



Sarah Ruhl's

EURYDICE

In English, co-directed by Henny Fleischmann and Charlie Bierend

10. April 2025, 20:00 Uhr

11. April 2025, 20:00 Uhr

12. April 2025, 20:00 Uhr

Hamburger Sprechwerk, Klaus-Groth-Str. 23, 20535 Hamburg

"A tender-hearted comedy – weird and wonderful."

(New York Times)

"EURYDICE feels like watching a poem and listening to a painting."

(Wall Street Journal)



The wedding day of the too-young and too-in-love Eurydice and Orpheus ends unexpectedly: Unable to resist the promise of a letter written by her deceased father, Eurydice finds herself at a stranger's apartment. On her escape, she trips, falls, and dies. In the underworld, where all words are lost but stones can speak, Eurydice is left with no memories of her husband and reunites with her father. When Orpheus's beautiful music makes even the stones weep, the wedded couple are given the chance to return to the world of the living – and Eurydice is left with a choice to make. A tale of love, loss, and letters.

EURYDICE reimagines the classic myth of Orpheus and Eurydice not through Orpheus's infamous pilgrimage to retrieve his bride but through the eyes of its heroine. The production departs from the myth aplenty to create an associative visual poem full of light-hearted humor and emotional intensity. With contemporary characters, surprising plot twists, and inappropriately seductive side characters, this play is a fresh look at a timeless love story.

Sarah Ruhl ranks among the most produced living US playwrights. She was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize twice, a Tony Award nominee, and has received the MacArthur Fellowship and PEN Theater Award. She adapted EURYDICE into a libretto for an opera of the same name in 2020, which was then nominated for the 2023 Grammy Awards. She is also an acclaimed poet and essayist, whose memoir SMILE was among Time magazine's 100 Must-Read Books 2021. We present the play with an original score by Bremen-based composer and sound designer Ole Schmitt.

This production has been awarded BEST STAGE PRESENTATION at the international FEATS festival in Antwerp 2023.

Tickets

Online presales: 18 / 9 €

Box office: 20 / 12 €

School classes / student groups: 7 € per student. Accompanying teachers/lecturers get in for free. Please register beforehand (up@uni-hamburg.de).

Coproduced with the Amerikazentrum.





SCHOOL PACK

EURYDICE

By Sarah Ruhl

ADAPTATION AND MYTHOLOGY

Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* is an **adaptation from the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, a well-known ancient myth**. Myth differs from fiction in that its meaning and significance stem from its deep connection to ideas and culture passed down through generations, even centuries and millennia. As such, myth is inherently adaptive, with characters and stories existing in countless versions and forms. In ancient times, whether myths were shared through drama, poetry, rituals, or oral traditions, each version reflected what the storyteller valued or believed was missing from previous tellings. The symbolic elements of a myth were always shaped and manipulated by the teller, influenced by context, audience, and personal motivations—much like our modern-day practice of adaptation.

Contemporary adaptation, too, reworks a story or world. Broadly speaking, “**adaptation is repetition without replication**” (Linda Hutcheon). There are various reasons for creating an adaptation: economic appeal (audiences are drawn to familiar content), legal constraints (avoiding costly royalties), or the pursuit of cultural capital (using classical or “high-brow” material to elevate one’s status). Motivation can also be personal or political, such as paying tribute to an artist, subverting or challenging the prior work, or offering a critique by focusing on perspectives ignored or erased in the previous version(s) of a text. In the words of dramatist Michel Vinaver, “**adapting is substituting one’s own intentions for that of the prior text.**”

Discussion Questions

- What are some adaptations you're familiar with?
- Which elements of a story can be maintained or modified?
- Why might a writer or director choose to adapt a particular story?
- Can you think of any modern adaptations of Greek mythology?
- Based on your experience with the play, what do you think motivated Sarah Ruhl to reimagine the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice?

KEEP THE CHANGE: ADAPTING EURYDICE AND ORPHEUS

The Traditional Tale

The traditional myth of Orpheus and Eurydice tells the tragic story of Orpheus, a legendary Thracian musician whose music could enchant even lifeless objects and the wildest creatures. At their wedding, Eurydice wanders into the woods with her companions. In some versions, she is threatened to be raped by Aristaeus, the god of bees, or a lustful satyr, and while fleeing, she steps on a venomous snake, whose bite kills her. Other accounts describe her peacefully dancing with friends when she accidentally steps on the snake. Devastated by her death, Orpheus expresses his grief through music so heart-wrenching that it moves all of nature, even the stones, to mourn with him. In his sorrow, he resolves to descend into the underworld to retrieve Eurydice. His music softens even Cerberus, the three-headed monstrous watchdog of the underworld, and moves Hades himself, who grants Orpheus one chance to bring Eurydice back to life—on the condition that he must not look back at her during their journey to



the surface. However, as they ascend, Orpheus, filled with doubt and longing, turns to see Eurydice, breaking the condition and losing her forever.

