

Audience Guide:

metamorphoses

Written and Originally Directed by
Mary Zimmerman

Directed at ZACH Theatre by
Dave Steakley

Choreography by
Nicole Whiteside

David Christopher (Midas)



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Photography: kirktuck.com

About Adapter/Playwright Mary Zimmerman

Mary Zimmerman is the recipient of a 1998 MacArthur Fellowship, the 2002 Tony Award for Best Director for *Metamorphoses* and 10 Joseph Jefferson Awards, including Best Production and Best Direction. She is a member of the Lookingglass Theatre Company of Chicago, an Artistic Associate of the Goodman and Seattle Repertory Theatres, and a Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University. Works she has adapted and directed include *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, *The Odyssey*, *Arabian Nights*, *Journey to the West*, *Metamorphoses*, *The Secret in the Wings* and *Eleven Rooms of Proust*. She has also directed *Measure for Measure*, *Henry VIII*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Pericles*. In 2002, she created a new opera with Philip Glass, *Galileo Galilei*.

The daughter of two university professors, Zimmerman spent her childhood in Lincoln, Nebraska, dreaming of being an actress. As an undergraduate at Northwestern University, she began as a composition and literature

major but switched to the Department of Performance Studies. It wasn't until her graduate work at Northwestern that she discovered "the act of directing, creating and making theatre—without being in it." After receiving her BA, MA and PhD at Northwestern, Zimmerman joined the Performance Studies faculty. The environment has continued to be fruitful. Her production of *Metamorphoses*, which began as a student production, went on to Broadway and was nominated for a Tony for Best Play.

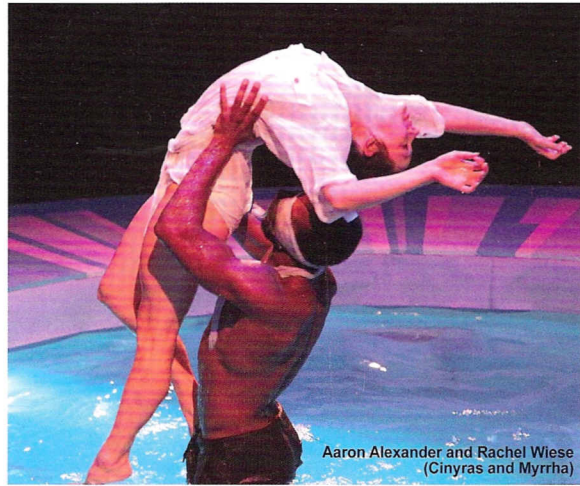
In her work, she continues to be drawn to ancient literature and stories based in oral tradition. Her rehearsal process is open and organic, especially when she serves as both adapter and director. She allows time for a production's imagery to develop, often working off the physical improvisations of her ensemble of actors. Her hope is to have a child's openness and imagination, for – to paraphrase one of her favorite quotes by Willa Cather – "I'll never be the artist I was as a

child." "I love that quote," Zimmerman says. "It is a statement of my own belief that I'm at my best when I'm unselfconscious and using what's in the room. They don't call it a play for nothing. We think of 'play' as a noun. 'I'm going to see a play.' We forget that it's also a verb. Children play in order to survive. They're practicing at life in order to cope and survive later in life. Plays do the same thing. They're teaching us how to cope with situations, like the advent of our death. And we can sit back and observe."

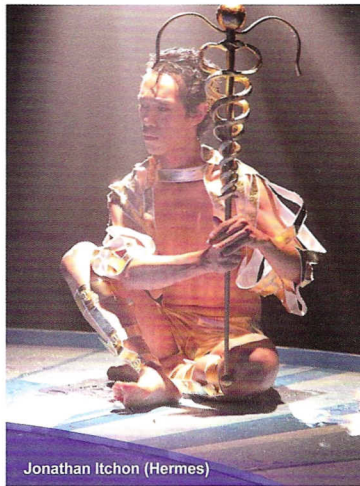
Mary Zimmerman looked to David R. Slavitt's translation of Ovid's epic poem as the basis of her stage adaptation. Completed in the year 8 A.D., Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is a lusciously rich tapestry of 250 myths and legends with the unifying theme of transformation. Her adaptation is at once both classical and contemporary, retelling the ancient myths with a modern American sensibility in much the same way Ovid retold the Greek myths with a Roman one. ☺

