



THEATER ANU

POETISCHES THEATER IM ÖFFENTLICHEN RAUM

Ovid's Dream

In The Garden of Transformations



The background of the page is a photograph of a large, leafy tree at night. The tree's trunk and lower branches are illuminated with a bright blue light. The ground around the tree is covered with many small, warm-white lights, creating a starry effect. In the background, a stage is visible with a large, glowing orange light source, and a few people can be seen standing on the stage. The overall atmosphere is magical and artistic.

Theater Anu



For over ten years Theater Anu have been exploring the potential of poetic theatre in public spaces. Under the direction of Bille Behr and Stefan Behr, and in collaboration with a variety of artists, the company have played in parks, squares and a variety of other non-theatrical locations such as tunnels, churches and industrial halls. Their installations and performances create unique spaces of experience and memory which invite visitors to immerse themselves in imaginary worlds, to be enchanted and transformed.

Theater Anu is based in Berlin. Their repertoire includes commissioned productions for particular occasions (Angel Land – The Return of the Angels, By the River of Light) as well as touring productions (Ovid's Dream – In the Garden of Transformations, The Great Journey – encounters in the labyrinth of light).

www.theater-anu.de

775 Years of Berlin; European Capital of Culture 2010 – Essen for the Ruhr, opening ceremony; 20th Anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall; Illuminating Hadrian's Wall, Newcastle; Kölner Sommer Festival, Cologne; Leuven in Scène, Belgium; Altstadtfest, Vienna; International Shadow Theatre Festival, Schwäbisch Gmünd; Tollwood Festival, Munich; 850 Years of Munich; FETA Festival, Gdansk; International Street Theatre Festival, Ludwigshafen.



Ovid's Dream

In his narrative poem „Metamorphoses“, the Roman poet Ovid transforms people into trees, into stones, birds and flowers – into non-human beings.

In their new park production Ovid's Dream Theater Anu embark on a poetic and sensory exploration of these metamorphoses, creating a 'garden of transformations'. Visitors encounter the discarded hulls of the transformed: tongues of flame dart out of shoes; garments are reshaped into lamps; the fabric of clothes is unravelled and spun into new threads, entwined amongst trees, woven into massive cocoons. Visitors are free to wander through this magic place for two and a half hours, witnessing the metamorphoses and listening to the stories.

In nine scenes spread over different locations, dance, shadow-play and light-effects, installations and sound-collages create evocative images and tell familiar and unfamiliar stories, of Narcissus, Orpheus and Eurydice, Pygmalion, Phaeton, as well the Tree of Forgetting, and Rosa, the woman who loved a tree. Seven dancers, from Italy, Spain and Germany, explore the mysteries of the metamorphoses. Their performances, lasting around ten minutes, are performed continually in a loop. The production allows the audience to get right up close to the action and yet can still be enjoyed by several thousand visitors on one night.

Premiered 2012, at the Gassensationen International Street Theatre Festival in Heppenheim, Germany.

The ideal location is a park with trees. Other locations are possible as long as there is space to lay out a route with 9 scenic stations using light and sound.

Up to 2500 visitors can visit each day.

Duration: 2.5 hours per performance.

The production consists of 9 scenes / installations with 7 performers (the company is made up of 10 people in total)

The scenes are repeated multiple times per performance: average scene duration is 10 minutes.

Previous knowledge of Ovid's poems is not necessary.

The sound collages use recorded texts; it is therefore possible to adapt the production to include other languages as required.

Rosa, the woman who loved a tree



You have changed.
Become a tree.
So many branches
where your arms once were.
Roots down deep in the ground.
Although you always wanted
to travel far away.

You have changed.
Become a tree.
Without saying goodbye – to me.
Without giving me a chance
to part – from you.

How should I love you?
How should I leave you?
Should I burn your branches
so I can warm myself on you?
My cold, silent lover.

I no longer love you
in the way I used to do.
How could I?
Now I live in you.
I will never leave you.
I will never hate you.
I seek out your soft spots.
Tickle you. Like I used to.
Tend your wounds.

I am your wife.

Here I am, warm, soft.
My eyes see.
My mouth speaks and kisses.
You give the birds a home;
let me live in you too.

In autumn
when you drop your leaves
I sense you dying,
the life drained from you.
You die every year,
die again and again.

When new life pours from you
in spring
I feel hope. I am happy.
Do you still recognise me?
Are your young shoots for me?

You changed –
without asking me.
I still want to be close to you.
Would you like it
if I changed?
Became a tree too?
Put down roots too?
How? Just tell me how, my lover.
I am waiting.
Waiting for your sign.





After a thousand, thousand years, when Adam and Eve first approached the gates of Eden again, the Cherubim lowered their flaming swords and allowed them to step inside.

God welcomed them and showed them round his garden. In the midst of paradise a new tree had grown up.

