man. A man with

broad shoulders like me. Orpheus has long fingers that
would tremble to pet a bull or pluck a bee from a
hive—

EURYDICE. How do you know about my husband's fingers?

MAN. A man who can put his big arm around your little

shoulders as he leads you through the crowd, a man
who answers the door at parties... . A man with big
hands, with big stupid hands like potatoes, a man who
can carry a cow in labor.

The man backs EURYDICE against the wall. (1.5.68-77)

It is trying to escape this attempted rape that Eurydice dies, yet the critics who discuss this moment in the text often reduce it to chance, fate or Eurydice's own fault. In his review of the Second Stage production, Peter Hodgins describes the moment: "The man's caddish behavior alarms Eurydice, and she leaves in haste. Too much haste: she trips and falls down a long staircase, killing herself." Hodgins minimizes the behavior of the Nasty Interesting Man while blaming Eurydice for her own death. In her review of the New York City production, Miriam Chirico goes further, stating it "is no surprise that her death is her own fault. When Hades (Mark Zeisler), disguised as a Nasty

Interesting Man, lures her away from her own wedding with the promise of a letter from her father, she follows him to his high-rise apartment, only to fall to her death.” It may be that, since Ruhl has set out to give Eurydice agency, the tendency of directors is to make her completely the agent of her own fate, but threats of violence from the Nasty Interesting Man/Lord of the Underworld continue to drive Eurydice’s actions through the play. Despite his childish form, he continues his unwanted attempts at seduction:

EURYDICE. Please, don’t.

CHILD. Oooh—say that again. It’s nice.

EURYDICE. Please don’t.

CHILD. Say it in my ear.

EURYDICE. (toward his ear) Please, don’t.

CHILD. I like that.

(A seduction.) I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your
house down!

He blows on her face. (2.14.31-37)

The reincarnation of the Nasty Interesting Man as the child Lord of the Underworld reflects Eurydice’s own return to her childhood through the renewal of her relationship with her father. At this point in the text, Eurydice is protected from the child Lord’s violent, threatening sexuality by her father’s love. After Orpheus’ quest to retrieve her has failed and her father has erased his memory, the Lord of the Underworld returns,

ten feet tall, to force Eurydice to marry him: "I'll have them start preparing the satins and silks. You can't refuse me. I've made my choice. I'm ready to be a man now," (3.3.143-144). The threat of this forced marriage causes Eurydice to bathe herself in the river and forget, preventing her from ever reuniting with Orpheus. Although the Nasty Interesting Man/Lord of the Underworld is the antagonist of the piece, he – and the threat of sexual violence that he represents – is not what the audience takes away from it.

Language: the Maturation of Love

If the story's structure is an archetypal innocence-to-experience narrative of a woman's fear of giving up adult love for more innocent forms of love in a world full of sexual violence, the language of the play tells the story of that love. One of the most powerful tools Ruhl uses to evoke emotion in this piece is language. Ruhl told Gwen Orel in a 2009 interview in *The Writer*:

I'm interested in language. Playwrights are often taught that 'drama is conflict, so have some people argue.' I find that so boring. Drama is many things; it's observation, it's poetry, it's architecture, it's confession ... it's argument but also opposition--like black, white; quiet, loud--not just people bickering.

This opinion shapes her use of language in *Eurydice*. The text is almost architectural, defining not only character and tone but the shape of each Movement, Ruhl's term for acts in the script. In the First Movement, the dialogue between Eurydice and Orpheus vacillates between conversational and imagistic.

EURYDICE. I don't need to know about rhythm. I have my books.

ORPHEUS. Don't books have rhythm?

EURYDICE. Kind of. Let's go in the water.

ORPHEUS. Will you remember my melody under the water?

EURYDICE. Yes! I WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR MELODY! It
will be imprinted in my heart like wax.

ORPHEUS. Thank you (*Eurydice* scene 1)

The conversational dialogue "Kind of" and "Let's go in the water" gives way seamlessly to more the more imagistic "it will be imprinted on my heart like wax," indicating to the audience the romantic, childish, storybook quality of their relationship. The dialogue between Orpheus and Eurydice in the First Movement is often funny, gently mocking seriousness of young love. This language hails the history of romantic poetry that is familiar to the Western ear.

ORPHEUS. I'm going to make each strand of your hair into
an instrument. Your hair will stand on end as it plays

my music and become a hair orchestra. It will fly you
up into the sky.

