

Act Like a Stone: A Navigation Through Sarah Ruhl's Underworld

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Submitted to the Department of Theatre & Performance Arts

School of SUNY Purchase College in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

Purchase College State University of New York

May 2021

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Artistic Aims

Three years ago, when my journey at Purchase College first began, I remember being told about senior projects and how much of a big deal they are. At Purchase, especially in the Theatre and Performance major, senior projects signify the end of years worth of training and preparation. I can remember attending senior projects as a freshman and sophomore and thinking about what my own senior project would look like. What play would I choose? Would I have collaborators? Who would I cast? A multitude of questions, worries, and excitement ran through my mind as I began thinking about my future educational endeavors. Now, it's my turn to present an outstanding and memorable experience for students and my castmates alike. The senior project for the Theatre and Performance major grants the opportunity to showcase all of the higher-level training and hard work we have dedicated ourselves to for almost four years. It is an honor and pleasure to be able to present students and faculty of Purchase College the adapted story of *Eurydice* by Sarah Ruhl, where I will be acting as Little Stone.

Before I begin talking about the play, I want to talk about my specific concentration and what skills I have amassed over the years to prepare me for this play and my role. For the last three years I have been an Acting concentration Theatre and Performance student. Having grown up in Maryland, there weren't many opportunities for acting outside of community theatre, especially in the area where I lived. Participating in theatre my whole life inspired me to want to pursue a professional career in it, which is why I specifically chose to attend Purchase College. The reason I chose the acting concentration in the BA program as opposed to auditioning for the BFA Acting program was because I was attracted to the freedom and flexibility of the Theatre and Performance major. I wanted to be able to take acting classes while also having the freedom to explore other areas in theatre, as well as my other interests. Because of this, I believe it has

enhanced and inspired my love of theatre. Being able to take classes outside of my specific major allowed me to learn about many different topics that could assist my acting career, like psychology and sociology for example. As an actor, I feel it's imperative to have a deep understanding of human emotions and how humans behave in certain circumstances. There needs to be a level of emotional intelligence to accurately depict the circumstances the character is in. Psychology classes like Abnormal Psychology taught me that certain life events can lead to certain behaviors in people and also taught me how to break down those life events to draw a conclusion as to why a person could be behaving in that way. *Eurydice* focuses on the topic of grief for a good portion of the play, so having knowledge of how a person deals with grief will be extremely helpful for myself and my castmates. Sociology, on the other hand, gives a more broad insight. Where does gender and race fit in with the story? How can one's culture influence their approach to life? Sociology answers those questions. Race and gender have been huge topics of discourse this whole year, so I believe these questions are relevant to any play being done at this time.

Additionally, the classes in the major were extremely helpful in getting me to this point. A class that has stuck with me, and specifically comes to mind when thinking about the classes that have prepared me for my senior project, was Rachel Dickstein's Ensemble Creation class. More than any other class I've taken, Ensemble Creation assisted me in finding my physicality in a theatrical space. As discussed with Kai DonDero, the creator of this project, the role of the stones will be extremely physical. Rachel Dickstein's Ensemble Creation class gave me tools and ideas for how to utilize space with the body. These tools will guide me as I figure out how to stage myself as a stone, which is quite a difficult task. Not only that, but Ensemble Creation really stressed the importance of a cohesive ensemble; everyone has ideas to bring to the table

and everyone must be on the same page during a production to make it all successful. Devised work was a regular occurrence in that class and I feel it's one of the best courses I could have taken to prepare me for a role like this. Also, I took the class alongside a few of my cast mates, so I'm extremely excited to begin blocking and see what innovative ideas we come up with during that time.