'It all seems very familiar,' Adam said, 'except for this tree; I don't recognise it.'

God laughed, 'whoever eats its fruits will forget everything.'

There are three of these particular trees here now: the tree of life, the tree of knowledge, and the tree of forgetting. The latter is intended for you and your wife, Adam:

if you eat its fruit, the curse on you, which has lasted a thousand, thousand years, will be lifted.'

The Garden of Eden: it is open to anyone prepared to eat from this tree.



Love

and the tree of forgetting



Pigmaliion's creation



P ygmalion

It was a long time since I had shared my bed with a woman. I found too many faults of nature in them. I, Pygmalion the sculptor. But with my skilled hands I carved a figure from snowy ivory such as no woman on earth could possess, and fell in love with my own creation.

So perfectly was nature expressed in my work of art. Often I laid my hands on her, testing. Gave her kisses, and believed I felt them returned. Laying her on a blanket, I treated her as my wife, and brought her all the gifts a girl's heart could desire: polished stones, flowers in a thousand shades, lilies, bright balls and amber, tears of the sun's daughter, fallen from the trees. I adorned her limbs with dresses, her fingers with precious stones, her throat with a necklace, placed jewellery at her breast. Everything suited her, and she looked no less beautiful naked. The feast of Venus had come. I stepped up to the altar and timidly asked: Oh gods, you can fulfil all prayers, let me marry a woman who resembles this ivory girl.

When I arrived home, I was drawn straight to the sculpture. I lay beside her and kissed her. And then it seemed that she was warm. Again I placed my mouth to hers and touched her breast with my hand. As I touched, the ivory became soft, no longer rigid; released beneath my fingers. Next time I kissed her, my mouth met real lips. My girl reddened. Now she raised her eyes shyly up to mine and looked at me. At me first. Her eyes were for me!

Book 10, Pygmalion

H is creation

Why did you do that? Why did you throw me into your world? Why? Did you ask me if I wanted that, ask me if I wanted to live as a human amongst humans? I never wanted this, never asked for it. Why did you do that?

Why did you make me?



Eurydice

I hear your song from far away, Orpheus.
Your sad lament is for me, your Eurydice.
I met an early death from a snake-bite,
and was led by Charon
into the kingdom of the dead.

But you, Orpheus, stayed behind.
In pain. Alone.
You lament my death, lament my absence.
Oh gods, could you not show us mercy?
Transform me, Eurydice, into a tree,
a flower or a bird?

I want to stay in your world, Orpheus.
Long to stay there.
Oh my singer of singers.
My song of desire.
My sad melody.
You braved the journey into the kingdom
of the dead,
raised your voice in that dark place.

The bloodless souls swarmed to hear you
and began to cry.
Tantalus forgot to reach for the vanishing waters,
the Danaids ceased filling their sieve
and Sisyphos sat idly on his stone
and listened to your song.

Oh my Orpheus.
Oh singer of singers.
Oh song of desire.
Oh sad melody.
And so Hades and Persephone allowed you
to lead me home –
back into the world of the living.

Their only condition:
you must not look back at me,
Before you had left the valleys of Avernus,
otherwise the favour would be withdrawn.

The path led uphill through the deathly hush;
it was steep, dark and shrouded in mist.
As soon as we approached the light,
you were overcome with worry
and turned around to look at me.

There I stood: sad and gentle.
Already sliding away,
I reached out my arms,
wanted you to catch me!
Wanted to catch you!
But grasped nothing more than fleeting air.

Oh my Orpheus.
Oh singer of singers.
Oh song of desire.
Oh sad melody.



and the flight of Phaethon

Here lies Phaethon, who drove his father's chariot;
he could not control it,
but fell as a man who had risked something great.

Oh daughters of the sun, sisters of Phaethon,
who have transformed yourselves into tears of amber,
I hear your silent laments,
and see the sadness in your branches,
my trees, my daughters.

Time will unite us.
and we will forget all the pain
of that day on which Phaeton
fell from the sky.

His insistence, his request,
I can still hear it today:
'Oh mother, tell me
is the man who drives the sun's chariot
really my father?'

All my declarations,
all my vows,
were not enough to calm his desire for certainty
that he was a child of the sky.

So he climbed up
into the halls of Phoebus
and demanded of him
a sign.
His father,
touched by the sight of his son,
allowed him to wish
for whatever he desired.

And so Phaethon asked to be allowed
to drive the sun's chariot, with its horses
for one day.
He would not be deterred,
refused to listen to his father's warnings:
'You have not been given the godly gifts
for such a reckless wish.
No human is able to tame
the power of the sun's horses.

But when Phaethon insisted his wish be fulfilled
and Aurora announced that morning had come
Phoebus led him to the chariot
and the sun's horses sped off
taking Phaethon with them.

