

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Written by

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Based on, The Georgics book 4 by Virgil

The tribes of North America honor their culture by regularly performing traditional celebrations and ceremonies that are centuries old without trying to make them "modern" or otherwise acceptable to modern sensibilities. Traditional music and dance are an important component to the story's telling.

One motive for this script is to demonstrate to those who have inherited the Greco-Roman traditions of story and culture that there's nothing "corny" about performing your stories traditionally.

This play is meant for an all Native American cast. Each performer is to don Greek theatrical regalia and masks. The Gods speak in verse and the mortals in prose.

Most scenes are performed in an open amphitheater but the scenes in Heaven and Hell are filmed on elaborate stage sets

The most important element will be the accompanying music and dance. Practical effects will be used wherever possible.

ACT 1

EXT. NIGHT AMPHITHEATER

Black shrouded Charon stands is surrounded by black shear curtains.

CHARON (V.O.)

Nobody dies in Hell and I should
know
I'm the ferryman Charon from down
below.
Once we came close to a righteous
exception,
When brave Orpheus, but for Hade's
deception
would have revived his true love
Euridice.

Steep crescendo to fill a silent pause

Aha! I've piqued your morbid
curiosity
Calm yourself now without fear and
attend me
As I relate true loves tragic
charade,
Our story begins during Spring in a
glade

EXT. DAY GREEK AMPHITHEATER

A party in the woods. In a small clearing in the woods we see ORPHEUS sitting on a log playing the lyre, EURYDICE (Orpheus' wife), SALLY (Bob's wife), Susan (Bob's Sister) and BOB (Orpheus's friend) dancing to music played on the lyre. BOB is in his cups and trying (unsuccessfully) to dance with Eurydice. He stops dancing and looks quizzically at ORPHEUS.

BOB

"I know you're master of the lyre
but we're not here for artistry.
We have wine and bread and beauty.
And did I mention we have wine??
Let's pick up the pace a little!

ORPHEUS

You honor Bacchus 24/7. If
Persephone can only leave hell once
a year to kick off spring, the
least we can do is honor her!

SALLY

Come on! Play something we can
dance to! I'm sure Mother Nature
won't mind you using Apollo's harp
to sweep us off our feet."

SUSAN

I think he might be practicing for
another competition. I'm happy to
hear whatever you want to play
Orpheus.

BOB

Ignore my sister!

Turning to his sister

BOB (CONT'D)

Your crush is crushing my mood sis.
Either jump him or get your party
on. Your choice.

SALLY looks at SUSAN sadly as SUSAN runs into the woods
crying.

Susan, still crying approaches a low stone altar away from
the party. She opens a locket with Orpheus' image inscribed,
kisses it and places it on the altar and closes her eyes.

An image of Aphrodite appears. She looks down on Susan with
a sympathetic look and it slowly turns to disgust. Three
snakes emerge from the altar and dissolve into the locket.

EURYDICE picks up a wine jug and stops near ORPHEUS to fill
his cup. She places her cheek on ORPHEUS cheek and whispers
into his ear

EURYDICE

I'm dancing too fast for any of
these three
For your music has made my legs
slippery.
I'll hide away into our dell by the
river
To dance with myself and my wood
nymph sister
Leave these fools soon to their
bacchanal

(MORE)

EURYDICE (CONT'D)

Let's share each other's breath all
 within all
 Hasten to me Love, as quick as
 Eros' arrow
 Let them find us exhausted sometime
 tomorrow

Orpheus' eyes are focused at a distance as he visualizes. He accidentally plucks three random strings loudly and then grins.

ORPHEUS

Shouting to the three remaining dancers

So you want a dance eh? Well I
 hope you brought extra shoes 'cause
 this Ho-down's gonna burn your old
 one's up.

ORPHEUS begins playing a lively jig as EURYDICE goes into the woods un-noticed. We see a pattern on the bark of an oak tree turn into a young nymph (EURIDICE'S SISTER) who joins hands with EURYDICE as they escape.

EURYDICE and her SISTER are doing interpretive dance when EURYDICE stops and picks up the jug she brought from the party. She sees that it's empty and goes down to the river to fill it with fresh water. It's important to note that Eurydice is wearing a bright gold stephana (sort of a solid metal tiara) topped by a headband lei of small red rose buds.