Initially, I intended to put on my own play for my senior project, *Fefu and Her Friends* by Maria Irene Fornes. What drew me to that play was its unique second act, where all of the scenes are taking place simultaneously. The blocking would have to be timed perfectly to pull it off, which is what really intrigued me as I enjoy challenging myself to further my craft. Another reason I was drawn to it was the fact that it's an all-woman cast, even featuring romantic relationships between the women--something that at the time it was written, and even now, is not common in famous bodies of work. What's great about *Eurydice* is that it's written by a woman, so that was a major plus for me. Being that I am a woman, it was important to me that I take the opportunity that is the senior project and use it to project women's voices in some way. Also, like *Fefu*, I feel challenged by my role in *Eurydice* because I have never been cast as a stone before, and it's difficult to imagine what that would look like in a non-literal way. I appreciate that *Eurydice* is making me think in depth about my character's traits and physicality; in the past I have struggled with being more physical in my acting. Being Little Stone will most certainly challenge me and help me with this.

Additionally, I feel that the story of *Eurydice* is extremely relevant to the times we're living in. Tragically, many people in this country and across the globe have experienced some sort of loss this year, whether it be loss of a loved one or even loss of work. We, as a collective, are going through an extensive and seemingly never ending period of grief. *Eurydice* explores

the topics of loss and grief beautifully, while also being careful not to romanticize them. What I mean by this is that Sarah Ruhl doesn't give the audience a necessarily "happy" ending, in fact, the ending is almost tragic. Like the original myth, Eurydice and Orpheus are granted permission to leave the Underworld together under the condition that neither of them look at each other, or else they will be separated forever. In Ruhl's edition, Eurydice purposefully calls out to Orpheus in order to return to the Underworld and be with her father, only to find out when she returns that he has dipped himself into the river that erases all memories of mortal life. With grief and loss, there isn't always a happy ending. People don't just come to terms with loss immediately, even years after the passing of a loved one. This is clearly shown in *Eurydice* with Eurydice's decision to leave her living, breathing fiancé forever to stay with her late father in the Underworld instead. Ruhl presents the audience with a more honest and raw approach to grieving. I say all of this to say that people in the present day should know that they're allowed to grieve. They're allowed to be devastated and upset and not always accepting of the fact that their loved one is gone. They should know how normal it is to feel that way, to see that even Eurydice would give up life on Earth just to be with her deceased father again.

In conclusion, I am beyond excited to begin working on *Eurydice* with my castmates. I couldn't have thought of a better play to end my college career with, given the times we're living in and the technical aspects that will challenge me as an actor. Having been introduced to *Eurydice* in previous classes, I've always had a love for this story. Now, being cast in it for senior project, I am elated to be given the opportunity to actually stage and act in the play. With all of the training I've done over the years from Acting Scene Study to Advanced Movement for Performers, I feel fully prepared to take on these challenges and absolutely cannot wait to get on stage again.

Research

What happens after we die has been a topic of philosophical debate since the beginning of time. Being innately curious of what lies ahead in the Great Unknown, humans have found creative ways to imagine what life after death looks like. In the Bible, the soul passes on to either Heaven or Hell, in Buddhism the soul reincarnates into a new life, and in Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* the soul hitches a ride in a raining elevator and takes a swim in a river that wipes all of the soul's memories of life in the physical world. In honor of her father's passing, Ruhl reinvents the tragic love story of Orpheus and Eurydice, adding in elements of her own life and losses to the story. By sprinkling figurative language throughout the script, Ruhl beautifully conveys her ideas on grief, loss, and the after-life. Ruhl relies on unique figurative language and imagistic metaphors and personification to capture the hardened and empty essence of The Underworld.

One major key to Ruhl's success in illustrating The Underworld to the audience is her repetition of certain metaphors throughout the play. For example, in Movement One the Nasty Interesting Man says to Eurydice, "You need to get yourself a real man. . . a man with big hands, big stupid hands like potatoes." (Ruhl 24-5) In Movement Two, Big Stone describes "the language of The Stones" to be like "potatoes sleeping in the dirt." (Ruhl 27) This repetition establishes the subtle connection between The Underworld and the physical world to the audience. Ruhl is using an image or word to create resonance between segments of the story, in this case the word being "potatoes." This resonance deliberately and artfully blurs the lines between the real world and The Underworld. Another example of this notion is the line "I'll give this letter to a worm, I hope he finds you," which is said both by Orpheus on page 36 and then later by Eurydice on page 70. The phrase is used in the same context both times, as Orpheus

writes it in a letter to Eurydice to the Underworld in hopes of contacting her. Eurydice writes it in a letter to Orpheus after she is sent back to The Underworld in hopes of contacting Orpheus from The Underworld. Again, this repetition indicates that there is a link, possibly even a physical one, between life and the afterlife.