Synopsis of the Stories in Metamorphoses

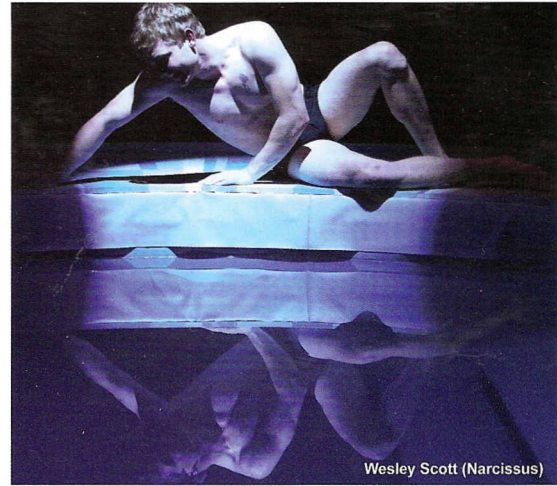
Rich King Midas shuns his daughter for being disruptive during his speech. A drunken Silenus enters and, before passing out, speaks of a faraway land that grants eternal life. Bacchus comes to retrieve Silenus, and grants Midas a wish for his graciousness towards Silenus, and Midas wishes to have whatever he touches turn to gold. He accidentally turns his daughter to gold, and is told by Bacchus to seek a mystic pool that will restore her to normal. Midas leaves on his quest.



Aaron Alexander and Rachel Wiese
(Cinyras and Myrrha)



Jonathan Itchon (Hermes)



Wesley Scott (Narcissus)

ALCYONE & CEYX King Ceyx voyages into the ocean to visit an oracle, despite his wife Alcyone's warnings. Poseidon destroys Ceyx's ship, and he is killed, unbeknownst to Alcyone. Prompted by Aphrodite, Alcyone dreams of Ceyx, who tells her to go to the shore. With mercy from the gods, the two are reunited, transformed into seabirds, and fly away together.

ERYSICHTHON Erysichthon, a sacrilegious man, cuts down a tree sacred to the goddess Ceres. In an act of vengeance, Ceres commands the spirit Hunger to curse Erysichthon with an insatiable appetite. After eating endlessly and spending his fortune on food, Erysichthon sells his mother to a merchant. She prays to the god Poseidon who turns her into a little girl and she escapes from the merchant. Erysichthon succumbs to his hunger and devours himself.

ORPHEUS & EURYDICE This story is told twice, first from Orpheus' point of view. Orpheus married Eurydice when she is bitten by a snake and dies. Distraught, Orpheus travels to the Underworld ruled by Hades to strike a deal to retrieve Eurydice. Hades lets Eurydice return with Orpheus on one condition: Eurydice must follow behind Orpheus and he cannot look back at her—if he does, she must stay in the Underworld forever. Orpheus agrees, and, when he is almost back to the living world, he looks back and she is plucked away. The action is repeated many times, each reminding Orpheus of losing his bride. The second telling is

from the point of view of Eurydice in the Rainer Maria Rilke poem of 1908. After an eternity of this repeated action, Eurydice becomes fragile and forgetful, no longer remembering Orpheus. She returns to the Underworld unknowing of Orpheus, whom she loved long ago.

NARCISSUS A beautiful young man named Narcissus catches a glimpse of his own reflection in a pool. He becomes transfixed and paralyzed, and a narcissus plant replaces him.

POMONA & VERTUMNUS Pomona, a female wood nymph, has refused the hands of many suitors and remains alone. Shy Vertumnus disguises himself in costumes to convince Pomona to fall in love with him. After the story of Myrrha, Pomona tells Vertumnus to take off his silly disguise and the two fall in love.

MYRRHA Vertumnus tells Pomona the story of King Cinyras and his daughter Myrrha. After denying Aphrodite's love attempts, Myrrha is cursed by Aphrodite to lust for her father. Myrrha tries to control her urges but finally falls to temptation. With the help of her Nursemaid, Myrrha has three sexual encounters with her father, each time keeping him drunk and blindfolded so he doesn't know it's her. The third time, Cinyras takes off his blindfold and tries to strangle Myrrha, who escapes and melts into the pool.

PHAETON Phaeton tells his Therapist of a distanced relationship with his father Apollo, God of the Sun. After being bullied in school, Phaeton goes to his father, who drives the sun across the sky each day. Racked with guilt of fatherly neglect, Apollo allows Phaeton to "drive" the sun across the sky as compensation for years of absence. Phaeton drives the sun too close to the earth and scorches it.

EROS & PSYCHE "Question" and "Answer" narrate the story of Psyche falling in love with Eros. Q and A tell the audience that they might wander in the darkness of loneliness until they blind themselves to personal romantic desires and give themselves to a deeper love. **The voice of the "Question" is performed by Alia Vinson, and the voice of the "Answer" is performed by John Aielli of KUT 90.5's Eklektikos.**

BAUCIS & PHILEMON Zeus and Hermes disguise themselves as earthly beggars to experience being mortal. After being shunned by the entire city, they are accepted into the house of a poor married couple, Baucis and Philemon. The couple serves the gods a great feast, unaware of the true identity of the strangers except that they are "children of God". After the feast, the gods reveal themselves and grant the two a wish. Baucis and Philemon ask to die at the same time to save each other the grief of death, and the gods respond by turning their house into a grand palace and the couple into a pair of trees with branches intertwined.☞

Who's Who in The World of Metamorphoses

Listed are the important characters in order that they appear or are referenced in the play. For the most part, the play uses the Greek names of the characters.

