

25 June

My credo has always been that like-minded collaborators are desperately hard to find. When you do find them, do everything you can to work with them again and again. Familiarity doesn't dull the edges of art, it creates a sense of artistic efficiency. Time spent on diplomacy and negotiation is eliminated. Trust is crucial in art, especially when you're an artist, as I am, who comes to a project without a script.

My association with Vladan Slavković—known as Slavko to virtually everyone he knows—began in 2006, with the creation of *Box/WhatBox: I Dream* in Mokra Gora. Slavko is unlike anyone I've ever met in theatre. In addition to his acting and scenographic skills, he's also an accomplished artist. He has equally been a soldier, a soccer hooligan and a member of a local teen gang on the streets of Kraljevo. With his piercing blue eyes, military crewcut and jutting jaw, he can look like a ruthless killer, while at the same time possessing the kind of intellect and vision that has pushed him to create a youth theatre, organise local political resistance (“Lokalni Front”) and found a theatre festival dedicated to emerging artists (the A.N.F.I. Festival). Slavko is a legend in Kraljevo, the King of “King’s Town.”

That's how we came to 2017, and the creation of *Eurydika By the Water*¹ for the A.N.F.I. Festival.

A couple of factors added a sense of poignancy to the project. The first was that Slavko had begun the process of emigrating to the United States². The second factor was that I'd been diagnosed with cancer just before leaving Canada in April. I'd delayed the surgery because I wanted to create one more original show in Europe, with my favourite collaborator and partner-in-crime. Slavko was determined to stage a show outdoors, by the edge of the Ibar River, using a tiny island close to the shoreline. He suggested doing a version of the Eurydice myth. Several outstanding female actors with whom we'd both worked would be central to the project. He thought the tale of Eurydice might prove ideal. It meant work on the narrative needed to begin immediately. We'd have just seven days to put it together in Kraljevo. With five strong actresses, it was clear we'd focus on Eurydice's story, rather than that of Orpheus. Slavko and I wanted to use his youth group, for their further theatrical development. So a Greek-style chorus became part of my thinking.

For those unfamiliar with the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, there are several versions, each a product of their era. Some list Apollo as the sire of Orpheus, while others mention Apollo as the father of Eurydice. The cause of Eurydice's death changes from one version to another, as well as the identity of her pursuer, and the motivations behind the melodic mourning of Orpheus. It's a satisfyingly pliable dramatic landscape, open to interpretation.

The version by the Roman poet Virgil is the best known. Eurydice, an oak nymph, and Orpheus, a son of the King of Thrace, fall in love and marry, though the god Hymen prophesies a short union. While joyfully celebrating with her fellow nymphs in the woods, Eurydice encounters Aristaeus.

¹ The show was simply called *Eurydika* in Serbian. Slavko thought it was repetitious to say the show was taking place by the water, and I failed to adequately explain that I was using the phrase in the present sense about the character, not describing the show. Such is the occasional nature of intercultural theatre.

² In the end, Slavko chose to stay.

Filled with lust, he pursues her³. She flees, steps on a snake, is bitten, and dies. Orpheus is devastated. He plays a tune on his lyre so mournful that the gods allow him one chance to travel to the Underworld, to bring her back to the land of the living. One condition is made by Hades, the lord of the Underworld: Orpheus cannot look back as they exit the dark and approach the light.

Orpheus lands in the Underworld and is reunited with his love. They return⁴. Orpheus, fearing he's been tricked by Hades, looks back, with the attendant folly that the Bible later says fell upon Lot and his salty wife. Eurydice must return to the Underworld.

The sexism and insipid romanticism of the Virgil doesn't appeal. Other sources are more dimensional. In Plato's *Symposium*, Orpheus is characterised as a coward for refusing to die in order to be with his beloved. This feels more resonant and powerful, a tale of self-glorifying mythmaking for the age of the selfie. A love that begins as something pure and true, on both sides, remains so only in the heart of Eurydice. Orpheus sees the potential to make art by using the events of his life. Our reading recognises the commodification of personal experience, the chance for a "hit" that will ensure his name lives on. Our audience should be left, at the end, wondering what lies at the heart of human destructiveness.

Following the BWB model, I create a series of frames, each containing a set of posts, prior to *proba* (rehearsal). Given that there's a Chorus, the creation of lyrics for chanting, singing or speaking also needs to be done in advance. A monologue, spoken by Eurydice in the style of Müller's *Hamletmachine*, appears on the pad in front of me. I don't know if I'll use it, or if it's simply research. Other issues require decisions. The time frame: contemporary, classical, a combination? It's clear to me that the Eurydikas⁵ will make direct contact with the audience. But what world will she connect them to, her own, or one she shares with us? Another question lies in the staging. The strip along the shoreline is narrow. There is a concrete bank for spectators but not much of an area for playing. On the other hand, the island may present auditory challenges. It doesn't appear likely that we can amplify sound⁶.

It occurs to me that this is a little similar to challenges faced by the early Greeks, in creating theatre outdoors. The solution seems clear. Instead of placing the four Eurydikas on the island, in direct competition with nature and at a distance from the audience, we'll place them on shore. The audience, sitting behind them, will be fellow denizens of the Underworld. The Chorus, with larger movements and sounds, are on the island—the "living world" of the show.

June 26

Five days until *proba*. Kraljevo is not the easiest place to get to. Central Serbia is far less cosmopolitan than the north and cities such as Belgrade and Novi Sad. Over the years I've become aware that my visual language is different than it would be in North America, or the more

³ In Virgil Aristaeus is a shepherd, though he was known as the god of apiculture. Such inconsistencies encourage the adaptor. As long as the story retains integrity, there's room for different choices in the narrative, in keeping with what the Greeks, over centuries, did themselves.

⁴ They return in various ways, according to variants of the story. Given that we have an actual river, the Ibar, to turn into Styx, we'll ford the river that acts as a frontier between present and past.

⁵ As the name is spelled in Serbian, although a "v" is used in place of the "u".

⁶ It's not generally part of my approach to BoxWhatBox to use a lot of technology. Lights are often essential but amplified sound is not. The aim is to keep everything "poor" in the Brookian sense.

westernised part of the European continent—more primal, using vivid emotional colours and movement. Yet audiences in this region are light years ahead of the North American fixation with realism, for instance, and possess the vocabulary to understand the semiotics of virtually any theatrical style. Emotions are never far from the surface in Serbian and Balkan life, and passion reigns in tandem with intellect. The hegemony of technology in northern European productions—Germany in particular, but also Belgium and the Netherlands—is impossible to produce and undesirable. BoxWhatBox relies on the visceral link between actors and audience.

BoxWhatBox is as an intercultural mechanism. It attempts to use what each theatrical context had to offer: the local language, materials, music, history or literature as influence in the narrative. Performing ambiently brings the performance closer to an audience because we make use of what's already there, transforming the familiar into a mythic landscape. *Eurydika* is going to be an ambient (or site-specific) performance, too. The river has to play an active role, to be a character. We'll perform at dusk, linking the daily light and dark of Kraljevo to Orfeo's land of the living and the Underworld. This can't be a show about 2600 year-old characters. Its world has to be visceral. It has to exist here and now.

At the moment I feel like I'm on fire. Ideas for exercises and études, ideas on communicating archetype and character, are all coming out at once as I swill coffee of varying strengths in cafés where I can find some peace. Part of me despairs at how to transmit what I'm writing to the actors in seven days. They need, deserve to know: *Why this subject? Why this location? Why this narrative?* Within the working environment they require basic information on the models they are working from: Orpheus and Eurydice, the Chorus and its function, the Erinyes and the Boatman. Not so they can behave in some kind of faux-historical or *classical* manner but so that they can begin the process of transforming these archetypes into living people. Much of what I do before I meet the actors involves getting the words out, so they can then transform.

June 30

I meet Slavko at the bus station in Niš. He has news: Nevena, my Chorus Leader, won't arrive until almost halfway through rehearsal. She's also translating the chorus chants. The Chorus, which I hoped would be at least ten, may be as small as five. We've also lost almost half our rehearsal time with the Chorus, because the studio inadvertently booked mornings to a Tai Kwon Do group. In the afternoon, Slavko and I take a walk around the riverbank. The space on shore for the Eurydikas is linear, and narrow. The island is close enough for the Chorus to be heard without difficulty. We don't know what kind of competition we'll face from activities, as the river is Kraljevo's summer playground.