SNAKE'S PERSPECTIVE OF EURYDICE APPROACHING RIVER. CAMERA MOVE TOWARD EURYDICE AS A SNAKE PASSES UNDER CAMERA WITH INCREASING SPEED.

CUT TO: EURYDICE
 ON THE GROUND

EURYDICE is lying on the ground gasping "Orpheus..." And then disappears in a bright golden light.

DOLLY ZOOM

Zoom in on ORPHEUS. Zooming in, the background scene of the woods gets darker. In a reverse of the dolly zoom, the background is replaced by Eurydice's funeral.

INT. EVENING OLYMPIA

Calliope (mother of Orpheus) and Apollo (Orpheus' father) are seated facing each other. In the foreground is Bacchus and Neptune looking over a railing at the scene on earth.

CALLIOPE (ORPHEUS' MOTHER)
 Father of Orpheus can we please
 send
 prayers of insistance for Hades to
 mend
 This cruelest of injuries and to
 beg
 Eurydice's tragic death he renege.

BACCHUS
 Tragedy must follow as sure as
 death
 When serpents think they can kiss
 any guest

NEPTUNE
 Come let's away to consult other
 gods
 On humans at parties and tragedies
 odds.
 It isn't a likelihood they couldn't
 foresee!

BACCHUS
 I think we have to revise
 party policy.

NEPTUNE (CONT'D)
 I think we have to revise
 party policy.

EXT. DAY AMPHITHEATER

Mourners surround Orpheus. As each one arrives downstage,
 they speak.

BOB
 A snake, a fucking snake! There
 are snakes all over the woods. How
 the hell can a river Nymph die from
 a fucking snake bite. There's more
 to this than meets the eye. Why is
 it that whenever gods (pause as he
 looks spitefully at ORPHEUS) and
 their sons, are involved it all
 goes so wrong.

SUSAN AND SALLY
 You gotta stay away from him for
 now Sue.

(MORE)

SUSAN AND SALLY (CONT'D)
 He's in mourning and it would look
 weird if you were to dote over him
 now. Just for a while okay?

INT. HADES TEMPLE

PERSEPHONE (HADES' WIFE)

Persephone is wearing the headband of rose buds we saw on
 Eurydice when she died. Eurydice approaches and fills
 Persephone's wine cup. Eurydice's stephana has been replaced
 with a simple ribbon.

He plays his heart strings on his
 father's lyre
 And places his future on the
 funeral pyre
 I know something of loss and love's
 agony
 when Hades my love, from life you
 took me.
 Yet I am a hapless goddess of new
 spring
 when nothing I can give him will
 ease the sting (we see HADES'
 facial expression soften as she
 says this)

INT. DAY OLYMPUS

APOLLO

Your pain is my pain as with any
 father
 But son I am begging you now to
 consider
 Your life can't end here in pain
 and despair
 You must live as my son...

ORPHEUS

..Dad that's not fair!
 You can no longer talk to me as
 your son
 Any more than I can undo what's
 been done
 There's no logic or reason that
 will sway
 My dead sprit's revival...

APOLLO

...there's a way.

ORPHEUS

What are you saying? You taught me
too well
'No one can defeat death or escape
hell.'
Now you say I can! What's the
condition?
God's always impose...

APOLLO

...listen, now listen!
Although Hades is Zeus' older
brother
His deathhold resolve is like no
other
But his weakness is his wife
Persephone
Who's heart was softened in your
sympathy
There's a small chance, an
opportunity
To loosen his hold on...

ORPHEUS

...Eurydice.

APOLLO (CONT'D)

...Eurydice.

APOLLO (CONT'D)

The thing about Hades you have to
know
Is that he's evil and scheming.
Although
His demeanor will be convivial.
But whatever he offers don't take
the deal.
Then when his attention is turned
away
Look with pleading eyes to
Persephone
At that point she will sweetly
interject
Considerations that he won't
reject.
He'll use these to set the
condition
Abide by it or renounce your
ambition
If you pause or waiver then all is
lost
So steel your heart's resolve at
any cost.

