

ORPHEUS: A SIX-HOUR, FIVE-LOCATION PERFORMANCE/EVENT

Orpheus was a six hour performance, based on the myth of Orpheus' descent to the Underworld, in which the audience traveled to five locations with Orpheus in his search for Eurydice.

Orpheus was conceived in 1979, and produced in 1983. It was part of a body of work involving audience participation, and the third piece in a trilogy of performances about the Underworld. The first two, written by S.D. Lydenberg, and developed and directed by myself, were *Tantalus* (1979) and *Persephone and Hades* (1980). Both of these pieces were audience-activated.

In 1975 I began experimenting with the role of the audience in performances. This was the result of wanting to work with the aspects of live performance that distinguished it from film. As I developed various structures for performances that involved the audience, and worked on performance techniques that were appropriate to the form, S.D. Lydenberg began writing texts and designing pieces for the form. *Tantalus* and *Persephone and Hades* were audience-activated, in that the audience controlled the combinations and durations of texts and actions. Both performances lasted as long as the audience continued to stay and activate them.

In working on these pieces, I began to research myths and rituals. Particularly in *Persephone and Hades*, the actions, objects and personas are a complex of imagery associated with the ancient Triple-Goddess. This work was performed annually for 17 years.

Developing *Orpheus* was simply an extension of all this work - in audience participation, with ongoing performances, and using mythological and ritual imagery in a contemporary setting. I was particularly interested in creating a performance which combined levels of reality; which combined the ritual act with the everyday act.

An experience that was an impetus for *Orpheus* occurred while I was standing on a curb, watching a Portuguese religious procession. The Christ figure was being carried aloft, and there were many women following, carrying candles. As they passed, I listened to the women and overheard them talking about their children, husbands - all the everyday conversation of neighbors over coffee. And yet they were still enacting the ritual.

In *Orpheus*, the audience was purposely given an outline in advance of the events that were to happen. One of the main reasons for the length of *Orpheus* was to avoid the idea that it was a ritual only or a performance only. The extended time gave the audience time to talk, rest, and eat, in addition to watching performances, and participating in certain parts.

I was also intrigued with the idea of combining different kinds of performances in the same event. The range in *Orpheus* went from very structured, scripted and rehearsed performances where the audience was simply a witness; to structured, scripted performances that occurred within the audience; to improvised performances with the audience as viewer; to improvised performance with the audience involved; to images in the environment where the audience was unsure whether they were a part of the event or not.

Finally, the audiences began to view the entire environment and all the random events and interactions within it as part of the event. I was very excited by this concept: creating a situation

within the environment, where the audience views the richness of the real world with a heightened sense of reality. It led to further work, including *Red in Woods*.

Orpheus was produced by Mobius Theater, Inc. in June of 1983. It involved over 30 artists, and a technical support staff of 20.