A reunion with three of the four Eurydikas: Svetlana (Cece), Aleksandra (Belka) and Kristina (Tina) were part of my cast for *Ghost Mountain*. They're all delightful, in distinctive ways. The other Aleksandra, Arizanović, arrives tomorrow. The work I'd planned for tonight isn't in the cards. Instead we discuss the four elemental aspects of Eurydika. The women love the story, and Eurydika's centrality in it. Stefan Milikić, who also worked on *Ghost Mountain*, will make a powerful Orfeo. The small, youthful chorus is the question mark. Slavko, as always, believes we will solve every problem as it comes up.

July 1

Happy Canada Day! The first real working day of the *Eurydika* project. I've always hated holidays.

Today is a perfect example of the wild ride alternative theatre can sometimes be. The schedule changes several times, and the venue once, but in the end, we get five and a half hours of work in with the chorus and the Eurydika ladies. Aleksandra A. shows up half-way through and promptly sprints into my arms, bear-hugging me. Aleks is a powerful specimen, and she knocks me backwards as everyone watches and grins. It isn't the only spontaneous hug of the day. Goran, the owner of the studio, walks in during an exercise, shakes my hand vigorously, and pulls me into a man-brace. This is one reason I keep coming back to Serbia. Serbs are open and expressive, which matches my personality. I make a poor Northerner.

None of this warm and cuddly sentiment prevents me from feeling major anxiety in the morning. I have no idea if we have enough bodies for a proper chorus, what skills they have or lack. With the rehearsal space double-booked, we deploy to a schoolyard the Jets and Sharks would have found homey. We make an overlap in the two sessions so the chorus and the Eurydikas will be together for an hour. This defenestrates the planning I'd done. *Plasticity*. Beginning to work, as bumpy as that often is, lowers my anxiety.

At the moment we have six, possibly seven chorus members. The work is gratifying, considering the challenges. The schoolyard is baking hot and periodically a nearby sound stage goes through a sound check worthy of *Spinal Tap*⁷. I take the actors through systematic breath control, neutralisation and various walking exercises. There's no point being abstract in a process this compact, so the walking is character-orientated from the start. BoxWhatBox works best when the principles are applied. Questions that arise from the work are addressed later. Here, it means we develop character at the same time as developing the actor. *Eurydika* is distinct from other BWB performance projects in that it's largely character-based. In performances like *I DREAM* or *Ghost Mountain*, characters appeared and disappeared, Büchner-like⁸. The frames presented were nearly discrete, and the order could be re-done until the last minute, altering according to rhythm, length and subject matter. *Eurydika* follows more of a narrative line, and concentrates on a principal character (even if she is split four ways). This places different pressures on the development of the material. There's a greater onus on the actors to create an arc in characterisation, even shared amongst four. At one point on the first evening, Slavko asks if a narrator is a possibility. I shudder inwardly. His apprehension as a producer is natural, but the experience would cease to be immersive.

After the departure of the Chorus we move back to the studio. After a short warm-up, we begin a character-building étude that I keep adding to; in the end the actors improvise for almost forty minutes. Each says it felt like just a few minutes. The research focuses on establishing character, objective, and landscape, using discovery, with elements taken from the performance text, such as gazing through a thick fog, waiting (in several variations, such as purpose/no purpose), and walks with different contexts. The actors have lived, in character, for forty continuous minutes. That's a terrific amount of research to begin a process with.

Next is a series of exercises in building expressive vocabularies, lining up the actors. They work in order, to start, and then are encouraged to fire off expressive vocabulary as it comes to them. Confining the exercise to character refines the objectives for the actors. They're forced to narrow

⁷ As in, eleven on a scale of ten.

⁸ See *Danton's Death, or Woyzeck*.

their selection, to edit their choices, depending on the small amount of character information they intuit or have gained so far. As Eurydikas, each is aware of what the other three is doing. They're encouraged to copy, borrow, or slightly alter expressions from each other. In this way the four Eurydikas begin to build a shared vocabulary.

Finally, in working through the important posts of Frame 1 and 3, I set an étude. Each Eurydika speaks on a given subject, non-stop, extempore. Aleksandra, the Warrior Eurydika, speaks on the paradox of history and revision. Belka, Eurydika the Lover, speaks on the paradox of gain and loss of self in love. Ceca, Eurydika the Martyr, speaks of the nobility of suffering as a determinant of love's worthiness. Kristina, Eurydika the Watcher, describes how perception divorces itself from reality.

On the first day of work an étude requiring so much imagination represents a major risk. The investment is not only in character, but in understanding the narrative themes. Such études are always fascinating, because my observational skills are tested by the fact that the actors are improvising in Serbian. Although I understand some Serbian, this effectively frees me to focus on other expressive choices that may go unmonitored in rehearsal: leaning forward, an unconscious crossing of the legs, direct contact with the audience. Afterward we discuss what each actor has said. The actors understand the themes instinctively. Already, they feel as if they are charged with telling Eurydika's side of the story. Slavko, who has wandered in and is pretending to check his cellphone like a true producer, looks pleased. The étude has triggered a personal investment in the development of each Eurydika. Now the actors must edit and add to their text, evolving in service of Eurydika and the audience. This requires more conscious work on posture, gesture and non-verbal expression, but already they seem to have Eurydika's way of thinking. The initial results are pretty thrilling.

The day ends at 8pm. I'm knackered. Five and a half hours of work creating and leading études is different than rehearsing a script. I've done that at institutional theatres. Directing actors in creating performance material takes far more energy. Writing these entries takes the last bit of that energy, but it's necessary. I once foolishly trusted myself to remember details afterward. No more. The experience, within and without the rehearsal hall, is so rich that you, reader, shouldn't miss a thing.

July 2

A two rehearsal day, with a long break in-between. Not ideal for maintaining energy. There are storms on and off throughout the day. We change our schedule and work indoors. In the morning we begin the chorus work with only females. Two of the three men straggle in late, and the third, my Orfeo, oversleeps and never arrives. In America or Britain such actors would be placed on notice or fired. At this stage of my career in Eastern Europe, this is such an unsurprising incident that it doesn't disrupt the work. The two males are incorporated without a hitch. Stefan shows up in the afternoon to work with the Eurydikas, which I hadn't intended, but I don't tell him that.

The Chorus has potential. It's a mixed group. Lina, Milica and Staša are rookies. Staša in particular has enormous potential. Tamara has worked with Slavko's group for three years, and also with me. Highly intelligent, she never needs to be directed twice, and is a quiet, serene presence. Nevena, who arrives tomorrow, is high octane, a bundle of generous impulses and nervous energy, a rising star. Vlada is willing, amiable and serious, Nikola slyly playful and astute. Stefan, at twenty-seven, possesses a laser-like focus and charisma. We have a cast. Two drummers, undoubtedly Nikola and

Vlada; a quicksilver, mercurial Orfeo in Stefan, and three rather pleasant Furies, Tamara, Milica and Lina, who need to learn to be sufficiently Furious. When Nevena arrives, she'll be Chorus Leader, our "Leopold". Two years ago, my show *Project X* was postponed because of rain. I had to depart before the première. Nevena deputised and ran the show in my absence perfectly. She is brilliant, and I trust her implicitly.

The day before, in the open air, I'd introduced the group to Ball Basic, to much joy and laughter. Today the ball doesn't make it out of my knapsack. The ceilings are low at Evergreen, with exposed lights. More than that, I feel intuitively that it's time to focus the work entirely on games, exercises and études directly related to the frames of the show. After the obligatory work on breath and neutral alignment, we get down to business with character walks. This time a vocal component is added, cueing two groups into a step progression of low-middle-high tone humming. When this becomes fluid and less conscious, the results are surprisingly beautiful. It possesses, as well, the gratifying quality of increasing the confidence of actors who do not believe they are musical.