ORPHEUS

Knowing Eurydice isn't lost to me
 Has brought me bold purpose and
 energy
 By what you've told me I no longer
 despair
 But how do I enter Hades' dark
 lair?
 The Gates of Hades are hardened to
 me
 and can't be loosened by strength
 or villany
 So how in the world will I gain
 entrance
 without forfeiting my mortal
 essence?

APOLLO

Your mother came up with a clever
 plan.
 She convince some beavers to build
 a dam.
 When it floods the bulwark around
 the gate
 Will soften and become easy to
 break.
 Rodents and songbirds will burrow
 strategic holes.
 High flying eagles will watch for
 Hades patrols.
 As a muse, she could offer them
 recompense
 of Pierian waters and frankincense.
 By the time you arrive you should
 be able,
 to open them without much trouble.
 Eurydice's sister will show you the
 way
 and give you three coins for the
 ferryman.
 Then it's your wits you'll have to
 rely on.
 Show honor and fairness to the
 ferryman Charon!
 His boat's never pointed toward the
 entrance
 So pay for the return trip in
 advance.

ORPHEUS

My mind is set and only have one
 ambition
 To set myself against vile
 perdition

(MORE)

ORPHEUS (CONT'D)

I won't wait for condescending
permission
My love for Euridice will guide my
mission.

Orpheus rises and turns his back to Apollo who is watching him with increasing concern. As he does it fades to...

EXT. DAY AMPHITHEATER

ORPHEUS (CONT'D)

I have a quicker wit and steadier
hand
Than any god of mortal air sea or
land
Whatever the obstacle no matter the
risk
I will win this battle by brawn and
wit
All my senses, all of my attention
Will be focused on true love's
devotion
My purpose and commitment will not
waiver
No matter the dangers in this
endeavor

ACT 2

EXT. DAY AMPHITHEATER

Orpheus walks off stage and the scene morphs to

EXT. DAY ON THE PATH TO HELL

Orpheus is making his way through a lightly wooded path when he sees the pattern on a tree next to him move as though sobbing.

ORPHEUS

Oh sullen sister of my love's
affections
I know you are here to give me
directions
I know I can help us both to
recover
By righteous quest for your sister;
my lover
I promise you Hades can't defend
against
My perseverance and my insistence
Be assured then in our certain
victory.
That he will release our lovely
Eurydice.

Orpheus looks curiously at the surrounding tree leaves, tall grass and bushes and concludes that they are not moving as they would in a wind or otherwise naturally.

ORPHEUS (CONT'D)

Why are so many nymphs following
us?
Don't they know that we enter
Erebus?

EURIDICE'S SISTER

Eurydice's sister tilts her head and widens her eyes with an expression of "?"

ORPHEUS WALKING THROUGH THE WOODS FINDS HIMSELF ALONE UNTIL HE SPOTS EURYDICE'S SISTER ON A LOG WITH HER ELBOW ON A KNEE AND PALM SUPPORTING HER HEAD.

ORPHEUS

Your moving too fast and it will
soon be night
Sister! You need to stay within my
sight
You know the way but I know the
danger
From Hades spies and his sentry's
anger
My senses are trained on all that I
view
But distracted when I have to look
for you.

EURIDICE'S SISTER

Eurydice's sister rolls her eyes and then opens them wide with an expression of "!" As she points the way in an exaggerated motion.

After a short hike following Eurydice's sister, Orpheus spots a circling Eagle. Eurydice's sister stands suddenly still and shakes her head. She holds out her hand and shows Orpheus three large gold coins which he takes saying:

ORPHEUS

I know you may not enter hell with
me
But please wait here and be second
to see
that purest gem of our lives,
Eurydice.

As he approaches the river bank, he sees the perfect outline of a large gate made of the nests of cliff swallows. Getting closer, he sees an outcrop of black metal where rodents have burrowed several holes in the bank.

With some effort, he pushes the dirt aside and makes an opening just big enough for him to fit through. His hand passes through the exposed gate and he enters, head first, into the narrow opening into Hade's kingdom.

CHANGE LUT TO
SEPIA WASH OVER
MUTED COLORS

When he stands, he finds himself on a river bank exactly as the one he left except the quality of light is different and a shiver runs through his body.

As he retraces the path he walked in the mortal world it becomes darker. He sees black phantoms in his peripheral vision that come closer as it becomes darker and foggier.