Phaethon was soon thrown from side to side.
The reins slipped from his hands
and the chariot soon strayed from its path,
flew up high
then fell back down towards the earth.

The chariot's fiery trail
scorched the earth.
Deserts appeared on this day; rivers dried out
and the ice of the poles melted.
Great cities and their walls fell down.
The fires buried whole peoples under ash.

The forests and mountains burned.
Phaethon saw the flames
destroying the world from all sides
and could no longer bear the mighty heat.
The entire surface of the earth became
cracked.
Light seeped through the gaps into Tartarus
and shocked the king of the underworld and
his wife.
The ocean shrank, and where waters once
were, was only dry sand.

The catastrophe knew no bounds now
and even the heavenly halls seemed about
to be consumed in flames;
now Jupiter shot a bolt of lightning
and ended the flight.

Book 2, Phaethon



Progne
Furies prepared the
couple's bed





he warrior Tereus married Procne, daughter of Pandion.

But the nuptials were not attended by Juno, guardian of the rite of marriage, nor by the graces. And the sacrilegious screech owl was brooding in the roof of their bedchamber. The furies held torches stolen from a funeral pyre. And it was they who prepared the couple's bed. Under these bad omens Procne and Tereus were wed; under these omens their son Itys was born.

Five autumns had passed when Procne spoke softly to her husband: 'If you truly love me, let my sister Philomena visit!' Tereus sailed himself to fetch Procne's sister. He was smitten at the sight of the virgin girl. Her beauty alone was reason enough to love her; but he was driven by an innate, base lust. His people's passion, which he inherited, caused a fire to burn within him. As soon as they had left the ship, Tereus dragged Philomena to a far-flung stable and forced himself on her with all his strength. 'Barbarian, savage, cruel beast! You have made me betray my sister and made yourself a bigamist. If I have the chance I will overcome my shame and disclose your vicious act.'

But Tereus seized her tongue and cut it out with his sword. The tongue twitched and trembled, murmuring something to the blood-darkened earth.

A year passed by before Procne discovered the tragic story of her sister's fate. Night is the time of the mysteries. At night Queen Procne left her palace, was initiated into the rites and took on the garments for the Bacchanalian frenzy. She hurtled through the woods towards the stable, seized her sister, and took her to the palace. Oh terrifying Procne!

'Tears are not the right weapon, sister; we need the sword, or perhaps you know of something more powerful than the sword?' While Procne was still speaking, Itys, her son ran up to her. 'Why can one still speak soft words while the other is forced into silence, her tongue cut out? Then Procne thrust the sword in her son's side.

The hall was drenched with blood. A deep cauldron boiled.

Tereus himself sat high on the throne of his ancestors. He ate, filling his belly with his own flesh and blood. 'Fetch Itys!' He ordered.

'The person you are calling for is already inside you!'

Tereus bellowed like a bull. He longed to tear open his belly and remove the ghastly meal from inside him!

Soon he would cry, calling himself the pitiful grave of his son. But now Tereus chased after the daughters of Pandion, his sword in his hand. They ran. He almost caught up with them. But they took off, flew up in the air, as if carried by birds, then found themselves flying with wings of their own. Soaring high in the sky: two birds.





Cocoons

There is nothing in the whole universe that persists; everything is in flux and every form is fleeting, seen in transformation. Nothing retains its own form, and nature, the eternal creator, makes one new form emerge from the next. Nothing in the whole world dies; it simply changes and renews its face. 'Being born' means beginning to be something other than before, and 'dying' means ceasing to be the same.

Book 15, Pythagoras, Verses 178 and 252-259

Asked if the boy Narcissus would live a long, full life,
the seer and prophet Tiresias said:

as long as he never recognises himself!

Book 3, Narcissus and Echo, Verses 346-350



Fotos: Bille Behr, Stefan Behr, Bernd Friedrich, Johannes Gärtner, Roger Rossell, Matthias Stephan, Martin Thoms, Andrea Zank

"Passages from Ovid's poems sound out over ethereal tones from loudspeakers while, suffused in a magical light, dancers enact the transformations which will grant the figures in Ovid's Dream eternal life. Some visitors may well start to ponder, but anyone who responds to this production with their guts not their head will become immersed in a Shakespearian summer night's dream and experience a new dimension of theatre."

Kölnische Rundschau



Performer: Cox Ahlers (Rosa), Jadi Carboni (Clymene), Ludmilla Euler (Clymene), Irene Fas Fita (Eurydice), Jessica Hellmann (Procne), Rosabel Huguet (Pygmalions Geschöpf), Maike Möller M. (Procne), Laura Parker (Eurydice), Lorenzo Pennacchiotti (Kokons), Silvia Sassetti (Eva) | **director and choreographer:** Bille Behr | **creative director:** Stefan Behr | **stage designer:** Martin Thoms | **produced by Theater Anu 2012**

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