In an interview with Wendy Weckwerth, Ruhl details the thought process she had while constructing The Underworld, saying:

I think it's something about contemporary alienation: the experience of going to the underworld involves an alienation or unfamiliarity. Not in a devilish or horrible way, but in a contemporary way. Like when you go to a mall and you're in an elevator. It smells funny and it's tinny. Then you walk out and you're in a corporate hell. I was thinking about that sort of moral neutrality in the underworld I was creating. (Weckwerth)

This quote provides insight on some of Ruhl's theatrical choices. In order to perfectly paint this image of The Underworld, an elevator that delivers people to Hell, and characters like The Stones and Lord of the Underworld enforce the rules of the space, like mystical and otherworldly office supervisors.

Ruhl also conveys this image to the audience through her use of poetic stage directions and juxtaposition of harmonious sounds and cacophony. In the script, Ruhl includes specific stage directions that help to "set the mood." For example, before Movement 2 begins, Ruhl writes these stage directions, "The underworld. There is no set change. Strange watery noises. Drip, drip, drip." (Ruhl 26) On the page before, as Eurydice is leaving her physical body, when she writes "Blackout. A clatter. Strange sounds-- xylophones, brass bands, sounds of falling, sounds of vertigo, sounds of breathing." (Ruhl 25) Why does Ruhl specify no set change, even though the setting is drastically changing? Ruhl wants the audience to feel a sense of familiarity while Eurydice enters The Underworld, so the two worlds to resemble each other. This is even expressed by Father in the script on page 15 where he writes to Eurydice about The Underworld,

claiming, “for the most part, there is a pleasant atmosphere and you can work and socialize, much like at home.” All of Movement One and then the beginning of Movement Two establishes that connection and link between life and The Underworld. How does this make The Underworld seem empty and cold? Familiar sounds, objects and characters have their familiarity stripped away. She gives them a world that resembles their own, but takes away their ability to speak and understand their own language. She takes away all of their memories too. She takes away everything that made their world familiar to them. In Movement 2 Scene 1 Ruhl writes:

A train whistle. Eurydice steps onto a platform, surveying a large crowd.

EURYDICE: A train!

LITTLE STONE: The station is like a train but there is no train.

BIG STONE: The train has wheels that are not wheels.

LOUD STONE: There is the opposite of wheels and the opposite of smoke and the opposite of a train. (Ruhl 29)

Take this hypothetical train for example. A train is something that everyone can recognize. Children are gifted train sets for Christmas, and most of the population of New York City uses them for daily transportation. Sarah Ruhl takes something that is so easily identifiable, that even in her river-induced state of amnesia Eurydice is able to point it out, and then completely redefines its meaning in The Underworld. It’s similar to when someone is thinking of a word and says, “I have it on the tip of my tongue!” To always be on the verge of an epiphany and then the mind goes blank repeatedly sounds like its own Hell. The people of The Underworld know there’s something they’re forgetting, but they just don’t know what it is, and that’s what makes Ruhl’s underworld so chilling.

Additionally, Ruhl takes on the ambitious task of incorporating three new characters into her adaptation that not only are inanimate objects, but are only mentioned once in a stage direction of the original myth. The characters I’m referring to are the brash, merciless Stones--

Little Stone, Big Stone, and Loud Stone. The Stones are both a personification and a metaphor in the The Underworld, and serve multiple purposes in the play. Their most obvious purpose is their role as “overseers” for The Underworld. This can be observed throughout the play, but especially in the opening scene of Movement One. One of their interactions with Father and Eurydice goes:

FATHER: Eurydice. I wanted to remember your name. I asked the stones. They said:
Forget the names! The names make you remember.
BIG STONE: We told you how it works! (Ruhl 31)