From this I reminded them of the attack-oriented work we had done the day before, through the playing of *Space Invaders*. Today it was to become more specific to the events of *Frame 2*, where Orfeo is attacked by the Furies. As we developed the étude, using Nikola and Vlada interchangeably as Orfeo, it was amusing to observe how ladylike the Furies behaved. Told they were to beguile Orfeo as they approached him at the edge of the water, they made almost no physical contact. On the other hand, for all the lack of sexuality once they got Orfeo on the ground there was no shortage of energy expended on pinning his head to the floor (the objective of the exercise, equated with drowning). It was hugely enjoyable to watch, and yet another indication of how self-conscious young actors can be about intimate physical contact. We finally made it to the intimate contact part, though not the feigned sexuality. The shape of how the attempted punishment of Orfeo will take place became clear over several versions of the étude. As well, despite my repeated promptings, the only part of the post that featured non-verbal sounds was the struggle itself. It's a little eerie, I think, that that three women would approach a fellow advertising sexual congress, and that none of the four would utter a sound!

With this work our two hours were up; we'd sacrificed time to get inside. I'd wanted to make more progress on percussion and vocalisation but we can catch that up, I think, with Nevena joining the group.

After the gym, a shower and a quick protein shake, it was back to Evergreen at four to work with the Eurydikas—and Orfeo, freshly roused from slumber. Stefan is perfect for what I had in mind for this Orfeo. He's tallish and slender, with glasses and a serious, Chekhovian student-like mien. He's prone to ever-so-slight pomposity and self-advertisement as a serious actor, all of which is utterly forgivable, as he's a genuinely nice man. His approach to acting, self-described, is methodical, building block by block. Thus BWB is a new experience for him¹⁰. Having been in the Chorus rehearsals, he had no idea of the narrative line of the show, and we threw him in the deep end. I'm not a big believer in over-explaining context and circumstance, and especially psychology for an actor. As I told the actors this afternoon, I stopped using table work years ago. It's the refuge of lazy

⁹ See notes in the Games section.

¹⁰ He performed in *Ghost Mountain*, which was built on the same precepts, but for some reason he doesn't seem to think of that show in the same way.

directors who hew to the orthodox without thought. It's the crutch of actors who don't really want to go and do the hard work part of acting yet—getting out on the floor and risking.

There is *nothing* one can learn in a week or two weeks of table work that can't be achieved in less than half the time on the floor.

Aleksandra was also putting the sequence and the justifications for the action together in her head as we worked today. Although she was present yesterday, she'd been absent for the first (ironically, table) meeting. So she and Stefan had to do what the prompts told them to do during the improvisation we segued into after breath, neutrals and character walking. This improvisation swallowed several separate études in one continuous whole, and lasted somewhere between thirty and forty minutes. The advantage of this kind of work is manifold. As I mentioned, actors discover their characters through action, and begin to curate the choices they make on behalf of that character, through running into problems and obstacles. Then, there is the confidence aspect of having lived continuously in character for such a lengthy period of time, going through moments of stasis and moments of activity, and the transitions in between. Most actors dread improvisation. Another cohort of actors avidly seeks improvisation, without actually knowing what proper improvisation is, thus wreaking havoc on the work and on their fellow actors. Then there is that special class of actors with the technical skills and the plasticity to apply as they think. Excellent improvisation in the service of creating performance material requires three elements in order for the actor to succeed: character, objective, and context. All the rest is gardening.

This prolonged étude incorporated études designed for several posts in the show:

- the arrival of Orfeo on the shores of the Underworld, and his re-uniting with Eurydika;
- the love-making of the two and Orfeo subsequently turning into stone;
- the Silent Passage étude where Orfeo and Eurydika leave the Underworld for the land of the living;
- the moment where Eurydika, looking back on the Underworld, is pushed into the water by Orfeo.

Much of the work by the Eurydikas was spot-on in understanding and surprisingly specific in choice. Stefan's great accomplishment was to gradually realise that his Orfeo was not the lovelorn romantic of the orthodox telling of the myth, but a casually ruthless musician who makes the decision to use his love for the furtherment of his legacy. That's what take place in what should be a single moment as the pair returns to the land of the living. There is no long-brewing plot; Orfeo is no villain. Thinking, as he looks towards the Chorus, of his impending victory over the doubts that had so angered him, it occurs to him that the victory, and the tale he could tell of it, would be greater exponentially if Eurydika did not return with him; if there was a sudden reversal of fortune, as the Greek tragedians loved to do, bringing forth catharsis. So in a moment of cold decision he turns and pushes the unseeing Eurydika into the water. As he places his hands on her shoulders, she believes it is an act of love, to be followed by a kiss. Instead she is jettisoned like detritus from a ship.

There is still much to accomplish for the Eurydikas, and Stefan now has to begin his development of a more callow, less likeable Orfeo. But the shape of Frames 3,4 and 5 has come into focus, and can now be filled by the actors. With that in mind, I bid adieu to fair Orfeo and continued to work with the Es. We began to talk about the chants. There was some anxiety on the part of Ceca and Tina, but this was easily dealt with in a similar manner to the morning's work. The women playing

Eurydika are already in such tight sync that getting them to trade low, medium and high notes without cuing was almost effortless. They created real, living music. From this simple exercise we can build a chant, where three Eurydikas provide the melodic backdrop whenever one speaks. To facilitate this it was now time to introduce the lyrics of the two songs in which the Eurydikas are involved. We sat around in a small circle and the women worked out rough-and-ready translations of both songs in less than half an hour. The beauty of this way of working is that the actors possess agency. It's *their* translation; and their voices representing the characters who speak the words. The words can continue to change, be refined or made more precise, right up until the performance. I prefer this method to employing a formal translator, which I have done several times; the obstacles to a successfully theatrical translation in those circumstances are so numerous I can't list them all here. Actors have to own their material. The best way to achieve that is for them to invest in its creation (or, when the text is copyrighted, in its interpretation). Of course they require guidance, and reassurance that their work has a context they can comprehend. That's my job.

We ended the day by lining the women up and speaking out these translations. As they repeated the words some of the fluidity I'd built into the lyrics began to emerge. It didn't become fully conversational, though, until I decided to forego any cueing or order in speaking. The Eurydikas would decide not only which of them would speak a particular line, but how many would speak: two, three or four would be as possible as one, and would depend on their understanding of how and when to make an emphasis in numbers. So, for instance, in one section of the last monologue of the show, Eurydika says

I am
I am
I am
Eurydika

This is clearly an opportunity to use three singles and a group voice. Other sections, however, are more satisfyingly oblique:

But a Legendary Love takes two
doesn't it
Or more than two
Or maybe it doesn't

In one section, unspoken communication between the actors resulted in the successful sharing of a single line. The original reads

I'm the second half of a famous act.
Orfeo and Other.

With the actors it became

I'm the second half of a famous act
Orfeo
and Other

This lent the dry quality of the line an added sharper edge of someone butting in to a conversation.

With all this work, we had covered nearly all the posts from Frames One through Seven that involve the Eurydikas. Now they can begin to work on introducing non-verbal, gestural, and postural expressiveness to a deepening understanding of the text and the actions. And remarkably, we'd finished a full hour early. I love working with actors with whom I share chemistry and trust. The work sings along like a high speed saw.

As the evening darkened Slavko took me over to Panorama, a restaurant on the fifth floor of Kraljevo's most expensive hotel. There is a suitably panoramic view, not only of the town square but of the most Balkan hills receding in the distance one can imagine. Their moody beauty reminded me why I love this region more than any other. I asked Slavko about his relationship with Tina, which had ended three years ago. I asked because the way she looks at him still is with a mixture of utter respect, adoration and awe. Yet she was the one who broke the relationship; he remains her closest friend. That's Slavko. A man among men. With all the emotions the Eurydikas are re-living in dealing with the callow fecklessness of young males such as Orfeo, the presence of a man's man who is also a gentleman is a needed advertisement for the gender. Oh, and the cost of a gourmet pizza at the priciest restaurant in town: 4.5 Euros.

03 July

Too exhausted tonight to write much, which is perhaps a good thing. After rehearsal tonight I set about revising the performance text with the additions and edits that had arisen out of the work over the past three days. This could have waited except that I felt embarrassed towards the end of today's second rehearsal when I couldn't find a particular section of text amongst the dozens of pages I'd accumulated and had taken to carrying around with me as a kind of superstitious talisman.

Two hours with the Chorus proved fruitful, but possibly I indulged myself by focusing on their training for the first hour, putting us behind. These young actors lack physical plasticity—their bodies are not connected and they are tense to the point of having cripple themselves. When four young women under the age of twenty can't get close to the floor with their hands in a spinal roll-down, that's a drastic level of inflexibility. So I took them threw the two energy flings from BWB. This also introduced them to the concept of JO-HA-KYU. Later, when the Eurydikas showed up, I kept the Chorus around and we warmed up by doing Boal's See-Saw and Hypnosis games.

