

Psyche and Psychology

Old stories rebirthed in the sea

Fear, loss, transformation, lust, betrayal, love, humor — and the power of story. That's what you'll get at the UO's *Metamorphoses*, which opened to a packed house on May Day.

You'll also see 10,000 lbs. of water in an immense pool on the Robinson Theatre stage, quick costume changes and lighting that takes advantage of every sparkly droplet. Impressive stagecraft combines with ancient tales that, as any child studying Greek mythology knows, might open the doors of modern consciousness.

In 2001, director/playwright Mary Zimmerman exploited that connection with an adaptation of Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses* on Broadway. In the original lengthy poem, Ovid tells more than 250 tales, with framing devices within framing devices portraying everything from politics to mythology to philosophy.

Zimmerman picked 10 to include in her play. Familiar narratives like the story of greedy King Midas, who should have known better than to ask for everything he touched to turn to gold, mix with lesser known tales like the agonizing (and complex, now tinged with Freudian overtones and the potential for use by sexual abuse deniers) tale of Myrrha. When *Metamorphoses* opened a month after September 11, the New York press noted its resonance with the mood of the city: "Sorrow is a fugue," wrote *Times* critic Ben Brantley, one that spoke "with a dreamlike hush directly to New Yorkers' souls."

Without that overlay of resonating shock and grief, the tales become something else in the hands of director John Schmor and the mostly able young cast. The tale of Midas (UO grad student Kato Buss, who played Claudius in Schmor's zombie adaptation of *Hamlet* last spring) speaks to the bubble market of the Bush years. Buss' daughter Olivia plays Midas' daughter, whom the king ignores until he's finally happy with his monetary situation. But when he turns his attention to her, they both realize too late that Midas' attention is nothing to be desired.

I saw the play on opening night, surrounded by audience members who know the actors well from the thick UO/Eugene theater



Andrew Poletto in *Metamorphoses*

community. This meant that several actors, garnered more laughs, whistles, applause and other reaction than might be the case during other performances. This definitely occurred with Andrew Poletto, whose long, chiseled torso lends itself to dance professor Walter Kennedy's choreography for the god Dionysus, and who plays Narcissus in an interlude that includes a smart nod to social media.

Because the stories skip around, topics changing and lightly touching on each other, the pool serves as an almost unifying force — though director Schmor notes that not every story takes place on or near water. One that does stands out in its loss and transformation: the tale of Alcione (Stephanie Brubaker) and Ceyx (Jeremy McLaughlin). Alcione, daughter of Poseidon, warns Ceyx not to return to the sea, but he goes off to work, leaving his beloved. They both suffer the bleakness of a god's wrath, but eventually receive another god's blessing as well. In the all too familiar story of Orpheus (Jacob King) and Eurydice (Alexis Schaetzle), the loss plays and replays with the strength of a memory loop that eventually wears out. No blessing there; only pain.

But there are lighter moments — the tale of Pomona (Zoë Preval) and Vertumnus (Jameson Tabor) being one of them, though it envelops the tale of a goddess (Courtney Kearney) punishing a young woman (Brubaker again, stronger in this role) with an uncontrollable lust for her father (Braden Couchner). Hard to watch. Even the splashes from Tabor's cavorting at the close of the story don't entirely wash away the bitter taste.

The ensemble play, devoted to the power of story, serves up Kennedy's visually striking movement work, Brad Steinmetz's dark set and the lighting and technical skills of Janet Rose, along with the costume skills of Sandy Bonds (whose heroic crew, I imagine, must work through the night to deal with various sodden, stretched or torn clothing). *Metamorphoses* inaugurates the new Robinson far better than did the silly *Around the World in 80 Days*. Some bits were slow on opening night, and the pool can overtake the narrative from time to time, but this is one to see. **EW**

Metamorphoses runs at the UO's Robinson Theatre through May 16. Tix at the UO Ticket Office, 346-4363.

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OPENING NIGHTS

Suicide Weather Opens Friday, May 8, at the Lord Leebrick Theatre.

Suicide Weather playwright and UO alum Jeff Whitty's a local-ish boy, or at least he was before he headed east and found big success with Avenue Q. Now the Leebrick's artistic director, Craig Willis, takes a chance with a dark family comedy from Whitty's younger days. Show dates are May 8-9, 14-17, 21-24 & 28-31. Tix at www.lordleebrick.com or 465-1506.

Forbidden Broadway, Greatest Hits, Vol. 1 Opens Friday, May 8, at Actors Cabaret of Eugene.

You SO know you want to see this mash-up! Show dates are May 8-9, 15-17, 22 & 29-30. Tix at actorscabaret.org or 683-4368.

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