Orpheus resolves to announce himself to them and begins to play his Lyre:

On playing his Lyre, the path became lighter and he could see that he is headed to another river bank. But this bank is different than the one at the entrance and has a short dock made of stone at the river's edge.

Through the mist on the river a dark figure appears floating on the low fog. It leads a faering boat with a lamp on its high prow.

Orpheus extends his hand and gives the specter the coins and suddenly finds himself on the boat.

EXT. DAY THE RIVER STYX, CHARON'S BOAT CARRYING ORPHEUS FOGGY DAY

Although the phantom doesn't speak, the sounds of the water lapping at the boats side, the wind, the creaks of the wooden boat and the splash of his poles in the water combine into unmistakable speech.

CHARON

I am the one they call Charon.
Ferryman of bodies who've had a
burial
I've never hauled a living one
I'm curious since your not even ill
Why on earth would you willingly
visit hell?

ORPHEUS

I can assure you I'm not here due
to health
But to recover a life that was
stolen by tricks
And for whom I will give my life
and wealth.
And even if I had to swim the river
styx.

CHARON

What you see in my hands may look
like sticks

(MORE)

CHARON (CONT'D)

but they push swimmers
Back into the styx.
Those without coins are legion in
numbers
But are lost to the river and most
can't float
Those who can try to get into my
boat.

ORPHEUS

Your boats low gunnels are easily
fixed
Rather than pushing them with
cumbersome sticks,
why don't you just get a bigger
boat?
and in that way ignore the ones
that float.

CHARON

By Jove what an excellent question!
One never asked of me by God or
human.

ORPHEUS

You must not have a very good
union.

CHARON gives an uncharacteristically wry grin at this
exchange.

INT. HADES RECEPTION HALL

Hades is a large man with a furrowed brow seated between two
iron braziers. We cannot see the walls of the vast reception
hall but the mosaic marble floor in front of Hades is well
lit and the flickering fires give Hades's face a fearsome
look.

A shadow sweeps across the floor toward Hades and becomes a
hand, shrouded in black. It reaches up from the shadow on the
floor offering up a folded paper (pleas a prayers from the
loved ones of the dead). Hades unfolds the paper and reads
it. He thinks for a moment then throws it into the fire on
his left (One fire for "Grant" and the other for "Deny").
Another hand and another note is handed to him.

As Orpheus approaches Hades speaks without looking up from
his reading:

HADES

Orpheus. What a pleasant surprise.
What brings you the largest
kingdom?

ORPHEUS

Do you take me for a common fellow?
I can speak in rhyme, I'm the son
of Apollo.

HADES

Of course you are. Don't take
offence.
Would you kindly indulge me just
this once.
For talking as humans as you
beseech...

(Hades looks at Orpheus
for the first time with a
hard expression)

...me for what only a mortal would
seek.

ORPHEUS

Speak in Rhyming meter or in prose
But please listen to what I propose
I have traveled to hell to make
this plea
Please restore my sweet love
Eurydice
Gratitude to you will be my life's
purpose
In song and verse I have no human
peer
I'm unequalled in eliciting
awestricken fear
This I'll devote to your honor and
praise
Every moment till the end of my
days.

HADES

It doesn't matter whether you can
sing
It's more the balance of the thing
Of love and death you make drama
and singing
But on balance your lives have no
real meaning:
If it is mortal it must surely die.
It is irrelevant that it makes you
cry.

ORPHEUS

Its precisely transience that makes
 love songs
 overwhelm all of life's other
 sordid wrongs
 You know and I know that in every
 corner
 of heaven, gods bow before love's
 honor.

Behind Orpheus, black sheer curtains part and the Persephone
 is lit from above. She is accompanied by Eurydice who has a
 blank stare.

PERSEPHONE

Love is honored by gods as you say,
 ergo
 Honor prohibits its use for your
 ego

As Persephone is speaking Orpheus turns and starts to rush
 towards Eurydice but dark, shrouded hands reach up from the
 floor with outstretched fingers, reaching for him. He looks
 to Hades to explain.