What I mean by training as an indulgence (it isn't) is that I had a long list of things to achieve with the Chorus today, and I knew that some of it would take considerable time. There was percussion work to do, orchestra work in sounds, translating the lyrics to the songs/chants, and sequences between Orfeo and the Chorus to develop. In the end I managed this by using time from the Eurydikas part of rehearsal. I'd intended to keep the Chorus around for a part of that *proba* anyway, to get the groups used to working with each other. The Eurydikas were patient as I finished the translation work with the Chorus. The only thing left undone was translation of the Past/Present Song, which is for Nevena, who showed up only at the very end of the second rehearsal.

Her late arrival shouldn't be a problem, I don't think. She's a quick study and our working chemistry is perfect. Her absence gave me a chance to deputise Nikola as a Chorus Leader, specifically in leading an Orchestra exercise we will use in the show, with the Chorus producing sounds of mourning. He was excited and assured in the role, and this small success opened my eyes to the possibility that he could lead an orchestra of sounds while Nevena sings the Past/Present Song. This

solves two issues. I don't think the Chorus could learn so many lyrics in a short time, or that we could package the song/chant in any kind of precise way if we had the Chorus sing it. Nevena can learn it, and Nikola can direct the melodic tonalities behind her.

The second rehearsal was split between work with the two groups and then, after the departure of the Chorus, with the Eurydikas. I asked Stefan if he could stick around a bit longer to work his frames with the Es but he pleaded extreme tiredness. This was much to the wry amusement of Kristina and Ceca, both of whom are in the same rehearsals as Stefan. Nevertheless, I wasn't unhappy; his work this afternoon as Orfeo was excellent. Now that he has been given the proper context for the character, he provided depth almost instantaneously with a scene of grieving that was remarkable for its intensity. Vlada and Nikola proved to be much better drummers than they had advertised themselves as being, and we now have an underscore for beats such as the Furies' attack on Orfeo that is compelling. Nikola also makes a convincingly cabbie-like Boatman.

Left with the four Eurydikas, I had just two things left to develop. There is a short post after Eurydika has been dumped in the water by Orfeo and she returns to the Underworld, where her three other selves are watching on the shoreline as she approaches. As with much of the script, the initial responses in an *étude* situation don't work the psychology of the narrative. As an example, I had to encourage the three aspects of Eurydika on shore to await their completion not with excitement or bated breath. They should be wary, and surprised: *what are you doing back?* The re-uniting should be neither automatic or, even in the end, really happy. Eurydika's romantic side was, after all, looking forward to being with Orfeo in the land of the living; of the other three aspects of her personhood, they feel betrayed to some extent. It's like your best friend deciding to date the guy who just dumped you. This had just happened to one of my dear friends, who had written me an anguished email late the day before, and it's a situation I think most women understand, and dread. So they unite, in the end, through the Martyr, of course, but it's awkward. No relationship is unmarked after a breakage.

The second script item to work on with the Es was a series of short texts in frame 7. First, they light torches and speak to the audience directly, about the nature of light and darkness. Then they turn to the land of the living (and Orfeo and the Chorus), and talk about gulfs that are too large to bridge, things that can't be fixed, that sometimes it's necessary just to move on. They turn back to the audience and begin the final "I am Eurydika" monologue, just before they (hopefully) walk through the audience and disappear in the dark fields behind them. By the time we'd finished some very exacting work on these texts it was shockingly close to eight o'clock. But we'd covered every element of the performance text, bar one. Now it's time to integrate Nevena, put everyone in clear mind of the running sequence of the frames, and start to develop not only depth but synchronisation, so that the music of the performance comes out of the rhythm of its playing, not simply from its songs.

July 04

Got to get this in before I fold completely for the night. The work is going spectacularly well—in only four hours of rehearsal today we managed to finish work on the songs and do a complete stumble-through of the material. The return of Nevena and her addition to the Chorus had a magic effect. Far from taking her time to settle in, she took up her not inconsiderable responsibilities as Chorus Leader and the rest of the Chorus upped their games to keep up with her. She's a magic young woman.

Lots of little changes still to make, but it helps that my script is a little bit more up to date...although I have to revise it again tonight. The cast has done a miraculous job in translating song and monologue text on the fly and getting it closer and closer to the rhythm and poetic intent of the original.

Let's be clear. The written material makes up perhaps 30% of the performance. It's still a BoxWhatBox process and performance in every respect: all local performers, local language, local materials, local landscape for the location. There is still training in BWB concepts each day, and up until today we were creating performance material from exercises and études that will now be used in the show. Where it differs from some shows such as *HAWKS*, and where it is more similar to processes such as *WALLS/STINY*, is that there is some material written specifically for the show. The fact that Slavko had suggested Eurydika as a subject defined the direction of the show's development. We could have done a series of experiments; it could have gone in that direction. Then it would have been something like *4 Lives of Eurydika*. That's a show I'd happily do sometime. In this case, the research on the topic led me to a decision that the best way for the show to be of current relevance to its audience was to contest the canonical reading of the myth. I can still see how this could have then gone in a performance research-intensive direction, such as *4 Eurydika Endings*. Again, a viable show. Perhaps I've placed my handprint too firmly on this show, in writing a monologue and three songs. There is a clear political perspective to the performance. It's about women and men, within the wider sphere of the theme of narratives and how they are made and revised. That handprint has largely disappeared through the week, I can say: the four Eurydikas implored me to keep the monologue after I had left it out to test its necessity. Two versions of the Immortality Song have been cut, reducing its potentially hammer-like emphasis (even though each version would have had a different choral perspective).

Slavko, as always, is unconcerned about the outcome. He trusts me, and trusts the process, and he wants his actors to feel *joy*. Joy is a rare commodity in acting generally these days, I think, at least beyond the first few years of a career. And it's as essential as Power and Control in creating art. I never doubt that my process will bring joy, it's never been absent from my work in BWB, and I treat it with the care and respect and attention that it deserves. Wonder, innocence and the ability to see something alone, shorn of context, is part of the creative miracle. He and I met this evening at Kafeterija, my office away from the flat, where I get WIFI and Slavko has arranged it so that I can't pay or tip the staff for my coffee no matter how hard I try. I told him how we had gone all the way from Frame 1 to Frame 7 this afternoon with only a few stops for notes and corrections; on the fourth day of our work, no less. He noted how nervous I'd been the first three days, which was true. I hadn't exactly gone as far as apologising in advance or qualifying out chances of success—I try never to do that, it's an awful aspect of being Canadian—but I knew that I'd created an enormous project, a full-length play, really, something that had more actions and a longer arc than most BWB performances. Something that is character-driven as well, which is very unusual in BoxWhatBox work, where the ensemble is everything. Character work takes the average actor an infinity. They claim it's out of some hybridised misreading of Stanislavski, filtered through Meisner or Strasberg or some other pedant who insists on taking oceans of time to ponder and reflect. And listen, I admire (most of) these teachers—well, Meisner at least, and Adler. And if you have the time to work on a character over months and years, the way my seminal influence Peter Stein often did, that's dandy. But one of my other seminal influences, Peter Brook, and yet another, Ariane Mnouchkine, and another, Robert Wilson, had long development periods that seldom concentrated on character research. The actor was expected to pick up triggers and stimuli from the work in the space and their

developing understanding of whatever performance text existed during rehearsal. Barba doesn't go through extended rehearsals around a table asking actors psychological questions about their characters. Yet his actors are perhaps the most skilled actors the west has to offer. Why, then?

Because an actor who has mastered *plasticity* doesn't need to negotiate with themselves to do the work. They find the rights source within and go get it, and then express it efficiently and with immediate access. I can take you through a one hour exercises where you cry about losing your dog and you transfer that emotion—until it fades—to whatever circumstance your character is enduring. Or, in directing a plastic actor I can describe the kind of sadness this character feels, from either the outside (gestural or postural positions) or inside (the immediate circumstance and its psychological result), and the actor can then produce it. Not *the sadness I felt when my boyfriend dumped me last year* but the essence of sadness, tailored for the *specific circumstance of the play's action*.

