



The Life and Afterlife of Eurydice (and Orpheus) in Opera

A Visions and Voices Signature Event
Presented with LA Opera

Thursday, January 30, at 7:30 p.m.

Bovard Auditorium, University of Southern California



Matthew Aucoin



Sarah Ruhl



Kenneth Reinhard

Eurydice Image: Courtesy of LA Opera

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Orpheus and Eurydice is a tragic tale from Greek mythology, normally told with Orpheus as the protagonist and Eurydice as a passive object.
- Eurydice*, a new opera by Matthew Aucoin (composer) and Sarah Ruhl (librettist), centers Eurydice's perspective.
- The opera is based on Ruhl's 2003 play of the same name.
- Anticipating the world premiere of *Eurydice* at LA Opera, Aucoin and Ruhl will discuss the new opera, and contextualize it within mythological and operatic history, with Kenneth Reinhard, a professor of comparative literature and English at UCLA.
- The event will be introduced by baritone Rod Gilfry (USC Thornton) who plays Eurydice's father in the opera.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

In ancient Greek mythology, Orpheus, son of the god Apollo and the muse Calliope, plays music so beautiful it enchants anyone who encounters it. He loves and marries Eurydice.

Just after their wedding, while wandering in the forest—either dancing with Nymphs or being chased by a shepherd whose advances she has refused, depending on the version—Eurydice is bitten by a poisonous snake and dies instantly. Orpheus's songs of grief resound, touching the hearts of all beings. But he cannot tolerate the loss.

Orpheus descends to the Underworld and begs Hades to let Eurydice live a longer life. As moved as anyone by Orpheus's

music, Hades agrees to let Eurydice return to the land of the living, on one condition: that she will follow Orpheus out of the Underworld, and he will not turn to look at her until they are firmly back on earth. As they approach the end of their journey, Orpheus cannot help but to turn and look for her, and in an instant he sees Eurydice and she is gone, forever.

Orpheus sings a mourning song, begging for his own death. He is torn apart—by beasts or by the Maenads, again varying across different tellings of the myth—but his head is saved, so that his enchanting singing will endure.

After being passed along orally, the myth was classically put into text by Virgil, Ovid, Plato, et al. Like many Greek myths, it has inspired re-tellings and reimaginings across genres for generations, from operas by Monteverdi and Gluck (among many others), to a painting by Titian and a sculpture by Rodin, to a ballet by Balanchine and Stravinski, to the film series by Jean Cocteau, and on and on.



Eurydice was previously granted subjectivity by the poet H.D. (Hilda Doolittle).

Excerpted from H.D.'s "Eurydice" (1916):

**So for your arrogance
and your ruthlessness
I have lost the earth**

[...]

**you who have your own light,
who are to yourself a presence,
who need no presence**

Photo: Steven Laxton



Matthew Aucoin

Photo: John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation



Sarah Ruhl



MATTHEW AUCOIN

Composer Matthew Aucoin is artist in residence at LA Opera. He has worked as a composer and conductor with the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, the American Repertory Theater, the LA Phil, and Music Academy of the West. He is co-artistic director of the American Modern Opera Company, which he describes as “an opera company, a new-music ensemble, a rock band, and a touring theatre troupe, all rolled into one.” He won the MacArthur “Genius” Award in 2018.

SARAH RUHL

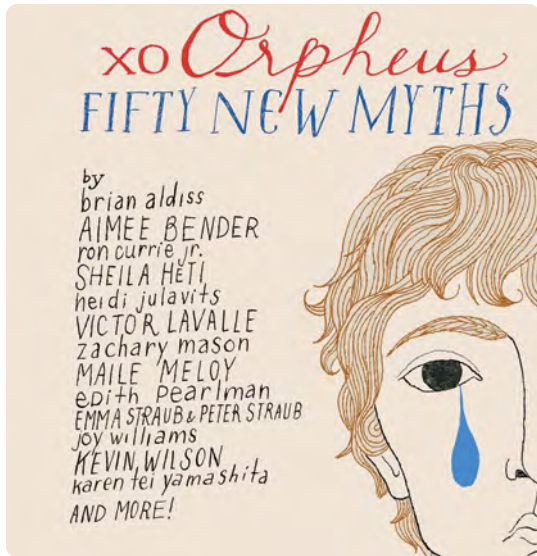
Playwright Sarah Ruhl has won a MacArthur “Genius” Award, the Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award, the PEN Center Award, and many other honors. She has been a finalist for the Pulitzer and a Tony nominee. Her plays—including *Stage Kiss*; *In the Next Room, or The Vibrator Play*; *The Clean House*; *Passion Play*; *Dead Man’s Cell Phone*; *Melancholy Play*; *Orlando*; *Demeter in the City*; *Late, A Cowboy Song*; *Three Sisters*; *Dear Elizabeth*; *The Oldest Boy: A Play in Three Ceremonies*; *For Peter Pan on Her 70th Birthday*; and *How to Transcend a Happy Marriage*—have been produced on Broadway and around the world. She is an alum of 13P and of New Dramatists. Her book on the theatre and motherhood, *100 Essays I Don’t Have Time to Write*, was a NY Times Notable Book of the Year.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Why do you think the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice has so enduringly resonated with opera creators (and other artists)?
- How does Ruhl’s plot give agency to Eurydice?
- How do the different tellings of the myth shift its meaning?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Eurydice Found Festival
laopera.org/community/eurydice-found
- LA Opera
laopera.com
- The Met in HD: George Frideric Handel’s *Agrippina*, 3/7/20 at USC
bit.ly/VVAgrippina
- American Modern Opera Company
runningamoc.org
- The Medea Insurrection* at the Wende Museum through April 5
bit.ly/WendeMedea



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BOOKS

- Bernheimer, Kate. *XO Orpheus: Fifty New Myths*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2013.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3602.E76 .X6 2013
- De Freston, Tom, and Kiran Millwood Hargrave. *Orpheus and Eurydice: a Graphic-Poetic Exploration*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: BL820.O7 D4 2017
- Lamberton, John Porter, James P. Boyd, Alfred Bates, and Athenian Society. *Drama and Opera: Their History, Literature and Influence on Civilization*. London: Athenian Society, 1913.
- Ruhl, Sarah. *Eurydice*. New York: Samuel French, 2008.
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: PS3618.U48 E87 2008

DATABASES

- Loeb Classical Library
- Opera In Video

ARTICLES

- Levine, Miriam. "Orpheus and Eurydice: Revising the Old Story. (Poem)." *The Southern Review* 52, no. 4 (September 22, 2016).

JOURNALS

- *Opera*
DOHENY MEMORIAL LIBRARY: JRNLSTACKS ML5 .0665

VIDEO

- *Black Orpheus*. Special ed. Los Angeles: Criterion, 2010.
LEAVEY LIBRARY: LVYDVD 5511
- *Orfeo and Euridice*. Long Beach, CA: Pioneer Artists, 1982.
GRAND DEPOSITORY: VIDEOS MUSLAZ 23

