

THIRD WORLD BUNFIGHT  
PRESENTS

# ORFEUS

WRITTEN, DIRECTED AND DESIGNED BY BRETT BAILEY  
MUSIC BY BEBE LUEKI

PROGRAMME FOR GRAHAMSTOWN FESTIVAL 2007

## Author's note

In 2001, while writing a play about C.G.Jung, I came across the Orpheus myth: the tale of this first poet-musician whose melodious lyre music brought harmony to the natural world: olive trees inched towards him as he played, fishes left the streams to listen, birds and animals gathered around him. The inner-conflicts of human listeners were stilled. I was mesmerised by this image of a man singing in a field, bringing order to the world with his art; art that enabled those who were touched by it to perceive the natural order of the world.

Also drawn to Orpheus' music was the beautiful Eurydice. On the night of their marriage an envious ex-suitor attempted to rape her, and Eurydice was bitten by a snake as she tried to escape.

Orpheus ventured into the Underworld to retrieve her, and came across several characters from Greek mythology, lost souls trapped in eternal torment: Prometheus forever being devoured by vultures for daring to steal fire from the gods, Tantalus dying of thirst but unable to drink the water in which he floundered... These characters haunted me. Who are the lost souls on our continent? What parts of my own self are hidden, voiceless, abandoned in the darkness beyond daylight? I searched for images rooted in both of these realms.

At the centre of the Underworld Hades – the ruler of this shadowy domain – held Eurydice in his catacombs. Another sorrowful image from the 21<sup>st</sup> century lent itself to this scenario.

The sadness of Orpheus' song melted Hades' frozen heart, and he allowed Orpheus to take Eurydice home with the injunction that she walk behind him: if he turned around to check on her he would lose her forever. I battled long and hard over the meaning of that command. A test of faith, perhaps: a caution to master our doubts on the long journey through life towards some promised Nirvana... But what is there really to trust today, with the promises of gods and rulers lying in pieces around us? Who is there left for us to have faith in during those dark nights of the soul?

The final and most beautiful part of the myth – in an episode seemingly unrelated to the earlier story – sees Orpheus killed and dismembered by the revellers of Bacchus. They throw his head into a river, and it is carried away still singing, taking his profound music to the world.

The Orpheus myth is as smooth as a river pebble, carried by the human imagination for over 3000 years. A mysterious and powerful amulet. I have had to sleep with it many, many nights to get an inkling of what it means; to get a grasp on what it illuminates both within me and within the world that we inhabit today. ORFEUS – its shape, its text, its music, its set, its

mood – is the artefact of that investigation. Thanks and appreciation to my performers and collaborators for helping to find the way to give it form.

In ORFEUS I have twisted the thread of the Greek myth through an African landscape, weaving it together with African stories and themes, following wherever it led me. A painful and wonderful expedition.

ORFEUS premiered – in a quite different, and much more cluttered interpretation – at Spier in 2006. The cast (which is a little different from that advertised in the Festival Program) includes:

**Bebe Lueki (Orfeus)**: a Congolese immigrant who I befriended three and a half years ago when he could barely speak English. A hugely talented musician and songwriter with 2 cds behind him, he composed all the songs in ORFEUS. We have also collaborated on a music show, White Chocolate.

**Jane Rademeyer (Storyteller)**: a musician and performance artist based in Johannesburg. We studied drama at UCT together, and performed in Marlene Blom's 'Verinnie Wereld' in 1995.

**Andile Bonde (Ritual Guide)**: based in Grahamstown, Andile joined Third World Bunfight in 1998 immediately after finishing school. He has featured in all our major productions since then, including: IPI ZOMBI?, iMUMBO JUMBO, The Prophet, BIG DADA, medEia and macbEth: the opera. He has also danced with First Physical.

**Nondumiso Zweni (Eurydice)**: a radiant performer from Umtata. She has featured in The Prophet, medEia and House of the Holy Afro.

**Abey Xakwe (Frog: the guide to the Underworld)**: one of my favourite actors, Abey and I first worked together in 1992. He has starred in IPI ZOMBI?, iMUMBO JUMBO and The Prophet, always as an enigmatic character who travels between the natural and supernatural worlds, the realms of consciousness and unconsciousness.

**Xola Mda (the Snake, and The Broken Man)**: a permanent member of Third World Bunfight, Xola has been with us the longest of all our performers, and appeared in IPI ZOMBI?, iMUMBO JUMBO, The Prophet and BIG DADA. He lives in Cape Town.

**John Cartwright (The Forgotten Man)**: once my English professor at UCT. He also played one of the witches in macbEth: the opera.

**Nicholas Ellenbogen (The King of the Underworld)**: one of the most well-known actors on the South African stage, Nicholas stepped into the role at the last minute.

**Children and women from Rini (The Shoemakers and The Merchandise)**

Production manager: Barbara Mathers

Set construction & stage manager: Iain North

Soundscapes: James Webb