This line indicates that The Stones are at least somewhat responsible for informing The Underworld’s inhabitants of how to behave there. This can also be observed with their infamous line on page 40 where they announce that “being sad is not allowed” in The Underworld, and that Eurydice and Father must “act like a stone.” After reading the script, one could conclude that acting like a stone means to be emotionless. In Movement Three, the Stones lecture Eurydice about how life as a stone is “hard work” and that there is “no time for being sad” when one is a stone. (Ruhl 68) Acting like a stone could also consist of being idle and still, even stuck. There is a saying that goes, “idle hands are the Devil’s tools,” and this phrase encapsulates the notion of The Stones being servants or workers under The Lord of the Underworld. Throughout the play, they reiterate the importance of “peace and quiet.” On pages 46 and 47 of the script, The Stones dramatically react to Eurydice and Father singing and dancing together, exclaiming “dead people can’t sing!” Then later on page 64, after Eurydice is presumed to have left with Orpheus, The Stones are pleased that the dynamics of The Underworld have been restored, saying:

STONES: Finally. Some Peace.
LOUD STONE: And quiet.
STONES: Like the old days. No music. No conversation. How about that. (Ruhl 64)
Even in their monologue, despite ranting about how “busy” they are, they admit to not actually being busy by saying “watch us work, keeping still, keeping quiet.” (Ruhl 68)

This brings me to the next role The Stones play, one that is less obvious than the first one we observed. Sarah Ruhl was inspired to create the stones as characters by a line in the original myth stating that Orpheus' music was so sad, "it made even the stones weep." In an interview with Ruhl and her dramaturg Walter Bilderback, Ruhl is quoted saying: "I was interested in the idea of repressed emotion in the underworld... what is it about weeping that breaks the rules of the underworld and allows Orpheus to enter?" (Bilderback) Stones, in real life, have no sense of self, no emotions, and no regard for anything that goes on around them because they are simply rocks. In Ruhl's *Underworld*, the Stones act in a similar way. They do not show that they are capable of feeling emotions, until Orpheus sings. As far as they know, their only life has been in The Underworld living under its strict rules. The Stones have no concept of what their life was before they died. In fact, the script doesn't even indicate that they were once human or ever lived in the real world. In the English language, there are figures of speech that are used to describe a person who shows little to no emotion towards others: "stone cold", or having a "heart of stone", and being "tough as rocks." This could also be a euphemism for being dead since after death, the body becomes cold and gray, forever stuck in that moment in time.

It makes sense that Ruhl created The Stones to be rigid and stoic in their emotions because that's how a real stone would behave if it were alive. It also makes sense in the context of Hell or a purgatory that the people inhabiting it are cold and unforgiving because Hell isn't supposed to be fun or fair. As Ruhl puts it, she doesn't "tend to write in a realist mode," she's instead "interested in things that automatically dig you out of that impulse." (Berson) The Stones are meant to be absurd; Ruhl literally took one simple line in the original myth about stones crying and personified that line into three individual characters. Yes, they are called "The Stones", and they do embody traits of real stones, but they still have their own personalities (this

is somewhat implied by their names-- Little, Big, Loud). Clearly, they aren't intended to be played as literal stones in the play. The stones interact with the space around them, move around, and have their own thoughts and opinions. Ruhl again takes something familiar to the audience and then brings a whole new meaning to it. The Stones are a metaphor for what it's like to be a resident in The Underworld. The river rids the mind of any ability to recall events from its past life, essentially washing away a person's humanity. Because they have no memories, they don't believe they can feel emotions, and they have little interest in getting to know others, they cannot be human. What is the point of being alive if one doesn't have memories to fondly look back on? Or the ability to feel, relate, and empathize with other people? My director, Kai Dondero and I believe that The Stones are souls who have been in The Underworld for so long without their humanity that they have "hardened," figuratively of course. Director Lisa Hall Hagen viewed The Stones "as a way of expressing the idea of memory/humanity vs. forgetting/divinity. Each of the three is at a certain stage of being forgotten as a human and blending into the set itself." (Bilderback) This quote does a fantastic job of capturing the duality that lives within the play, and how it applies to The Stones. As I mentioned before, there is a connection between memories, emotions and humanity. Even in real life this idea is acted out. The Stones somewhat resemble Alzheimer's patients. They navigate through their world with zero recollection of who they are or where they came from. They aren't even capable of wanting to know because they have no idea that they don't know. The beauty in this, though, is that they don't know what they're missing out on, whereas Father and Eurydice are doomed to forever long for what they have lost because they are able to retrieve their memories of their past lives.