HADES

What you see is but a puppet of
 her.
 That soul lives in other bodies
 that were.
 Now this one now that one at random
 times
 Until every soul and every body
 combines.
 my wife's favored maid is the
 puppet you see
 And not your companion Eurydice

PERSEPHONE

You stole your way into the heart
 of hell
 by deceit and now have the gall to
 tell
 Our king about living with love's
 honor.
 But your despair has brought you
 dishonor
 that pernicious lies will not
 palliate
 Now you must accept Eurydice's fate

Hades looks up with pride at his wife.

A shadow appears with a long message for Hades. Hades looks away from Orpheus as he reads.

Seizing his chance he finds Persephone's eyes and gives her a hopeful look before slowly looking down.

HADES

With audacious greed you pretend to
be bereaved
as part of some plot you and Apollo
conceived...

ORPHEUS

You would lecture me on audacious
greed!?

Orpheus motions to the ornate surroundings

ORPHEUS (CONT'D)

I came here sincerely on bended
knee
To beg for honor and magnanimity
Instead you accuse me of guile and
grift
no mention of the veil you alone
can lift.

PERSEPHONE

Now Orpheus you are being to rude.
Do you know how many use "Love" as
a ruse?
Music and dance are tricks to
beguile your
Ego but its just pitiful self
grandeur
You think yourself creative and
smart
But you only use it to win her
fawning heart.
But you make a point and I quite
agree
Your love is true as is Eurydice
But love's testament is only made
by heroes
who'd die to prove that love is not
just Eros.
Would you be such a hero Orpheus?
If not, abnegate honor and leave
us!

ORPHEUS

Yes!

HADES

Yes!

They look at each other for a second until Orpheus gives a nod to Hades

HADES (CONT'D)

Yes. And let this be an eternal
contest
for future lovers who make this
request
of the truth that all lost lover's
rhapsodies
are not for their souls but their
mortal bodies

Hades sits back on his throne as two shrouded hands rise from the floor. One with paper and one with a pen and scribe:

HADES (CONT'D)

For one hour my gates will be open
to souls and mortals to leave or
come in.
You will go and Euridice's soul
will
Follow but you may not look at her
until
The sunlight touches her and her
body
Renews its mortal temporality.
If you cannot resist the temptation
Your soul will be condemned to
damnation
And Eurydice's body and soul remade
by my wife's side as her favored
hand maid

Hades takes the written decree and places it into the brazier on his right. He begins to rise but pauses and leans toward Orpheus.

HADES (CONT'D)

But let me add an unsigned codicil;
That you can leave or accept as you
will:
From every yesterday you're one day
diminished
And soon your glorious love will be
finished
You give too much credit to what
you felt
And not enough to the damage you've
dealt
Her veil can't be raised by perfidy
And your guile is no match for my
divinity

(MORE)

HADES (CONT'D)

If you wish to join her simply stay here.
Eventually, you'll both disappear.

ORPHEUS

I'll return with my love and live above !
You set such small store on true love's resolve.
You framed it as mankind's epic contest.
But you've shortchanged the will of a lover's quest.

Hades looks at Persephone but she sadly looks down and disappears behind a black sheer curtain. He turns away from Orpheus and sits back on his throne and resumes reading the pleas as he talks.

HADES

Farewell young scion of Apollo.
It doesn't matter whether you go or not. What's done is done and you're about to learn the folly of hubris in the face of divine law and mercy.

The scenery around Orpheus slowly changes and he finds himself on the dock, waiting for Charon. His eyes do not blink or move as he stares forward with purpose.

The specter is silent as they cross the river but as he gets out of the boat he hears

CHARON

"Chances unseen are losses."

He hesitates but he cannot look back to ask what was meant. He breathes out heavily and continues at an intentional pace.

After what seems close to an hour he sees the cave doors wide open. The sun is high and the shadow of the top of the doorway is only a few feet inside the entrance. He rushes toward the sunlit floor when he sees Eurydice's sister come from behind the open door.

In a spit second, a snake just like the one that killed Eurydice leaps onto her sister and she dies in a flash of golden light. Just as that happens, he sees Eurydice's ghost run past him and embrace her sister's ghost. As Orpheus takes a step toward her with his hand outstretched, he sees the spirit of Euridice and the spirit of her sister walk hand-in-hand back toward Hades.