ZEUS (ZOOSS), god of weather, supreme ruler of the gods, lord of the heavens.

MIDAS (MIGH des), king of Pessinus, renowned for his love of wealth and the ability to turn things into gold.

BACCHUS (BAHK es), a son of Zeus, is the god of wine and partying.

SILENUS (sigh LEE nes) a follower of Bacchus, he is almost always drunk, but also possesses many valuable secrets.

ALCYONE (al SEE ah knee), Ceyx's Queen and daughter of Aeolus, Master of the Winds, and **CEYX** (SEE icks), loving King. The couple has never been separated since their marriage until Ceyx, Captain of a sea vessel, dies at sea by Poseidon's wrath. The couple is transformed into birds.

HERMES (HER meez), messenger of the gods, son of Zeus, who guides the souls of the dead to the underworld.

APHRODITE (af ra DIE tee), goddess of love and beauty, exhibits jealousy and rashness, as well as love.

IRIS (EYE ris), goddess of the rainbow.

MORPHEUS (MOR fee us), the god of dreams. Ceyx comes back to Alcyone disguised as Morpheus in a dream.

ERYSICHTHON (err i SICK thon), a mortal man who finds nothing sacred and unwisely shows no respect for the gods. Ceres curses him with an insatiable hunger after cutting down a sacred tree.

CERES (SER eez), the Roman goddess of the Harvest.

OREAD (OR ee add), a fierce mountain nymph and Ceres' handmaid.

HUNGER commanded to latch onto Erysichthon forever with an unquenchable hunger.

POSEIDON (po SIDE un), the powerful, trident-wielding god of the sea.

ORPHEUS (OR fee as), husband to Eurydice and the greatest of all musicians. His music not only has the power to influence the living, but the inanimate as well.

EURYDICE (you RID i see) marries Orpheus, but dies on their wedding day after stepping on a snake. She is eventually doomed to the Underworld after Orpheus breaks his promise to Hades, and will spend eternity not remembering her husband.

HADES (HAY deez), god of the Underworld.

PERSEPHONE (purr SEF ah knee), the goddess of the Underworld and wife of Hades.

VERTUMNUS (ver TUM nes), god of changing seasons and fruitfulness.

POMONA (pah MOAN uh), a wood nymph who prefers the company of trees to men.

CINYRAS (SIN i res), king of Cyprus and father to Myrrha.

MYRRHA (MUR rah), daughter of King Cinyras who denies Aphrodite.

NURSEMAID: a servant who agrees to help Myrrha have sexual relations with her father.

APOLLO (uh PALL low), god of the sun who brings daylight to the world by driving his sun chariot across the sky.

PHAETON (FAYI tn), son of Apollo.

THERAPIST: a Freudian psychologist who psychoanalyzes Phaeton.

EROS (AIR os), Aphrodite's son, god of love and desire, who falls in love with Psyche. Also known as Cupid.

PSYCHE (SIGH key), Eros' wife, the personification of the human soul.

PHILEMON (fi LEE mon) and **BAUCIS** (BOWcis), a loving, married couple of great generosity, despite their poverty.

PANDORA given a box by Zeus with instructions that she not open it; she gives in to her curiosity and opens it; all the miseries and evils fly out to afflict mankind.

SISYPHUS (SIS i fus), doomed to push a rock up a hill for all eternity

TANTALUS (TAN tuh luss), son of Zeus, cursed to eternal thirst.

The Poet OVID, 43 B.C. - 17 A.D. One of the most prolific poets of Rome's Golden Age, Ovid, the name by which Publius Ovidius Naso is commonly known, specialized in the witty and sophisticated treatment of love in all its permutations. Born March 20, 43 B.C., a year after the murder of Julius Caesar, Ovid spent his youth in his native Sulmo, untouched by the civil wars. Shortly after peace resumed, when Augustus ruled unthreatened, Ovid went to Rome to continue his education. His father intended him for a political career, but Ovid quietly rebelled. The literary temptations in the capital and his own spectacular talents drew him inevitably into writing poetry. Before he was 20, he was reading his works to appreciative audiences, and by age 30, he was Rome's most successful poet. Successes followed for two more decades, when Augustus suddenly dispatched Ovid, then 50, into exile. The circumstances behind this event remain unclear even today. Ovid himself deliberately obscured them (as did the emperor), merely referring to "a poem and an error." The place of exile was Tomis (modern Costanza, in Romania), a primitive town on the Black Sea. Arriving there in spring of 9 A.D., Ovid fought his longing for his friends, wife and Rome by writing poetry about exile. The last datable poems refer to the year 16, and presumably he died soon after, an unhappy man of 60 whose suffering exposed the authoritarian nature of Augustus.