Orpheus' images are reminiscent of the Romantic poets, reflecting Byron's "She walks in beauty, like the night/Of cloudless climes and starry skies;" ("She Walks in Beauty" 1-2). This linguistic reference to a known form deepens the impression of innocent, if unrealistic, love shared by the young lovers. After Eurydice's death, Orpheus' language shifts:

Dear Eurydice,

Last night I dreamed that we climbed Mount Olympus and we started to make love and all the strands of your hair were little faucets and water was streaming out of your head and I said, why is water coming out of your hair? And you said, gravity is very compelling. (2.7.1-6)

In this letter, the romantic and hopeful images of Eurydice's hair lifting her into the sky become images of water, a symbol of grief and the Underworld. Orpheus' text is also more mature following Eurydice's death; the reference to sex, which the young lovers never speak of before this point, suggests that Orpheus has grown up since his loss. As the play continues, his text continues to evolve:

Eurydice!

Before I go down there, I won't practice my music. Some
say practice. But practice is a word invented by cowards.

(2.17.1-3)

The exclamation point after Eurydice and the short declarative sentences indicate a more confident, more commanding, more adult attitude than Orpheus has had up to this point. His grief has caused him to mature.

Like Orpheus, Eurydice's romantic language is changed by her death and by her interactions with her father. She too relies on imagery, but she has a more realistic, cynical view of their relationship:

This is what it is to love an artist: The moon is always rising about your house. The houses of your neighbours look dull and lacking in moonlight. But he is always going away from you. Inside his head there is always something more beautiful. (2.16. 10-13)

There is richness and a deep loneliness in Eurydice's images of her life with Orpheus. She has come to recognize the isolation she felt when she was alive. Their differing world views, Orpheus' love of music and her unreconciled loss of her father all contribute to her loneliness. After reconnecting with her father, whose love of language matches her own and who fills a deep need in her for parental love, her relationship with Orpheus seems flat in comparison. After losing her father, however, Eurydice writes a letter to her husband that suggests a deeper, more mature and more accepting

attitude to romantic love. This letter urges Orpheus to marry again, and includes a piece in verse:

To my Husband's Next Wife:

Be gentle.

Be sure to comb his hair when it's wet.

Do not fail to notice

that his face flushes pink

like a bride's

when you kiss him.

Give him lots to eat.

He forgets to eat and he gets cranky.

When he's sad,

kiss his forehead and I will thank you. (3.3.169-179)

One of several poems embedded in this text, this simple verse acts as a counterpoint to the heavily imagistic dialogue of much of the play. Describing this phenomenon in his review of the Second Stage production, Eric Marchese says, "Ruhl views language as the product of vague constructs with abstract meaning, and uses words like a poet, or the way a composer uses notes."

Not all critics, however, have found that the varying styles of dialogue in *Eurydice* serve the story, and some have found it disconcerting. In his review of the Yale

Repertory Theatre's production, Charles Isherwood stated, "Ms. Ruhl's dialogue is variously cryptic, operatic, aphoristic and bluntly funny, an admixture that admittedly has a few lumps." In a 2007 review of the New York City remount of the same production, directed by Les Walters, Isherwood reiterates his discomfort with the language: "You might almost wish there were subtitles here, alerting you to the inner meaning of the lyrical, illogical and, yes, sometimes overly quirky dialogue." Isherwood, however, precedes this comment with, "much in 'Eurydice' could mystify theatergoers used to reclining on the comforting cushions of linear narrative and naturalistic dialogue." Isherwood is not the only critic who expresses discomfort with Ruhl's language. In his review of the 2004 production in Los Angeles, Paul Hodgins warns:

Those who are touched by Ruhl's mix of poetry, humor, aching sadness and willful eccentricity will find much to like in "Eurydice." But I suspect many will come away from this production frustrated that it doesn't add up to more.

The language is one element that leads to a heavily theatrical style that, as Isherwood points out, is a strong departure from the more conventional realism and naturalism.

Theatricality: Water and Stone

The two other elements that set *Eurydice* apart as a self-consciously theatrical piece are the use of images, particularly images of water, and the presence of the chorus. The vast and imaginative metaphoric landscape of the play reflects the love and grief onstage. Water is the most present image in the piece. The play begins by the seaside, on her wedding night Eurydice is lured away by the Nasty Interesting Man while she is alone by a water pump and the Underworld is sodden. In his book *Sarah Ruhl: A Critical Study of the Plays*, James Al-Shamma talks about the significance of Eurydice's relationship with water:

Eurydice is drawn to water: she leaves her wedding twice for the water pump, she asks the Nasty Interesting Man for a glass of water, and she requests a bath when she arrives in the Underworld. As water is associated with tears and bereavement, her craving for it manifests a compulsion to attend to the unfinished business of mourning for her father." (24)

