



Review: 'Orpheus' weds myth, modern

Latest, convention-flouting show from The Trip has its hitches but brims with ideas

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If you ever sense that your life may become the subject of a Greek myth, try to make sure you're a god rather than one of those who is god'ed over.

The gods are the ones who get to make all the (typically arbitrary and bizarre) rules. Such as the one that stipulates the musician Orpheus has to keep eyes front at all times while escorting his wife Eurydice out of the underworld, lest she vanish forever. Orpheus, of course, fails at the last possible second. (Let's hope Persephone and Hades, the gods in charge of punking him, had a good laugh over that one.)

In most interpretations of the story, Orpheus turns to gaze at Eurydice because he can't bear not knowing whether she's still there.

But in *The Trip*'s modernized, multimedia remix of the myth, his impulse to look back seems to come just as much from a fear of moving forward. That, and an ache to embrace everything in the present moment — his youth, his music, his new wife — no matter the cost.

It's a hugely selfish gesture, of course. But it's of a piece with this loose-limbed and often exuberant show, whose protagonists make plenty of bad decisions (getting hitched after a quick Web courtship, crossing the street without looking both ways) for understandable, passion-driven reasons.

The Trip, a fledgling company with artistic ties to UC San Diego's esteemed theater and dance department, has made its mark here with immersive, boundary-testing work. And "Orpheus & Eurydice," its latest piece, brims with ideas and energy, even if it can't always settle on a consistent tone or cohesive concept.

Writer-director Tom Dugdale (who also plays Orpheus) sets the work at the pair's wedding; the spare performance space is strewn

with white balloons, and playgoers — who double as wedding guests — even get to toast the newlyweds with bubbly (non-alcoholic) beverages.

Those who've done their homework, though, will already have seen the romance between Orpheus and Eurydice (Jenni Putney) via video clips on the company's website (thetriptheater.net). Excerpts are also shown at the start of the performance — but with supposed tech troubles that lead to the smartly surreal spectacle of actors Miranda Dainard and Joey Odom miming the disembodied voices of the central couple.

It's just one of the provocative ways in which the piece blurs lines — between live and virtual performance, and between artists and audience.

Music becomes a key component: At one point, the actors (who also include Joshua Brody as best man and Mohammad Shehata as a mysterious Orpheus & Eurydice fanboy) strip to their skivvies for a highly aerobic dance number to “Do or Die” by Thirty Seconds to Mars. The overall effect is both comical and hypnotic — two tonal poles this show sometimes reconciles, sometimes wavers uneasily between.

Nick Drashner's sound design carries more haunting notes, too (sometimes reminiscent of the British-Australian moodsters Dead Can Dance), and Karen Janssen's elegantly wrought video sequences bring a mythical sweep back into the picture toward show's end.

True to the original story, none of this (spoiler alert!) can save Eurydice. But Dugdale and Co. do have one up on poor Orpheus: When it comes to traditional notions of storytelling, they show few signs of looking back.