So, with Stefan, who carries in a charming way all the pompous pedantry of the Method actor. He keeps prefacing every étude with “I will try but I can't get to the emotion that quickly.” Which is fine. You can or you can't; and even in BoxWhatBox there is time for development. It's preferable to coming up with the *representation* of an emotion and then simply polishing that, which is what passes for theatre in Eastern Europe most weeks. But then the paradox: he produces the emotion, as often as not. Having dived off the cliff he finds he can hit the water and swim. Stefan is a very talented actor. Taking time is comfortable for him. I don't want him to be comfortable, because mediocrity is the buy-you-a-beer buddy of time; you can say no, but most times you give in to the comfort.

I'm not saying artists in theatre should have no time for gestation. It's just that the amount of time they say they need for this is wildly inflated, and equates to a general avoidance of the work. I'll go farther and say that an actor who insists on not moving until they know the moment-to-moment motivation of their character is an ego-driven artist who is forcing others to work at his pace and rhythm as a kind of status demonstration. What is called for in art is to create a *furnace*, a forge of art, where in the sweat and heat all the politesse and phony etiquette and reliance on seniority and status melts in a puddle and there is no alternative but to get the work done. That's what I try to do with a BoxWhatBox process as intense as this. You need more time; take it yourself. Do the homework outside of *proba*. The funny thing is, that it doesn't produce resentment, it produces joy, more often than not. Part of that joy, exhilaration really, comes from having extended oneself beyond orthodoxy and convention into artistic terra incognita and having come out the other side, not only intact but *more*. It's not meant to be easy.

05 July

O, the rise and fall of exhilaration! I've taken to reading Joyce in the morning; as I will be headed to Dublin soon I thought it apt to re-read *Dubliners*. Such perfect stories, fragments of lives, rendered in tiny, precise observations. The first three deal in some measure with the surging feelings of youth. I'm no youth, not have been for many years, and yet my feelings continue to surge and recede, tide-like, every day. And no more so than when I'm in the middle of a creative process. One moment I feel elation and a kind of willingness to be generous to the world, that will soon accept my gift. In another I feel a dark hatred of myself, for having the gall and the arrogance to assume that I have anything at all to offer, and a chafing resentment that anyone would ask me for it. In a third I feel cold fear, the presentiment of failure, the harbinger of humiliation and, worse, pity.

Such were the feelings that surged through me as we moved to the performance space beside the river this day. The performance approaches. The shape of the show is not complete, though it's close. We are so far working without any of the resources Slavko promised, and won't get them until tomorrow at earliest. The actors are torn by distractions to a degree I have seldom had to deal with, though distractions in actors are endemic and my shows have always featured various tugs of war between an actor's competing focuses. The actors from the local state theatre—Stefan, Kristina, Ceca, Vlada—have rehearsals there in the morning to early afternoon. The young chorus members, Staša, Lina, Milica and Tamara, are working as volunteers for the festival, and Tamara was absent the entire day today because of travel to Belgrade to ensure her university place. Nevena is only in her second day with the show and the process. Slavko was absent, as this is the first night of the festival, and he and Laza, the heir apparent, still had much to do preparing the abandoned house used by A.N.F.I. for its first show tonight.

And yet the work, for the most part, is good. The Chorus will need some remedial work tomorrow; they've lost their way with the chants a bit. But the work of the Eurydikas is clear and focused, and all of us were getting used to a vastly different environment. We were outdoors, in a hot sun, with a bunch of fascinated young guys hanging about watching, and every one of us had to get wet, walking across to the tiny island where the Chorus and Orfeo will play. The objective was to run through the entire performance twice in our three hours, and we managed that, almost to the minute. Stefan, Nikola and Aleksandra got used to the crossing I'd chosen from island to shore. There is a very strong current in the middle which can knock a person over, uneven and slippery rocks, and the shock of the water's cold. They did well, and the crossing, though it looks more biblical than mythic, is visually appealing. The Chorus began to get used to the rocky, sloping terrain that characterises the patch of the island they will inhabit. The Eurydikas began to clamber up and down the concrete and rock embankment on shore where the audience will sit in two rows, one on the flat parapet, one above on the grass that stretches out behind the embankment to make a field where the Eurydikas will finish their work.

The water, of course, makes its own rushing sound, and though the sonic distractions were fairly minimal it's possible they won't be on a Friday night. That's a serious concern. The Chorus is audible from the island, but just. The cues between island and shore all need to be physical to be sure. The Eurydikas need to range constantly back and forth along the line of where the audience will be, because their words don't travel far, even when they are projecting. So we will keep working to make the most essential aspects of the show's meaning clear. This isn't helped by the fact that Stefan has ruined his voice. In his first day's Method-rendering of Orfeo's grief he hurt his vocal chords and his voice hasn't improved over two days. So we have a frog prince as Orfeo.

Today, as the first and the second run went on, the Chorus' chants began after a while to feel like caterwauling to me and finally unendurable. So I called a halt to them and let them stand in silence for all moments except the lamentation at the beginning. We'll see if that's fixable today, but they lack a clear connection between the emotion of the scene and the emotion they can communicate in their chants. Even with basic harmonies this can be done but it takes a certain sensitivity these actors do not yet possess. So stillness may be the reductive answer.

None of this sounds like dire straits, does it, reader? So why was I moved, when at the festival's première tonight, asked by both Laza and Slavko how the show is going, to say "terrible"? Of course this concerned them, though it was clear they did not entirely believe me, sensing that I was indulging myself in a hyperbolic bath of emotional acid. I walked home after the wonderful solo

performance of Uroš Milojević, an actor I worked with on *Ghost Mountain*, wondering at my recklessness. Should Slavko fall prey to a sudden wave of insecurity, fed by my comments, he might speak to Tamara or Nevena and impart some of my sense of the show's instability. This would be potentially catastrophic to their morale. I need to be less indulgent and more careful about the context in which I allow my emotions to play themselves out. Most of all, I need to remember Slavko's dictum that the most important aspect of this work, for his purposes, is to produce joy for his actors. Joy is a very different feeling than relief. Relief is all I ever expect to feel at the end of an artistic process; relief at not having failed, at having ducked humiliation one more time, of avoiding that mythical person who strides forward and says, after one of my performances, "you are not an artist", at not seeing the pitying compassion of a spectator or colleague who says "it wasn't bad". This is my nightmare, one I live in every artistic venture I do, workshop or show. So relief, for the maker, trumps everything. I feel joy, of course, shot through the process, in so many moments, working with actors who embody youth or wonder, intelligence and conviction. But I can't savour the joy. It feels dangerous to me, like it will sate me. Rather the terror to see me on. The joy must be transferred to the actors. That's what I will go about ensuring tomorrow.

July 06

A bright sun greeted me when I rolled up the shutters of the flat's two windows in the morning; a hot day to come. I spent an hour at Kafeterija catching up on business and friends, the café being one of the places I have WIFI access. This means I can contact Slavko without paying a fortune in roaming fees, since I didn't buy a sim card this trip. It makes for awkward communication at best. There was no response from Slavko's quarter, and, given the rigours of a festival host on its opening night, I wasn't too surprised.

Still, getting from Slavko what the performance still requires was my most pressing need, so before leaving I told him where I would be at one o'clock, approximating my time after going to the gym. There's an espresso bar called, suitably enough, "Espresso Bar" near to the Evergreen studio space where I had told the Chorus to convene at three for remedial work.

The time at the gym was spent trying not to think about the show too much. But since arising I'd begun to rehearse the attitude I was going to take with young actors; the opposite of what I felt had been perhaps a slight over-reaction to their work the day before. In truth the criticism had been mild, and most Slavs are used to honest, even negative criticism, but I wanted to ensure that the youngest of our performers felt appreciated and that the process remained, in application as well as theory, a process. This can be a bit much to have on one's mind when trying to push 60 kilograms of weight above your head.

So there the great man was when I appeared at Espresso Bar at one, staring off into space at an outside counter. The conversation was short; I told him the most basic level of what we needed this afternoon and he promised he would do it. Slavko looked tired. He left and I completed a new revision of the script, went to get it printed out and returned to my flat to get water, bug spray and sun screen for the later rehearsal at the space.