Water is also linked to memory; Eurydice arrives in Hades in an elevator full of water, holding an umbrella. Of this moment, Ruhl says "I think it's something about contemporary alienation: the experience of going to the Underworld involves an alienation or unfamiliarity. Not in a devilish or horrible way, but in a contemporary

way. Like when you go to a mall and you're in an elevator. It smells funny and it's tinny. Then you walk out and you're in a corporate hell" (*Invisible Terrains*, 29). This juxtaposition of familiar images in strange situations contributes to the sense of whimsy in the piece. Ruhl adds to this moment with the umbrella. In *10 Essays I Don't Have Time to Write*, Ruhl says of umbrellas on stage:

I love them. [...] The sight of an umbrella makes us want to feel both wet and dry, both the presence of rain, and the dryness of shelter. The umbrella is real on stage, and the rain is a fiction on stage; even if there are drops of water.

The images in *Eurydice* are playing with this tension in the audience; Ruhl's images are impossible, not lifelike, and yet they give the audience delight in the theatre because they are and therefore could be. Ruhl is an expert at creating wonder. This expertise adds a necessary lightness to the overtones of grief and loss in the piece. In her notes on the text, Ruhl describes the sodden Underworld as more like Alice in Wonderland than Hades, an instruction that has seen many incarnations. David Rooney describes the Underworld in the Los Angeles production: "The depiction of hell not as a standard issue fiery pit but as a cool, aquamarine tiled Roman bath." In the New York production the set has been alternately described as "designed to look like a tiled community shower stall" (Finkle) and a "tilted vision of the Underworld as a slightly dilapidated spa, wallpapered in letters written from the dead to the living" (Isherwood). No matter

what the interpretation, in *Eurydice*, Hades is literally dripping with grief. Water, however, is also associated with forgetting, it is the river that washes away memories, and the seaside is the ideal place for love, so Ruhl uses this ongoing theatrical image to tie together themes of love, grief and memory.

The chorus of stones is another unapologetically theatrical element of this script that hails back to Greek origins of the myth with a contemporary twist. In her notes on the play, Ruhl says, “The Stones might be played as though they are nasty children at a birthday party.” This chorus is a reference both to the chorus in Greek plays and to the moment in Ovid’s version of the Orpheus myth when “even the stones wept” in Hades when they heard Orpheus’ music (Al-Shamma, *Critical Study*, 16). Ruhl includes this moment in *Eurydice*:

LITTLE STONE. Orpheus braved the gates of hell to find you

LOUD STONE. He played the saddest music.

BIG STONE. Even we—

THE STONES. The stones—

LITTLE STONE. Cried when we heard it. (3.2.46-50)

This chorus of stones is one of the key images defining the style of the piece. In her interview with Ruhl in *Bomb*, Paula Vogel states “When you put a chorus on stage, as in *Eurydice*, there’s a focus on the theatricality. There’s no way that you can be in that intimate, fourth-wall realism once that happens.” The playwright responds “If you

excavate people's subjectivity and how they view the world emotionally, you don't get realism" (55). Thus the chorus becomes a tool for Ruhl to express one element of the emotional story at play; the Stones articulate a fear of emotion and fear of loss that might make forgetting preferable to grieving a beloved memory until they are moved by Orpheus' music. Not all critics of the work have found the chorus an effective theatrical tool. David Rooney says:

If the quirks sometimes feel cumbersome as in the vaudevillian chorus of talking Stones [...] when it all connects, the melding of stylistic flourishes and bold theatricality with humanism and an unapologetic romantic streak makes Ruhl's work invigorating.

Miriam Chirico, however, insists, "[t]he difference between the stones and Eurydice and her father exposes the play's central thrust: human connection is only possible by the memories we possess of one another" (317). As with other of Ruhl's more blatantly theatrical techniques, the efficacy of the chorus is largely subjective, but there is no question that their presence is vital in defining the almost surreal style of the piece.

Conclusion

In *Eurydice*, Sarah Ruhl has created a world of theatrical pastiche. The archetypal innocence to experience story unfolds in a whimsical, dreamlike world of poetic language and startling imagery that challenges and unsettles the audience. Despite

varied critical response to *Eurydice*, this text remains one of Ruhl's most produced plays. When the right production meets an audience willing to participate in the surreal dream and open up to a more visceral level of experience, the play elicits strong emotional reactions from its audiences. While the archetypal plot of a young woman torn between childhood, represented by her father's love, and the excitement and fear of adult love and the enticement and fear of sexual maturity is an odd fit for Ruhl's exploration of grief, Ruhl's remarkable capacity to write with emotionally resounding, poetic language and evoke unapologetically theatrical images makes the piece resonate.

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