EURYDICE: Tell me the names of my mother and brothers and sister.

FATHER: I don't think that's a good idea. It will make you sad.

EURYDICE: I want to know.

FATHER: It's a long time to be sad. (Ruhl 40)

That's the duality of "humanity V.S. divinity" Hagen was talking about. It seems that in the Underworld, one cannot manifest both simultaneously. To have memories is to be closer to humanity, to have a deep yearning to be alive. To be divine is to not be alive, to not be emotionally attached to a particular life or place, but to accept that life moves on, time moves forward, and the rhythm of the Universe is in a constant loop between creation and destruction. Everything must eventually come to an end.

Speaking of divinity, I want to shift focus to another divine being of The Underworld, the Lord himself. Ruhl suggests that one can make the choice to cast the same actor for both the Nasty Interesting Man and the Lord of the Underworld, and she scatters subliminal connections between the two throughout the script. Let's begin with the Nasty Interesting Man. He is arguably the biggest reason Eurydice dies and goes to the Underworld, though in the original myth Eurydice succumbs to a venomous snakebite. (Garth 509) There is obvious symbolism here. In the Bible, it is common knowledge to know about the story of Adam and Eve, and the snake that tempts Eve into eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden--resulting in the creation of "sinning". The snake is often interpreted to be the Devil. The way The Nasty Interesting Man tempts Eurydice to leave her wedding and come with him to his apartment by informing Eurydice of the letter her dead father wrote to her is akin to the biblical tale. After following him to his apartment, Eurydice is met with her fateful demise before she even gets a chance to read the letter he possesses, which, to her surprise, actually does exist. I would argue that The Nasty Interesting Man is an incarnation of the Lord of the Underworld on Earth, allowing the Lord access to Earthly beings such as Eurydice who can then appear in the underworld to be toyed with for his own amusement. On page 16, Father says, "I write you letters. I don't know how to get them to you." He then drops the letter into a mail slot and exits.

In the following scene, The Nasty Interesting Man just so happens to come across the letter in the real world after meeting Eurydice at the water pump. (Ruhl 18) How would the letter have gotten there from The Underworld if not for divine intervention? Is it possible that the Lord of the Underworld knew about the letter, and perhaps saw it as an opportunity to intervene? After luring Eurydice to his apartment, a strange conversation takes place:

MAN: So. Eurydice. Tell me one thing. Name one person you find interesting.

EURYDICE: Why?

MAN: Just making conversation

EURYDICE: Right. Um-- all the interesting people I know are dead or speak French.

MAN: Well, I don't speak French, Eurydice. (Ruhl 23)

The man is implying that he is dead. His name is the Nasty Interesting Man, and is obsessed with things and people who are “interesting,” and when Eurydice describes the people she finds interesting, he claims not to speak French but he doesn't bother to clarify that he also isn't dead. Similar to her use of repetition in her metaphors throughout the script, Ruhl is displaying an uncanny familiarity between the two characters. One character lives on Earth, and then the other resides in the Underworld, facilitating Ruhl's intention of using the two worlds to mirror each other.