At Evergreen the Chorus was in a positive mood, ready to work, eager to correct what hadn't gone well the previous day, principally the songs. I made six significant changes to the work, some touching on the tone of the piece. Little things like Nikola and Nevena both bowing to the audience like conductors before directing their versions of the Mourning Orchestra and the Lamentation

Song. There are small comedic notes scattered throughout the piece now which I hope mix with the humanity of the Eurydikas and the essential seriousness of the themes to create more dimension to the work. Above all the corrections were aimed at simplifying expression and deepening meaning. So the Mourning Orchestra's caterwauling, which was explained to me today as a version of traditional Serbian funerary wailing, was replaced with the personal expressions of grief which we had developed in rehearsal. The conducting of the conductors was made more precise, in that their job is to produce and establish the sound for the audience, and to then combine it in audible groupings, rather than play with variations. In forty-five minutes we had not only worked through all six items on the list but we had reinstated the neutral warm up with breath work, alignment, and an energy fling. It's crucial to me that they don't feel that BoxWhatBox is a process like any other, meaning that its aesthetic and structure are sacrificed at the altar of expediency the moment the pedal hits the metal. To ensure this, I will bring a ball to play Ball Basic at the space before the performance tomorrow.

After the Evergreen rehearsal we walked over to our space at the river. Three big fat men and a swarthy, hairy, voluble one were swimming and lounging by the steps into the water, but we paid them no mind. The Eurydikas were ready. Once again I was missing a cast member; Lina was in Belgrade attending to university registration. So we haven't had a single day of rehearsal with a full cast. Nikola and Vlada examined their drums and placed them in the designated spots. Slavko had left an example of a torch for Orfeo and had built the house of wood. Strangely, after all our discussions, it was more or less permanent. It couldn't be deconstructed, or even lowered. So it sits in plain sight, which doesn't bother me as much as I thought it would. Being simply made of sticks it doesn't look like much until the paper surrounds it.

The first run was efficient, ruthlessly so. It came in at twenty-eight minutes, which was troubling. With adrenalin a performance can often cut four or five minutes off a show that uses a lot of improvisation. And twenty-eight is already too short. On the positive side all the corrections were in place and the transitions between frames are now more seamless. Nikola, in particular, seems to have mastered the crossing from shore to island with perfect timing for the text being spoken.

I gave notes, the sun burning down on all of us. I noted how Serbs disdain hat wear in the sun, and usually sunscreen. They've heard all the medical evidence about the dangers of UV rays, but as Ceca said, "We are creatures of the sun." Now that the structure was in place we could go back to talking about the humanity of the characters, and highlight areas where non-verbal communication can increase the audience's understanding and the depth of moments. The Eurydikas are increasingly comfortable dealing with imaginary audience and with themselves, even in off-focus moments. The result is that the audience, while straining to hear all of the text amidst the rushing waters and the outside air, will always have something to focus on which they know is directed their way.

The second run was satisfying. Thirty-six minutes. All the time gained by the actors heeding the note I'd given them to live in each of the moments a little bit more. This is not padding scenes; it's the heart of JO-HA-KYU. In a proper JO, or pre-expressive moment, the HA (or explosive moment) doesn't happen until the JO breaks from the pressure exerted on it. After the HA, which always has a very specific timing, the KYU (or aftermath moment) must be full of what came before, leading to the transition to the next JO. Old-time theatre would simply call this getting comfortable living in the moment, and there's no contradiction with that and my aesthetic. The return of Tamara had restored more order and presence to the Chorus. The drumming, after a rocky start, had improved

with a similar set of aesthetic directions I had given the Chorus regarding the songs: simple and primal rather than riffing into patterns that are difficult to sustain.

We broke at six, Aleksandra needing to get ready for her show, which was the festival's feature of the evening. I took my third shower of the day at Vlada's congenial flat, dropped on my back for a quick nap and headed out to the abandoned radio station—festival central—to see it. The play was a conventional two-hander, set in Nazi Germany, with Aleksandra playing a harassed young woman who takes care of her autistic brother; both actors were fine in their roles. The building was packed. The buzz around the festival and its shows is so positive and alive. Now it's our job to live up to that. Slavko greeted people leaving afterward at the gates to the grounds. He looked more tired than before, more serious than I'm used to seeing him. He's got a lot on his mind, especially with his impending move to the U.S. And though he's handed off much of the running of the festival successfully to Laza, he's the man. That was demonstrated on opening night when he sauntered out in front of the audience to welcome them to the festival and was greeted by more than three minutes of sustained applause. He has given his city a gift beyond price, and for once, the giver of gifts was thanked in proper measure.

07 July

It's the morning after the performance of *Eurydika*. I returned late to the flat, watched few videos aimlessly before falling on the bed into a dazed and fitful reverie. After midnight the thunder gods came and lashings of rain pelted the steel screens covering the windows. We had missed an inundation by some four hours.

How to describe the exhilaration of a performance that transcends? The performers, especially the four Eurydikas and Orfeo, leaped several levels in assurance and command. This sounds casually typical to the lay reader but theatre artists of most stripes would assure you it's anything but. To the end elements of the show which could cripple or enable its success hung in the balance. The fire department had had second thoughts about allowing fire on the island. We arrived in the afternoon for our dress rehearsal (so called) to find that the house of branches and sticks had been wrestled down over night. Some Gypsies were lounging in the water nearby, staring aggressively at the women and our oil barrel drums. I feared when we came back in the evening the women would be fine but the drums would be gone. Slavko hadn't yet figured out how to make the torches burn for more than about a minute. All these and other seemingly trivial concerns nagged at me through the day. What about crowd control, what if nobody came? The paper wrapped around the newly rebuilt house looked ungainly. Would it burn effectively? Would it start a conflagration in the dry grass surrounding it? Yet the dress rehearsal was better than the day before. The actors were not wilting under the fierce sun. They wanted to know about lighting the torches properly, how to hold them, how to put them out. Everyone was comparing the sandals they had purchased to navigate the stony terrain of the island. The Eurydikas had tried out their white, flowing neo-classical wraps the day before, an elegant solution to the question of historicity vs temporality in the play. Several of the women asked me about how to wear their hair. Concerns were turning from the narrative, the text and the terrain to the more mundane pre-show fixations of actors. A good sign. The afternoon run clocked in at thirty-four minutes; a couple of minutes shorter than the day before but still acceptable. I harboured ears that the energy of the show would shorten this further, so at the notes session I gave them more insight on character and how to fill certain moments without padding them, how to let the audience watch them, not to feel the need to be constantly in motion.

I walked back to the flat to shower with a couple of hours open, little to do. I wasn't fretting; I couldn't tell if this was a positive or a negative thing, but I felt more certain that the performance would at least represent an accurate culmination of all the work the artists had put in over the week. The metaphorical house was a worry. Would the fire department let us light it, and would it burn? There was a wind that had come up during the afternoon. Also, it was Friday, and by eight o'clock when the performance was to begin the riverside would be humming with relaxing Kraljevo residents. Having spent so much time with the play, which seemed now definitively to be a play rather than a concocted narrative, I struggled to remember what it would be like to see it for the first time. But the themes felt clear. The story was establishing itself in myriad ways without the superfluous assistance of narration. I hoped the audience would be moved; entertainment is never enough.

As I walked back towards the river at seven-thirty it seemed our luck had held. The evening had cooled a bit; the sun was heading for the horizon in a clear sky. A couple of reluctant fishermen were being roused off the island by Slavko as I neared the performance site. A clump of glowing white identified the bodies of the four Eurydikas, readying themselves with the casual public ease of actors. Greeks and Serbs are not so very different, and my Eurydikas looked like statuary that had come to life. At fifteen minutes to eight a crowd had already begun to gather. Cushions had been placed at the top of the stone abutment on the shoreline, with benches behind, enough for fifty. I carefully separated some of the benches so that the Eurydikas would have room to climb the abutment at the end of the show and enter the field beyond. Slavko set alight some piles of driftwood he had gathered. Standing up to his knees in the river's water like a latter day John the Baptist, he asked if I would address the audience beforehand. I thought this was a bad idea.

