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The Evolution of A Theatrical Production: Walking the dog Presents Sarah Ruhl's "Eurydice"

[CHATHAM, NY] - Walking the dog Theater is halfway through its 15-run production of Sarah Ruhl's Eurydice, yet Director David Anderson, his cast and crew, continue to discover and refine the play's connections, moments and meanings. Their approach to this piece being performed at PS21 in Chatham through July 31 is one of ongoing refinement.

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"While the play uses a Greek myth as its background, it is a thoroughly modern play and Sarah Ruhl is a voice of our time," explained Anderson. "Ruhl's plays were performed more than 200 times last year, yet this is a rare opportunity to experience her work because we're the only company we know of in this region this summer to be producing one of her plays."

Rehearsals began in June and the cast devoted the first two weeks to creating an ensemble that moved and thought as one. In those two weeks, only one read through was attempted.

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"It is very unusual to have the time to get to know the other people in the cast this way, it is a real luxury," explained Ron Komora, who plays Eurydice's father. "But it did require that we learn the script cold, on our own." The first element to be added once traditional rehearsals began was stage direction. The second element was music.

Musical Director Jonathan Talbott sat in on several rehearsals to create music that reflected and complemented what he could experience there. Original music in a WTD production can be as important as the script. At first Jonathan sat in with just a violin. "Going from silence for two weeks to this music was compelling," said Komora. "All of a sudden we had transition and underscoring to inform us in the way we were to move."

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The technical process changed again with the addition of costumes and lighting. “In rehearsals we did a great deal of movement with our arms and hands,” explained Nancy Rothman, one of the stones who act as the Greek chorus. “Then we got our costumes and found we couldn’t use our arms and hands. We created the atmosphere of death and the underworld through our very presence and possession of the space.”

To keep the production evolving and improving, Anderson hones in on what is and is not working. After each performance the group gathers to evaluate the show. After Thursday night performances, the audience is invited to give their feedback.

In the middle of the second week, Anderson changed his approach to the play. As an exercise the cast ran the play in 35 minutes. “Everyone was running around as fast as they could, and they were no longer in control of the play,” explained Anderson. “It freed them up and allowed us to identify and be influenced by rhythms we didn’t even hear before. As soon as we surrendered to another rhythm, something more than us was added.” The actors were surprised, as opposed to just going through the movements.

“This speed exercise meant we were acting on our toes instead of on our heels,” said Komora. “We really experienced the aliveness of the play.”

As a result of this exercise, the intervals between scenes were shortened and 10 minutes has been shaved off the play. The pacing of scenes also changed. And new moments have been added with the stones.

“Ruhl structured the play in movements instead of acts, like an orchestral piece,” Anderson explained. “We have tapped into the rhythm that allows us into the musicality of it.”

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One example of a change in pace occurs when Eurydice's father creates a room made of string. The day before opening night was the first time Ron Komora attempted to construct it. "It felt like it was taking forever to do," he explained. After much discussion and feedback Anderson suggested, instead of hurrying, taking as much time as it required, to concentrate on the string and the building. "Now with every movement I can feel that the audience is with me," said Komora. "It's one of the most exquisite moments of the play."

Walking the dog Theater's production of Sarah Ruhl's Eurydice runs through July 31. Tickets are \$25 members, \$30 non-members, \$18 students. All shows begin at 8:00pm. For information or to order tickets, please call 518.392.6121 or visit www.ps21chatham.org. Tickets will also be available at the door until the show sells out.

PS21: Performance Spaces for the 21st Century is a not-for-profit organization located in Chatham, New York. PS21 is dedicated to the performing arts and to serving a diverse community with concerts, programs and residencies by professional artists and ensembles, youth and children's programming, and cultural education opportunities for all ages.

"For me this play is an impressionist painting because there are so many non-traditional elements," said Komora. "Looking up close at an impressionist painting you have to ask, 'What the heck is it?' But when you step back and on subsequent views, or in this case on subsequent reads and performances, you get so much more."

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