Additionally, the names of the two characters somewhat mirror each other because there is the Nasty Interesting Man, and then the Lord of the Underworld/Child. Ruhl depicts the Lord as a child, for which he explains is due to the fact that he “grows downwards. . .like a turnip” (Ruhl 48) If the Underworld is the opposite of the physical world, as in the comparison with the opposite of a train, then that would explain why on Earth he's portrayed as a man. This, again, supports the theory that the two characters are being used as a device to communicate Ruhl's perturbed vision of the Underworld to the audience. Ruhl also establishes this with both of the characters' infatuation with Eurydice. On page 24, the Nasty Interesting Man confesses to

Eurydice that he is in love with her. Ruhl also writes in a stage direction after being introduced to Eurydice on page 18: “he looks at her, hungry.” Then, later in the script the Lord expresses his wish to marry Eurydice on page 69. This leads me to believe that not only are the two characters the same people, but that this was the Lord of the Underworld’s plan all along. A scene in the play that insinuates this idea is when Orpheus enters the gates of Hell looking to get back Eurydice:

ORPHEUS: I look straight ahead. That’s all?

CHILD: Yes.

ORPHEUS: That’s easy.

CHILD: Good. *The child smiles. He exits.* (Ruhl 57)

That last line spoken by Child/The Lord gives off a mischievous energy. It’s almost as if The Lord already knows that Orpheus isn’t going to leave with Eurydice by his side and is amused by his confidence. The Devil, in a Christian context, serves as a metaphor for all the evil, or sin, that humans are capable of (Cohn 17). He’s a trickster that is skilled at getting people to act on their deepest, darkest, fantasies so that they will be banished from Heaven and sent to Hell, giving him more followers and more power. By the end of the show, it’s evident that he is successful in doing so because not only do both Father and Eurydice dip themselves in the river once again, but directly afterwards Orpheus reenters the Underworld as a dead soul in hopes to be reunited with Eurydice for eternity, only to also be dunked in the river. By the end of the play, The Lord of the Underworld gets back the natural order of his kingdom. Now, there is no one breaking the rules and disturbing the dynamic he created for The Underworld.

Now that we know who he is, we can look at why his presence in The Underworld contributes to its dark, mysterious essence. For starters, he is a problematic force in the body of a child. It’s unnerving to think about an actual child being so despicable and capable of pulling off such mayhem. Children are normally thought to be innocent, pure, and naive. They’re to be

protected from the evils of the world, not the creators of it. This characterization brings forth a juxtaposition for the audience that contributes to their discomfort. Here we have this all-powerful, immortal being inhabiting The Underworld, most would assume that he would be intimidating and nightmare-inducing. Ruhl deludes this notion by writing him as a child and has him entering on red tricycle. (Ruhl 48) Even the other characters don't expect this, with Eurydice and Orpheus both commenting on his short stature on pages 48 and 56. It's so ironic and absurd that it's comical, but it's also disturbing. To make it even stranger, he insists that expressing any form of emotion, whether it be crying or laughter, is not allowed in any way. On page 49, he proclaims to Eurydice that "rooms are not allowed," which means residents aren't permitted comfort. Fathers are also not allowed, according to him. Parents, shelter, and comfort are all things that a child needs to survive and grow up to be a standing member of society; in The Underworld these are all prohibited. This makes the Lord and the Underworld itself ghostly and hollow.

Sarah Ruhl is known for her contemporary-style of playwriting, and her ability to provide, in her words, "metaphysical layering" to her shows. (Weckwerth) With *Eurydice*, Ruhl utilizes her ability to invent an entirely new world and she uses brilliant and carefully picked symbolism and figurative language to invite the audience into it. Ruhl's use of detailed and unique imagery mixed with her deeply personal experiences with loss and tragedy immerses the audience into a weird, mystical world that somehow, through poetic metaphors and repeated imagery, emulates the very one we exist in. Ruhl's Underworld is still and unwelcoming, and through stage directions, The Stones, and the Lord of the Underworld, the audience becomes aware of that. *Eurydice* is a love letter to lost loved ones, and by going through the stages of grief alongside Eurydice the audience is given the tools to come to terms with their own losses.

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Technical

Working on *Eurydice* this year was an extremely unique experience for me. Because of COVID-19, there were many challenges we had to face to get our production on stage and running. Our first week or two of rehearsals was completely online due to having to quarantine the first week of school, so we had to do our read throughs over video chat. At first, it was difficult getting all the technical difficulties situated and getting everyone on the call at the same time. Sometimes people's WiFi would go out and it was difficult to hear and follow along with the script at times. I will say though, that I did appreciate the fact that for the first week of school we didn't have to leave our house to go rehearsal. As a commuter, something I've never done before the pandemic, it was nice to have the opportunity to decompress after a day of classes while still being present for rehearsal. I think it also gave people the opportunity to get a feel for everyone before entering a space together, making the first in-person rehearsal less daunting and awkward.