Prominent Changes by Sarah Ruhl

While maintaining all major plot points, Ruhl's *Eurydice* shifts focus from Orpheus to Eurydice and emphasizes her experience in the underworld. Other key changes include Eurydice's **reunion with her deceased father** in the underworld, who helps her remember her prior life after she had been dipped in the river of forgetfulness. Unlike the myth, where Orpheus' turns back out of his own volition, losing her forever, here **Eurydice** calls out his name, which **causes him to turn**, which implies that she does not desire to return with Orpheus to the world of the living. **Ruhl's version thus reframes her character, providing voice and indicating agency, and stages different emotional relationships beyond the sole focus on Orpheus' artistic grief.**

The **relationship between Eurydice and Orpheus** is portrayed with deep complexity, particularly in how Orpheus' possessiveness and self-absorption distance him from truly connecting with her. Orpheus is not only emotionally distant, lost in his music, but he also views Eurydice more as an extension of his world—something to own and control—than as a partner with her own desires and needs: **"I want your hair to be my instrument,"** he says in the first scene. This doesn't contradict the ancient myth but foregrounds Orpheus' possessiveness vis-à-vis contemporary ideas about amorous relationships on equal footing by offering Eurydice's perspective, which has been traditionally overlooked in past retellings. Initially, the couple are presented "a little too young and a little too in love," to fully understand their different expectations regarding their relationship. This glossing over of their emotional distance and Orpheus' possessiveness highlights the fragility of their bond, ultimately shaping the trajectory of their tragic story.

In Ruhl's play, **Hades** is reimagined as a character that is both **childlike and menacing**, and portrayed by the same actor as the Nasty, Interesting Man. This interpretation lacks the gravitas of traditional depictions of the Greek god Hades, instead embodying a blend of threat and somewhat humorous absurdity. Serving as a projection of the various forces pulling Eurydice in different directions, the Lord/Interesting Man encapsulates the dreamlike surrealism that permeates the narrative. Through this unconventional representation, Ruhl explores the intricate motifs of seduction, attraction, manipulation, threat, power, and desire, weaving them into the fantastical fabric of the play.

Discussion Questions

- How would you describe the relationship between Eurydice and Orpheus in *Eurydice*? What emotions or dynamics stand out to you?
- After seeing the play, how does Eurydice's first death in Ruhl's version connect with the traditional myth? What significance does the double casting of the "Nasty Interesting Man" and the Lord of the Underworld bring to the story?
- In the traditional myth, Orpheus loses Eurydice, and that's the last we hear of her. How do you interpret Eurydice's second death in Ruhl's play, which some view as a form of suicide?
- Are there any other changes or shifts in the play you noticed? What motifs or symbols from the adaptation in comparison to the myth stood out to you, such as the role of the Stones, the letters, and music? How does Orpheus descend to the Underworld in this adaptation?

KINDS OF LOVE

Ruhl introduces **Eurydice's father**, a character **unknown in ancient mythology**. He resides in the underworld where he helps Eurydice remember her past. Their relationship becomes a poignant exploration of memory and family, adding a layer of emotional depth to the story that is absent in



traditional tellings. The father's presence creates an underlying tension, for many readers and audiences almost a competition for Eurydice's love and attention between Orpheus and her father. However, rather than framing this as a direct rivalry, **Ruhl explores how Eurydice's relationships with both men reflect different facets of love and belonging.** The play becomes less about Orpheus' singular quest and more about Eurydice's internal struggle between (or simultaneity of) two kinds of love—romantic and familial. It also touches on different stages of life, such as the transition from child to adult (or simultaneity thereof), and contrasting temperaments—her father's melancholic nostalgia versus Orpheus' sanguine hope for the future, both of which she can relate to.

Eurydice is positioned not just between the living world, where Orpheus beckons her back through letters, and the dead, where she now resides, but also between these two figures representing opposing emotional pulls. Rather than having us wonder “whom she will choose,” Ruhl invites us to feel through Eurydice's conflict, allowing us to **experience various forms of love, loss, and longing and identifying with different characters at different moments in the play.** Even when Eurydice seems to be making a strong choice, calling Orpheus' name and making him turn toward her, severing their connection forever, she cannot articulate why she did it, apologizes, and writes a letter of instructions to his future wife in a very loving and affectionate matter. Ruhl thus effectively opens different simultaneous, non-exclusive kinds of love, affection, and belonging.

Discussion Questions

- Sarah Ruhl dedicates *Eurydice* “to my father,” drawing from her own experience of losing him to cancer and imagining “a few more conversations with him.” How do you feel about this deeply personal approach? Did the allegedly real quotes and anecdotes from her father blur the lines between myth and reality for you? Did this enrich or complicate your appreciation of the play?
- Eurydice's mother is notably absent in the play. What do you think this absence suggests about the family dynamics and themes in *Eurydice*?