

# A Hell of a Play: Glass Horse Project seeks the nontraditional



Orpheus, portrayed by Dillon Medina, orchestrates his next move.

It's opening night at Glass Horse Project in New Bedford. I've read up on Sarah Ruhl's play based on the Greek myth — Eurydice was the wife of Orpheus, who painstakingly tried to bring her back from the dead with his enchanting music (or, in this adaptation, his letters, too). I walk into what was an art gallery and see, to my immediate left, three actors intertwined in a motionless pile on the floor. I'm in awe as they stay in that position for more than 40 minutes before the play begins, and remain there for nearly another half hour.

"Stones can do so much while doing so little," says artistic director Korey Pimental, producer for this show. "There's such a power to stillness. For the first third of the play, you get them just sitting there. And when we start the Underworld scenes, they come alive and go from complete stillness to this movement that is so concise and so specific."

Taylor Corbett is the co-artistic director for Glass Horse Project, serving as director for this piece. She explains how she uses makeup to help the stones (Big Stone, Little Stone and Loud Stone, portrayed by Kerri Lamothe, Monica Hartford and Jordan Daniel Smith, respectively) become the rock-human hybrids. "It was like part of their skin was the rock, and the point was to highlight the cracks in their faces and arms from being stones," explains Corbett. "The way they move is probably one of my favorite things about this show. I like to create an environment of collaboration for everybody. I gave the stones a couple of devising exercises to see how they can move with each other and their bodies. They came up with this whole movement piece. As we worked with them, they just became heavier limbed. If you're going to move, the only easy way is by rolling - as though rolling around in the Underworld was very much fun. They get the distinct pleasure of being the bridge between the play and the audience. In a lot of our rehearsals, we started thinking of the audience as the other dead in the Underworld, unknowing of all of their memories, and we get to watch as they relive their memories. We also loved the way the stones were born in the river, and Hades picked up the rock and broke it into these three stones. As they go to sleep, they're back in their original form.

“While I directed the piece, there was a lot of letting the actors play - which is the basis of all theater - and seeing what they feel is necessary to be their characters, get their stuff together, have a truthful honest performance up there,” explains Corbett. “That was partly my direction, and partly the choices they made as actors. I can’t be happier with how well we all worked together.” She also credits stage manager Sev Marshall, and Megan Ruggiero on sound design, for bringing it all together.

“The actors that I shared the stage with are some of the most generous I’ve ever worked with,” says Pimental. “They were willing to try things and listen, so it felt like we were able to create this really authentic story together. The play itself requires so much vulnerability. In my opinion, you can’t fake vulnerability and authenticity. For me, as an artistic director...I really wanted to get to the root of this complex story that is layered in nuance in so many ways. We wanted to challenge ourselves and our company of people who worked on the show to step up our game in the face of a challenge. Sarah Ruhl is no joke. She’s so specific in her language. When you do too much to her acting and directing, you lose the brilliance of her writing and cheapen what she wrote for you. She creates this beautiful, creative world for you to play in. You don’t want to take it too far, making sure you don’t detract from her own beauty and wisdom.”

There are lots of great things happening tech-wise. “One of the cool things about this show is the otherworldly magical environment we get to be in,” says Corbett (Brad Costa, Glass Horse’s head of digital and marketing, created the ambiance and an entire world in the confines of the nontraditional space). “And in some ways, it’s almost as though the world changes as they move through it to accommodate who’s alive and who’s dead. There’s a separation here Orpheus eventually breaks out of. The Lord of the Underworld (portrayed by Pimental) comes in and we’re in house now, and everyone needs to know it. When we have a thunderstorm, using different colored lights in between blue, green, red, purple flashing the magic they have access to. There’s this stark difference between the kind of lighting you’d expect versus the lighting in the real world. The light’s coming in as Orpheus comes closer and closer to his goal of getting down there and finding her.”

Costumes? “It’s kind of a closet show. A lot of it the cast members brought in,” says Corbett. “Interesting was Orpheus, through the whole journey, is shedding one piece after another looking more and more disheveled... The moment Eurydice died, he started looking and did not stop looking. So all those pieces that we lose are casual pieces of that having to find her. He’ll have a tie on too tight and he’d have to ditch it.” For Lord of the Underworld, Corbett says, “I want him to look like every ’90s kid out there. A red sweater - the style there is just such a childish outfit to me - using the (Burger King paper) crown and the trench coat to help distinguish between the child and the interesting man.”

The setting tells us, via the changing ceiling and sound effects, where we are. When the cast is in the Underworld, the twinkling, starry sky changes to a narrowing well as we hear water dripping, giving us the impression of being underground. Ceiling projections also include orange clouds. Corbett explains, “It’s like the one day - at the sea - when they’re truly happy. There’s the intense love in the beginning with the night sky, then the playfulness of the love scene. And they just enjoy each other’s presence - the sun of youth and their bright future ahead.”

“The idea for the use of projection came from Taylor,” says Pimental. “She felt like the ceiling should never end, which I thought was so very Sarah Ruhl because it’s such a specific way to get something across. So when she said this, I thought, ‘Yes, let’s figure out how to do this!’ so we worked with our resident designer, Brad Costa, and made it happen.”

Ropes? “In the script, the father builds Eurydice a room of string,” says Corbett. “Because there are no rooms in the Underworld, the strings are a way to comfort her, a place where she can go to be safe and get that ability to remember her father. She can’t remember him and he can really smooth over their relationship. I think the creation of a string room is to provide a place for that to happen. We tried to incorporate that feeling with the four strings. One of the many actions he plays throughout the show is trying to avoid the smells, the sounds of the Underworld, trying to keep her in a good state of mind as she’s trying to deal with this new, magical stuff that he’s experienced already.”

The entire cast was on point as energetic, well-animated powerhouses. The titular role, portrayed by Maura Barry Van Voris, was a force to be reckoned with. Her facial expressions alone told stories from total elation to utter torment. She owned that stage as others fed off her vitality, despite being a dead woman. Matching her vigor and zest for life was Dillon Medina’s Orpheus. Their flirty/flighty chemistry makes you feel the love and torture as they feel it. Eurydice’s father (David Adams Murphy) rounds out the tone of the Underworld with his compassionate understanding and fatherly love for his daughter’s plight. This synergy is further enhanced by the stones, who included the audience by worming their way under the seats, sitting on laps, and making eye contact.

The admission cost, for the moment, is by donation. “Part of that comes from the fact that, when I was in college, I heard this statistic that about 27% of New Bedford lives at or below the poverty line,” explains Pimental. “If people are situated at that specific place in their lives, how can they have access to the art? For us, the ability to access the arts is the fundamental right for societal participation. We are trying to expand as an organization and don’t really know what this is going to look like yet. So even if we don’t have a set price for a ticket, we’ll make sure the price would be accessible to people. We’d have more than one pay-what-you-can night, depending on how long our run is.”

“For me, personally, we call ourselves a fringe (theater) because we’re not in a dedicated theater space,” says Pimental. “We’re just really making this work before we can find a space where we can set up an audience section where people can come work. We’re trying to challenge ourselves to push the boundaries of what people expect to happen in this nontraditional space. We put out some lights and chairs, set up our projector and we’re on a roll!”

*The Glass Horse Project presents Sarah Ruhl’s Eurydice through February 1. 137 Union St, New Bedford. Call 774-320-4612 or visit The Glass Horse Project on Facebook ([facebook.com/theglasshorseproject](https://facebook.com/theglasshorseproject)).*