Similarly, the in-person rehearsals felt just as foreign as the online rehearsals at first. We were required to be masked and socially distanced at all times in the space. There was even a person sitting in on rehearsals to take our temperatures and make sure we weren't breaking any COVID rules in place. In the beginning it was hard for me to imagine pulling off a great show with these hindrances. For one, the mask covered virtually all of our facial expressions and muffled our speech. We also had to block every move six feet apart, even though the script calls for characters to make physical contact with one another at certain points. With these obstacles in our way, the road to a successful production seemed like it would be a bumpy one.

Although the odds may have been stacked against us, our cast was able to adapt to our circumstances. For the actual shows, our costume designer, Nikki Carpenter, was able to get ahold of “mask spacers,” a device that is inserted underneath the mask to create space between the mask and our mouths. This allowed us to project even more for the audience, which was great for both the live and digital productions of the show. As for blocking, I think we were able to overcome that obstacle as well. In fact, I believe that being extremely mindful of our blocking granted us the opportunity to come up with creative and innovative ways of blocking this show. There were specific parts of the show that I felt actually made more of an impact without physical contact, than it might have with it. The scene that comes to mind for me is when Eurydice recognizes her father in the Underworld; in place of a warm embrace, Benne (Eurydice) and Sean (Father) alongside our director Kai Dondero, choreographed a beautiful hand gesture that created an even more intimate and tragically beautiful moment than what would’ve happened had they simply hugged.

Additionally, the Stones also had to work around social distancing throughout the production. We are onstage for the entire rest of the play after the second movement, so becoming physically and spiritually in tune with my body was imperative to exploring my character. In Movement Three, when Eurydice goes to attack The Stones, we had to play with perspective in order to make it look like she was trying to hit us without actually coming close enough to. During tech week and the week of the show, we were required to run the scene at least one time before attempting it during an actual run. This helped us to perfect the illusion and also protected us from potentially injuring anyone or risking COVID contamination. I feel as though the strict blocking rules actually forced me to step out of my comfort zone more with my physicality onstage and helped me to be more present during runs. For example, if I wasn’t

speaking in a scene, I was intensely listening to what was being said by the speaking characters so that I could intuitively feel and respond to what was going on around me. Since many of the scenes I was in didn't require me to be acting with my voice, I had to be extremely aware of my presence onstage and be sure that what I was doing in the background wasn't taking away from the scene going on in front of me. Something that I began to do during the rehearsal process and continued to utilize during the shows, was imagining myself as a stone onstage anytime I was stationary in a scene. For example, during Orpheus' monologues I would sometimes lay down and act as if I was sleeping, and while I was laid out on the stage, I pictured myself as a literal stone sitting in the Underworld. I would actually be able to feel my body stiffen as if I were made of stone while I was doing this. I would almost liken it to entering a meditative state in which I was hyper-aware of my body and the environment around it. Doing this also helped me to be more relaxed and loose onstage, which in turn enhanced my ability to act as Little Stone.

During the rehearsal process, a lot of thought went into the characterization of each character and many times we incorporated activities like improv exercises to facilitate bringing our characters to life. One of my favorite parts of rehearsal was opening and closing the space, a concept introduced to me by our director, Kai. Before and after every rehearsal, one member of the cast would prepare us to get in and out of character by releasing the energy of the real world to open us up to the energy of the world of the play, or vice versa for closing space. I always appreciated doing this before and after rehearsal because I was able to ground myself and my thoughts which allowed me to freely explore my character in the space without fear of judgement or failure. Another special thing we did as a cast during opening and closing space was chanting a mantra together every single time after our energy activity. It was Kai's idea to get us to think of song lyrics, poetry, or really anything that reminded us of the play and present it to the rest of

the cast. Once we had a good amount of responses, we all voted on which quote would be our cast mantra. The one we ended up going for was “rivers and roads, rivers and roads, rivers till I reach you,” which are song lyrics from “Rivers and Roads” by The Head and the Heart. The mantra aided in our bonding as a cast and eventually gained emotional significance to us as we bowed to the song it came from during the curtain call, as well as used it for the end credits of the digital version.