Orpheus stumbles backward in shock and the Gate of Hades closes and disappears into the cliffside.

SECOND ZOLLY SHOT

Zolly in when Orpheus realizes he's lost Eurydice forever and zolly out to Orpheus with mourners back at his house.

ACT 3

INT. DAY GREEK AMPHITHEATER - FUNERAL SCENE

A crowd of sympathizers surround Orpheus to offer support and condolences. Orpheus sits silent and quietly strums his lyre.

Susan kneels outside the growing crowd around wretched Orpheus. She takes the locket from around her neck and kisses it, then opens it. The third of the three snakes emerges and kills Susan.

Orpheus sits up suddenly as he senses this, He parts the crowd in time to see the snake slither away. Just before it disappears it turns it's head to Orpheus and bends its head down with its blood-stained mouth slightly open. It is a combination of a nod of respect and what looks like an open-mouth smile.

Bob pushes his way through the crowd and stopped in his tracks by the sight of his dead sister. He looks at Orpheus and rushes at him with a knife.

Orpheus blocks the blow with his lyre but Bob rushes at him again

BOB

YOU! YOU! Fist you cause the
death of the most beautiful woman
I've ever met and now my sister.
You're going to die an un-mourned
death Orpheus and your soul will
never re-unite with my two loves.

Orpheus pins Bob

ORPHEUS

It wasn't me! I gave up everything
for Eurydice. I never meant to
cause this tragedy.

BOB

Fuck you're rhyming lying mouth and
Fuck you! No water nymph can die
of a common snake bite. You
conspired with your parents to make
you immortal with her. I'm going
to kill you!

Bachus and Neptune watching the proceedings from a railing in Olympus

BACHUS

The young man makes a good point
when he states
Nymphs cannot die because of mortal
snakes
We should ask the others to
investigate

NEPTUNE

I think it would be better to wait.
Human prayers for love's devotion
are weighty.
Those snakes could only have come
from Aphrodite.
You know the sister had a hand in
this
when she prayed to that goddess for
just one kiss
From her childhood idol Orpheus.
That prayer was what upset the
delicate balance
Of Eurydice's and Orpheus' last
chance.

EXT. WOODS

Orpheus is playing sad songs on his lyre overlooking the bay
in the dell Eurydice died in. Bob sneaks up behind him and
stabs him. Later we see him throw Orpheus' severed head into
the bay and spit after it.

INT. HADES TEMPLE

Persephone is being attended by Eurydice and her sister.
They're both smiling and talk to one another and then giggle
until Persephone looks at them with a warning grin.

HADES

Those two ae unseemly happy for
hell
I've been meaning to ask, How is
their dell?

PERSEPHONE

Its running creek makes a pleasant
sound
And the dying dell it feeds has
rebound
I saw an oak dancing without a
Dryad

(MORE)

PERSEPHONE (CONT'D)

I heard the creek laugh without a
 Naiad
 Serving me as maids together in
 Hell
 Has made them both happy and saved
 the dell.
 But oh how I'd have loved to see
 what would be
 In that dell if Orpheus had left
 with Eurydice.
 That love would have lasted forever
 Why didn't Orpheus just take your
 offer?

HADES

Fool's pride and lover's ego
 conspire
 To blind men to everything but the
 fire
 That rules their heart and destroys
 their body
 I knew that he had paid Charon
 already,
 his spirit didn't need another
 token
 and he could've left through the
 gates I left open.
 But in his cockiness he couldn't
 realize
 If he'd stayed and died they'd both
 be alive.
 "To die and then be reborn to new
 life."
 needs a person to be a little
 contrite.
 To know that true love is not
 life's business
 but what flows in the pulse of
 nothingness.

Hades caresses Susan's cheek with the final words.

FADE TO BLACK V.O.

CHARON

I hope that this tale left you in
 doubt
 of whether pride is something you
 can't live without
 Be wary that true love will
 someday find thee
 Lest you end up like Orpheus and
 Eurydice.

(MORE)

CHARON (CONT'D)

CLOSING SHOT

Orpheus' head floating down the River Styx singing "Euridice! What have I done?" in a heavily aspirated and haunting voice. The words echo off the cliffs as Charon pushes the head underwater with his stick.