

**GSA: *Orpheus in the Underworld***  
**March 17, 2023, ODU University Theatre**  
**Review by John Campbell**

Written by Jacques Offenbach, directed by Governor's School for the Arts Vocal Music Chair Shelly Milam, conducted by Stephen Coxe and choreographed by Morgan White, the eighteen-piece orchestra and cast of forty-plus singers and dancers gave a brilliant and fun performance of the world's first, great, full-length operetta (Paris, 1858).

This frothy spoof of a serious opera by Gluck tells the story of Orpheus, his love for Eurydice and his attempts, through the power of music, to win her back from death and to bring her back to the land of the living.

**Scene on Earth:** We were tipped-off to the change from the original story when the added character Public Opinion (Aurora Sauer in male evening attire) gave us the "Turn off All Cell Phones" message and traded bows with Conductor Coxe. The opening song was sung by Logan Windley as Eurydice while gathering cornflowers for her new lover. She is bored to death with her husband Orpheus (Jadon Colbert) and is having an affair with the shepherd Aristeus (Ted J.C. Thomas) who is really the God Pluto in disguise. After an argument between the married couple they decide not to stay together; she is fed up with his violin playing and he is happy to enjoy his new mistress, Cynthia.

Orpheus' violin student, Summer Littles, gives us a showstopping performance of a piece by Gluck from his original opera. He warns Eurydice of a surprise in the garden. There she is bitten by a serpent and Pluto happily whisks her off to the Underworld but not before she has time to leave a note for her husband. Orpheus is pleased that she is gone until Public Opinion steps in and bosses him about, saying that he has to show public grief and journey to Olympus and plead with Jupiter, King of the Gods (Jarius Hines) to descend to the Underworld to retrieve his wife. Orpheus grudgingly heads off with Public Opinion.

**Scene on Mount Olympus:** Here we see the gods and goddesses lounging about in their gold-trimmed togas, overseen by Morpheus, God of Dreams (Riah Lubansky). We hear from Juno, Queen of the Gods (Faith Woodberry-Crisp), Cupid (Isabela Farrell), Venus, Goddess of Love (Isabella Gayton), Mercury, (Savannah Stephens) and Diana, Goddess of the Moon, Hunting and Virginity (Mary Reins). They complain about living on Olympus, Jupiter's hypocrisy about his sexual escapades and especially their steady diet of nectar and ambrosia! The ensemble's singing was wonderful here and throughout.

Jupiter hears Orpheus's plea and grants him permission to rescue Eurydice but Jupiter declares that he will go with them to the Underworld to investigate the affair personally. Bored, all the other gods plead to come along and they all descend.

**The Underworld:** Meanwhile in Pluto's Underworld boudoir, Eurydice is kept in seclusion and guarded by the dim-witted former King of Boetia, John Styx (Banks Boney). Eurydice is bored and accepts the advances of Jupiter disguised as a fly (fun costume with black, folding wings like a shawl). Cupid coaches Jupiter in how to get romantic attention. It works and they disguise Eurydice as a bacchante, a worshiper of the god Bacchus (a very sultry LaVonte Evans), to escape the Underworld together.

Pluto throws a raucous party with spicy food for all the gods and goddesses. Jupiter and Eurydice arrive and try to fool the crowd by her disguise as she sings a hymn to Bacchus. As Pluto begins to inspect the “bacchante,” Jupiter creates a diversion by having the party join in a minuet. Pluto's one-upmanship has him introducing a can-can instead. Public Opinion arrives with Orpheus and Jupiter lets him take Eurydice with him, with the proviso that he must not look at her until they are out of the Underworld. To ensure he can't succeed Jupiter hurls a thunderbolt at Orpheus' feet. Eurydice decides to actually become a bacchante and the entire cast erupts into a wild can-can.

A special thanks to everyone who made this performance possible: the students, both vocal and instrumental, their instructors and parents in what was a huge undertaking to bring such a glittering, glamorous and fun production to the University Theatre where the staff and tech students also did a great job. Also a nod to the large community of GSA supporters who believe in the arts.

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