As I mentioned before, our director incorporated improv activities into our character study. One rehearsal, Jason, Adrienne, and I were tasked with improving a one-minute skit about The Stones that revealed a secret that our character keeps from the other characters. As Little Stone, I decided that I had a secret desire for structure and control, which can be observed in my performance. The reason I chose this as my secret was because of the choice I made to portray Little Stone as a little girl. Having been surrounded by the presence of children my entire life, I interpreted a lot of Little Stone’s mannerisms as that of a little kid’s. For example, I would argue that out of all the stones, Little Stone is the most vocal about following the rules of the Underworld exactly as they’ve been told to her. This behavior reminds me of the black and white sense of morality younger children tend to possess, whereas adults typically view their morality more abstractly and are willing to bend the rules depending on the situation. For Little Stone, the rule is that rooms are absolutely not allowed as that’s what she’s been explicitly told to believe during her time in the Underworld, whereas Big Stone, for example, seems to be less attached to the rule itself and more concerned about fulfilling her duties as a stone. Activities like this forced me to think critically about not just what I was saying, but why I was saying it. I’m an actor that needs to have an intention behind every step of blocking and every line spoken; how does the way I say this line influence the direction of the scene? Why am I doing this specific movement

in this particular scene? These are questions I was asking myself throughout the entire rehearsal process to further develop my character.

In addition to strict COVID-guidelines, our show faced other adversities as well. About a month before our show went up, our director tested positive for COVID-19, requiring them and some other castmates to have to quarantine for 10 days. Because of this, we had to revert back to online rehearsals for about a week. I feel that this did set us back slightly because we only had a few weeks of rehearsals left before tech week and having that time in the space would have been really beneficial for us to run scenes that we didn't work on as much. We also had to let go of our Stage Manager the day before opening night because they weren't fulfilling their duties in the ways we needed. This show has many cues for lighting and sound and not having a competent stage manager to call them out was hurting our production. Luckily, Kai, Ash (production manager), and Nikki all stood in for that position when needed for the rest of the weekend. Arguably the most shocking and halting event to take place during this process was when Dante, who played the Nasty Interesting Man and Lord of the Underworld, jumped off of the platform and injured himself in the middle of our opening show. Never in my life have I ever had a show get cancelled halfway through a performance, and it honestly had me shaken up for the rest of that night and the day after. Not only was I scared for my fellow castmate, I was unsure of what that meant for our production. I was scared that we would have to cancel the show altogether if Dante's injuries were too severe, and then all of the hardwork and effort everyone of us put into this production would have been for nothing. Fortunately for us, Dante was willing and able to act in the rest of the shows despite his injury.

Although we faced slight turbulence, all in all I would absolutely say our show was a success and I am immensely proud of the work we displayed. Making theatre during a pandemic

originally seemed to be an impossible task but turned out to be an extremely educational and rewarding experience. I'm unsure if I would feel as proud and satisfied with the outcome had we not overcome so many obstacles. Through all of the crises and disasters, my cast and I put together a magical show and formed an intimate bond with each other in the process. I can confidently say that each and every person on this project brought everything they could to the table to give this play the outstanding performance it deserves. Not only did this show make me a better actor, it also made me a better castmate and team player. To say the least, I am pleased with the work of myself and my castmates and honestly couldn't imagine a better way to close this chapter of my life.

Pictures by Studio Jae



“Then, he sang the saddest music even we, The Stones, cried when we heard it!” -Little Stone

M1S2

Awaiting Eurydice’s Arrival into the Underworld





Little Stone and Big Stone playing with a book sent from Orpheus



Father reading Eurydice a letter from Orpheus