At five minutes to eight the crowd had extended beyond the pads and benches past the performance area. We wrangled the spectators into a tighter group, cajoling the dogs and children, men and women standing at the edge of the stone shoreline. I signalled across to the huge tree stump on the far edge of the island, where the Chorus was waiting, for the drummers to step onto the main part of the island and assume their posts at the drums. They began a slow, sonorous, powerful beat, a single note every five seconds. Slavko ran up to me. "Why have you begun? It's not yet eight!" I told him this was a pre-show movement. Such elements are designed to attract an audience, both physically and aesthetically. They know that something with the power of ritual will take place, and that they are being called. It worked; the stragglers meandering across the open fields leading to the basketball courts a hundred metres away picked up their pace. Slavko had guessed we would start ten to fifteen minutes late, in the usual manner of Eastern European theatre, but with the crowd swelling I determined we would start at eight precisely, a statement of our organisation and intent. Two rows of people now stood behind the benches, double capacity. I signalled to the drummers and they switched from drumsticks to using their hands on the drums, producing a more intimate, quotidian beat. This was the cue for the Eurydikas to move into their "egg" positions, Tina and Aleksandra in the field, and Belka and Ceca on the stone walkway in front of the audience, and for the rest of the Chorus to make their way from the tree stump, across the small shallows separating it from the island, and to begin walking amongst the scattered wild grass. The beat picked up in intensity. I could feel spectators staring at me as I signalled the drummers to increase the cadence. It reached a peak; three powerful single beats, and the Chorus formed a line, facing the audience across the water. Nikola stepped from his drum and walked to the river edge. He bowed in comic fashion to the audience, turned to the chorus and began to conduct them in the Mourning Orchestra. A murmur rippled through the audience; something unexpected, in one sense comic and in another—the sounds themselves—sad.

Nikola bows and takes his place in the Chorus. Nevena walks into position to conduct them. She too bows in comic fashion; I wanted to turn the tone of the stern, Eastern European bow I have witnessed so often throughout my career on itself. She speaks to the audience, a sentence only, of the agitation of the townsfolk, then turns to conduct the Lamentation Song. The lyrics mix a townspeople's zest for gossip and rumour with their bourgeois concern for orthodoxy and order:

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!
Did you hear the news?
What news is that?

The daughter of Apollo
Apollo's sunny girl
Is dead!

No! No! No! No! No! No! No!
Really?

That's terrible, it makes me sick
What was her name again?
I love a tragedy, it's so sad!

Just as she was married
A life of love ahead—
The wife of Orfeo is dead.

WE'RE. SO. SAD.

Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!
Did you hear the news?
What news is that?

She stepped on a snake
And died, poor thing
Dead from venom, sure

Orfeo told the cops
A man had chased her
He's shattered, poor thing

WE'RE. SO. SAD.

The four Eurydikas begin to stir. They begin to discover this new world they have awoken to, and the people who inhabit it. The field Eurydikas, the Warrior and the Watcher, come down onto the stone walkway and with the Lover and the Martyr, they begin to question the audience. What is this place? Am I dead? What lies across the water? And where is Orfeo? They glide, almost dreamily, weaving back and forth in front of the audience and amongst themselves, in the narrow, two metre-

wide space that divides spectators from the river. Finally they gather together and look out across the water, wondering.

Orfeo has come from behind the Chorus to the edge of the water in the Land of the Living. He assumes a posture of intense mourning, and, when the Eurydikas are still, he moves and speaks, howling Eurydika's name. When he is silent once again a slow, quiet drumbeat begins. Three Furies emerge from the Chorus, calling his name. They sound flirtatious, playful. They approach him as he rises in surprise to see them. They touch his face, murmuring that they want to lie with him, pressing on him. The three women gradually lie him on the banks of the river and one sits astride him, smiling, leaning in as if to kiss him. The drums increase in intensity until they reach a manic pitch; the Furies attempt to drown Orfeo by pushing his head into the water. He struggles fiercely. He doesn't want to die. A harbinger of the depth of feeling, or lack of it, for Eurydika. Orfeo rises with difficulty and confronts the Furies, still crouching in the mud of the river's edge, and the Chorus beyond. He is furious, indignant. The Chorus asks him hard questions about the nature of Eurydikas death. It's clear they are not convinced of the account. Orfeo defends himself. In defiance he asks permission to go to the Underworld and to bring Eurydika back. One of the Furies gestures to the Boatman, standing nearby. The Boatman and Orfeo walk a short distance to the fording place. The Chorus silently watches him depart.

As the Boatman and Orfeo slowly make their way across the river the Eurydikas spring into thought and action. The Martyr speaks first, of the addiction to suffering and its equivalence to love. The Watcher follows, moving back and forth along the lines of spectators like a lawyer arguing a case in court, speaking of the paradox of perception versus reality in love. The Warrior cannot constrain herself any longer and jumps in to mutter darkly about history and its revision, while at last the Lover, dreamy and optimistic, speaks of the loss or gain of the self in love. While they speak Orfeo has a change of heart in mid-stream. He wants to go back. The Boatman ignores him, and they continue. They near the shore of the Underworld. The Eurydikas are arrayed in a diagonal line, awaiting; he is visible once he passes halfway in the water.

Orfeo strides towards the Eurydikas. The Lover backs away a pace or two but stands and welcomes him. The others fall away, riven by doubts. As Orfeo and the Lover Eurydika embrace the other aspects of her remember the sensations of a kiss, an embrace, of being loved. But then the doubts resurface and they attempt to pry Eurydika away from Orfeo. They do not believe this will end well. Orfeo fights two of the doubts and wins his place, silencing them. The Lover, struggling with the doubts of the Warrior, at last overcomes her. She lies with Orfeo in a position of love making and the three other Eurydikas withdraw, bemused, confused, and concerned. The Martyr speaks to the audience; what about tomorrow? The Watcher is not surprised; she knows this part of herself and has witnessed her in love, after all. The Warrior feels impotent, and regards them stonily. Across the water the Chorus has turned and faces the Underworld, staring silently into the mist.

Eurydika awakes after a night of love-making. She is relaxed, playful. But Orfeo does not move. He's turned to stone, seemingly. The doubting aspects of Eurydika respond with cynicism and world weariness to what they know is Orfeo's stratagem; silence and immobility until he gets what he wants. The Lover Eurydika grows frantic. She doesn't know what is wrong, or how to solve it. She pleads with Orfeo's immobile form, finally telling him if he wants to return to the Land of the Living, she will do so. He stirs, rises, satisfied in getting his way. The three doubting aspects of Eurydika withdraw coldly as he takes the Lover Eurydika's hand and leads her firmly to the Boatman and the fording place. The three other Eurydikas watch her go, a piece of themselves torn

away from the whole. Eurydika and Orfeo begin to cross the river with Boatman. In the Land of the Living the Chorus, in happy anticipation of Orfeo's return, begins to construct a house for them of wood, wrapping a wide swath of paper around it as a garlanding. The second Chorus Leader steps forward to the edge of the water and addresses the audience with the Past/Present Song:

A war is raging
Did you hear about it?
You're involved—
It's Life or Death—
It's the War of the Present
Against the Past

Tones ensemble.

Letters from the Front
Those memories you cherished?
Casualties of War
Never returning
Now so distant
They seem untrue

Tones ensemble.

We guard our Territory
Drop napalm on the Truth
And say we miss it
The Generals never
Made a mistake
Fools become Heroes

Tones ensemble.

In the trenches of Passion
Reason lies rotting
Old Guard and Avant-garde
Both complicit
Legends must be made
Children must be taught

Tones ensemble.

In the killing fields of myth
Meet the Lonely and the Dispossessed
The lied-to, armed with spears
They will die
For someone else's fame
As Present becomes Past

She turns and watches for the arrival of Orfeo. The Boatman steps on land. As he approaches the edge of shore, Orfeo turns to Eurydika and takes her face in his hands as if to kiss her. He pushes her forcibly into the water of the river. At that moment each of the other three Eurydikas cries in sudden pain and buckles to her knees. Orfeo leaves her behind, stepping into the Land of the Living. Eurydika shrieks in confusion and hurt, thrashing about in the water, as Orfeo strides back into his community and confronts the Chorus. He begins to spin a tale of being tricked by Hades, the god of the Underworld, who made Eurydika disappear even as he turned to profess his love for her. The Chorus is sceptical. They adopt postures which indicate their wariness and displeasure. Orfeo can do nothing but adopt a sullen pose of defiance, masked as mourning, at the shoreline. The Chorus turn their backs on him and walk away to the furthest edges of the island. Eurydika, meanwhile, has persuaded the Boatman to take her across the river back to the Underworld.