Bill Moyers Interviews Mary Zimmerman

(Excerpts are taken from the full interview which can be found at www.zachtheatre.org.)

BILL MOYERS: We've seen how some myths keep human beings imprisoned in political and religious shackles. But other myths have redemptive power. They change the way we see our world and ourselves. Mary Zimmerman believes in the power of myth to transform, even to transform a swimming pool into an ocean of the imagination. That's what she's done, making a big splash with her acclaimed play *Metamorphoses*. She's taken ancient Roman myths and brought them to life in the here and now. How do you explain the stories' power to transform? One of my colleagues went to the play last evening, came out and said, "I laughed, I cried, but I felt transformed."

MARY ZIMMERMAN: I'm not sure what causes that, but there is something about these stories being so ancient. And they have something to say because they are so ancient, which helps you take the long view.

MOYERS: This play was in rehearsals during the World Trade Center attack.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. We were in rehearsal September 11th and went into technical rehearsals on the 13th. And it felt strange going in to rehearse a play at that time, but on the other hand, the play suddenly had all of these very profound resonances. There are at least two stories in it where someone goes away, off to work basically, and is suddenly taken from the earth—just destroyed. I remember on our first public performance, which was the 18th, shaking and trembling off stage about showing this and dragging the audience through this story, including the dying prayer of a man saying, "I only pray my body is found. Just let my body be found." The line that has become the most important to me in the play is in the final minutes. Baucis and Philemon are setting the table for the gods and they're bringing out all this different food, and there's a moment where one of the actors brings out a basket of apples and someone says, "remember how apples smell?" And then everyone pauses and remembers. And that's a very important line to me right now, because there's a lot of rhetoric about how everything is changed, nothing will

be the same, we can't go back. But the natural world—the smell of apples—to me remains innocent. Don't lose sight of the fact that there is still beauty in the world, and there is still love in the world, and these simple pleasures in the world, which are indelible.

**"It's just inevitable.
The soul wanders in the dark until it
finds love. And so wherever our love
goes, there goes our soul—If we're
lucky and if we let ourselves be blind
instead of always watching out."**

MOYERS: Whose line is it in your play, "Let me step out of my own heart."

ZIMMERMAN: "Oh, gods, I pray you change me, transform me entirely, let me step out of my own heart." I actually wrote that line, and it's partly because when I first made this play I was undergoing some personal transformation in my life. I had lived with the same fella from the age of 20 to 37, and he was leaving me. It was so devastating to me, and change felt so soul destroying and I was frightened of what was to come. I couldn't stand the state I was in; I wanted to be through it—the moment of metamorphoses is so excruciating, but then it can produce something new.

MOYERS: The birth.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. Something the world has created through these horrible changes. And I don't mean that particularly from the World Trade Center, but if you take the long view, we've suffered incredible disasters and transforming events, and yet story goes on, narrative goes on. Even though we die, these stories continue and tie together.

MOYERS: *Metamorphoses* just seems like such an appropriate play for our time, when God has no answers.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes, well, there are lots of

gods in *Metamorphoses*, and the Greek gods I believe are 12 different names for feelings inside ourselves. There are moments when you're being governed by Aphrodite who is chairing the meeting of all the different parts of your personality. There are moments when you are governed by Zeus, when you're in an authoritative position and you're very reasonable. There are moments when you're being governed by Mars and you're crazy angry. But all those different parts exist inside us; it's who's chairing the meeting at different times... who's really got the upper hand at that moment.

MOYERS: In your story of Cupid and Psyche, the narrator philosophizes on happy endings. "It's just inevitable. The soul wanders in the dark until it finds love. And so wherever our love goes there goes, our soul—if we're lucky and if we let ourselves be blind instead of always watching out."

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. That has very personal meaning for me. Those ideas are drawn from James Hillman writing on the figure of Eros.

MOYERS: The Jungian scholar.

ZIMMERMAN: Yes. But I believe in that idea that there's another I, that love operates from a sort of internal I, but that we're often fooled by appearances. It's the *Beauty and the Beast* story. And I just have faith that if you allow yourself to be trusting, to forget about your past hurts, that's the chance at which you will find love. That story remains always mysterious to me. Their names are Eros, which means love, and Psyche, which means the soul. Why is it forbidden for the soul to look directly on love? It's the myth that feels like it has the most urgent symbolic content and yet it remains elusive to me.

MOYERS: Do you still think there are happy endings to be embraced?

ZIMMERMAN: I do. I think we can't lose sight of that dream. That dream guides us even if it's not finally attainable. It brings it out the best in us. ☺

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