As Eurydika arrives at the shore of the Underworld, her fellow selves array themselves in a diagonal line to greet her. It's not a warm greeting. She moves to the Warrior, who rejects her apologies and her weakness. Then to the Watcher, who is tired of her unwillingness to learn. She runs to the Martyr, her last resort, the one who understands the weight of the world and our responsibility to bear it. They embrace awkwardly. The Warrior and the Watcher spar with each other. Finally they too join the embrace. The four Eurydikas are reunited. They take hands, spreading out across the walkway of the Underworld, and turn to face the Land of the Living, the land they have forsaken. Orfeo has disappeared. The Chorus sings the Immortality Song. It's the sanitised version of the myth, history revised by Orfeo, in spite of the doubts of the people of his own time, a view of how miscreance can transcend the truth of one's own time through determination and ambition. The Eurydikas are compelled to disagree, and sing in counterpoint:

Chorus:

Eurydika:

There is a love

There was a love

Sing of immortal love

Love must be mortal to live

Orfeo's love for a woman

He doesn't remember me

I can't recall her name

My name is Eurydika!

The songs of love

Are lies

The poems of love

Are fiction

The legend of love

Is a myth

Outlives us all

Love dies with Truth

Orfeo returns to confront the Chorus, wild with anger and humiliation, bearing a lit torch. He asks if burning his house down will satisfy their doubts. The Chorus does not respond. He sets fire to the house, lighting the paper and the wood within. Purplish smoke billows from it towards the sky. Will it satisfy them if he throws himself into the fire? The Chorus says nothing. Orfeo is cornered, caught

between his desire to prove them wrong and his desire to live and to achieve immortality. He watches his house, the house meant for he and Eurydika, burn.

In the Underworld the Eurydikas turn to their fellow citizens of the Underworld and speak to them. They are older, now, wiser; still believing in love but not in myth or legend, knowing that Eurydika is the mortal part of what will be an immortal tale. They speak about lightness and dark, and needing light to illuminate one's way; not to show a fixed path, but simply a path. They turn to regard the Land of the Living. Perhaps through the mist the flames of the fire can be sensed. They speak of how sometimes there is no way of return, and that however stony the forward path is, it must be taken. Once again they turn to the audience. In the distance, from another world, Orfeo shouts Eurydika's name, but she doesn't hear it. The Eurydikas share a secret with their fellow citizens. Even the darkest place can fill with light. Arrayed in a line across the walkway, they speak gently, firmly, as one being to the audience:

I am Eurydika.
You remember me...
No?
I'm the second half of a famous act:
Orfeo and Other.
Like the drummer in your favourite band
Whose name
You can never remember.
The music is everything.
We made music, Orfeo and me.
Don't get me wrong—
He wrote the song
He played it
But a Legendary Love takes two
doesn't it
Or more than two
Or maybe it doesn't

Did Rodin love Camille
Or just her sculpted image?
It's alright to forget my name—
Even the tragic poets forgot my story.
So I've told it now, to you,
My fellow citizens in this pleasant Hell
I am
I am
I am
Eurydika.
I am not a myth.
I was just
A girl who loved
But I'm worth remembering
We are worth remembering

The Eurydikas each light a torch and hold it aloft in front of the audience. Speaking: *I don't know where I'm going. But then no one does, really. Want to come? Let's go!* They bend their knees and smile mischievously, as if to race into the audience. They part the audience and climb into the fields beyond the water, walking farther into the Underworld, disappearing into the gathering twilight.

08 July

Last full day in Kraljevo. In show weeks I try to avoid a morning after syndrome by finding some useful work to do. So I wrote the preceding entry in the journal, some 2000 words. A document of an experience I don't want to forget, and one that is yet one more variation in the ongoing development of BoxWhatBox. I'd gone to bed fairly late; a product of the excitement, of course, and of the necessity of going to the after party, a quiet and social gathering at a local café. Even such low-key social affairs are a trial for me. My social anxiety rears its head at such moments, and it takes a few minutes of self-persuasion to get myself out the door. Unlike those with more dire levels of this affliction, I can identify the elements of it that I can address and overcome with a little determination—the ego aspects particularly, the indulgence of not making an effort. Previous generations felt just as much anxiety but the sense of social duty was far more powerful, I think, in my mother's day. One simply did what had to be done. So most of the time, these days, I manage the effort. I lasted two hours at the café, all of it in conversation with Vlada, the donor of the flat where I'm staying, and his friend Danijela, a Serb who now lives in Canada. Upon rising, I noticed only then that my cast had finally arrived after the requisite amount of time needed for primping, so I said a cheerful adieu and walked along the buzzing and crowded riverfront to the flat.

The day yesterday was full. I had gifts to buy for Vlada, the journal to write, a bus ticket to buy in the direction of Novi Sad, where I have no business; it's a stopping point on the way to Budapest, where I will complete my prep for CATT in Dublin. I've always wanted to see Novi Sad, though. It's the only large Serbian city I haven't been to, and many of my actors trained there. It's also a cosmopolitan meeting point for ethnic Hungarian (think tennis player Monica Seles, actually Szeles Monika), Croatian and Serbian populations. Serbia is the place in the world I feel most comfortable, with Greece not far behind, and Bulgaria just behind that. So it feels right to experience as much of this country and its fascinating, deeply complex people every opportunity I get.

There was also the need and desire to meet with Slavko and Laza, not so much for a post-mortem briefing as a kind of celebration. We met at Pod Obalom, the restaurant that sits in a tree-sheltered enclave hard by the resort area by the river, and where I've managed a few free meals this week courtesy of Slavko. Laza is a tall, athletic, friendly, passionate man who is slowly taking over the reins of the festival as Slavko makes his career and life decisions. It's clear he wants me to come back, and we get along well (being fellow football fanatics helps). But it's unimaginable to do a show like this in Serbia without Slavko, not just for the moral support but the aesthetic support as well; he's a crack scenographer who can make something out of nothing. Certain actors, like Nevena, I would also be reluctant to do without. But every option is open. If I get through the cancer surgery in three weeks' time with no after effects, I can consider the future a bit more realistically.

In the evening I saw my fourth show of the festival, and my nineteenth of the trip, quite an impressive number of shows for a single trip. The company of young actors from Novi Sad were exuberant and charming. The show was demonstrably a product of their academy, taking special care to showcase each actor in a scene, and after a while the predictability of Slavic stereotypes and the sheer energy of actors trying a bit too hard became wearisome. A short walk back to the flat on a

warm Saturday night. Kraljevo is a city of some sixty-eight thousand people, not large, and it's been wracked by globalisation in the same way as many eastern bloc manufacturing centres have been. But as Danijela mentioned in our conversation, Kraljevo has a band of people, amongst them Slavko, Laza, Vlada and others, who have fought the entropy, creating political movements, a theatre school and a festival. They're an impressive group of people, the kind of small knot of culturally ambitious people who mark every town, but who often can't find the will or the luck to express their abilities for the benefit of others. These people have managed that. Kraljevo is vibrant. People walk its streets at every time of night. The cafés buzz with conversation. Not the restaurants; there are few, and most Serbs, I think prefer to eat at home of a night and socialise over coffee, *pivo* or *raki* later on.

Kraljevo also has a river (two of them, actually). Like my hometown Ottawa, like the European cities connected by the Danube, a river helps create a cultural artery. Of course all arteries can become sclerotic. No one associates the 21st century Nile with the achievements of its previous eras. But rivers, to me, are like cats in the order of the animal kingdom. They are slightly wild, but generally calm, unlike the larger and less manageable seas and oceans. They can be made use of more easily than these larger bodies, and they're at the same time far more interesting than lakes. Give me a river over a lake anytime. There's life in a river that you can see and touch and feel.

Who knows if I'll ever come back to Kraljevo? At this point in my career nothing is certain, and I think more on these things than I once did. So without overtly indulging myself in a reverie of rose-smelling I take note of where I am, what I experience, how it makes me feel. I write journals like this, which are notations not only of the work I love and which defines me, but of the life I live in such places. Perhaps there's a hope that it will explain, long after I can, what brings me to such quixotic projects and to lead a life of persistent peripety. Or it won't. The writing feels appropriate, though, so I won't stop yet, just as I won't stop working at my art until some thunderstruck intern carts my carcass off the stage.

Michael Devine
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