



The William and Mary Theatre professor, Elizabeth Wiley, will direct her students in a production of *Eurydice* in February, 2010. The production is playwright Sarah Ruhl's retelling of the Orpheus myth from the perspective of Eurydice, his wife.

Given Elizabeth's interest in physical theater, Ruhl's *Eurydice*, written in 2003 and produced off-Broadway in 2007, was particularly appealing to her. "Courses and programs in physical theatre are gaining presence in theatre education; it is a vital force for live theatre in the twenty-first century." Storytelling



Elizabeth Wiley Brings Us *Eurydice*

By Sara E. Lewis

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through physical movement employs techniques such as mime, puppetry, and dance.

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- Elizabeth Wiley

William and Mary in Physical Theatre with dance professor Joan Gavaler, Theatre Department chair.

“Two years ago I directed The Scams of Scapin by Moliere with Joan as movement coach. We loved creating this kind of theatre, the students loved it, the audience loved it,” says Elizabeth. “So, Eurydice just seems to scream for a physical approach. As soon as I read it, I gave it to Joan to read and she agreed with me. It’s not Com-

media, like Scapin, but it’s definitely a place where dance meets theatre, where myth meets magic. We had to do it.”

From childhood, drama and music were Elizabeth’s passions. “I always knew I wanted to have a career in theatre.” Growing up in the Twin Cities area of Minnesota, she took dance and piano lessons, sang in an internationally-acclaimed children’s choir, performed in community theatre, and studied at The Children’s Theatre in Minneapolis. “I am very grateful that I grew up in an area so rich in theatre and the arts.”

She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and later a Masters of Fine Art, but instead of heading to New York, Elizabeth and her husband, also an actor, worked steadily in theatres in the Twin Cities. They knew it would take a long time in New York to attain a similar quality of life. “Once we both had reached a degree of success in the theatre business, we decided we wanted to start a family. It was only then that I considered shifting my focus to teaching, which would bring me more job stability while still being able to work in the field I love.” Her first teaching position was with the University of Mississippi. After three years in Mississippi, she took a position at the College of William and Mary in May, 1997.

“Certainly it has been exciting to see this town grow over the dozen years we’ve been here, and invigorating to have new artists move to the area with fresh ideas to share,” says Elizabeth. “I must admit I still miss the Minneapolis community, but have found my life quite full between teaching, family, and what time I might eke out for my own artistic pursuits.”

Elizabeth’s husband, David Doersch, shifted his artistic focus to music once the couple moved here, founding the band Coyote Run in 1999. Their two daughters enjoy the arts and, quite naturally for

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children surrounded by Celtic music growing up, enjoyed Irish Step Dance lessons. Today, the couple's 10th-grader is more interested in playing B-flat and bass clarinet and performs with the Williamsburg Youth Orchestra. Their 4th-grader enjoys acting, singing, and dancing, and reminds Elizabeth of herself at that age. Outside of academia, Elizabeth works as a voiceover artist. She has worked on-camera and as a voiceover actor for Colonial Williamsburg and has also done voiceover work for the software company Rosetta Stone®. "If you are learning American English with their language learning software, you will hear my voice," she says.

Elizabeth enjoys working with faculty and students to build a season schedule that supports the students' theatre education. "We choose plays from across a selection of styles, genres, cultures, and time periods. We also must consider things like an appropriate balance of male and female roles, design requirements, and budget constraints." Elizabeth is excited about Ruhl's *Eurydice*. "When a director is passionate about a play, she can usually put forth fairly persuasive arguments for including the show in the season."

To prepare for the play, she reviewed Ovid's myth and looked at artistic interpretations of it in art, music, and literature. "It is not only the tale of love and loss, but it also explores memory, music, and language, with water as the common element." She says she could spend days riffing on these themes, "considering, for example, memory loss and the act of remembering and recognition." Her artistic collaborators contribute to the brainstorming process, contributing ideas from their areas of expertise in set design, music, and more. A reviewer of the off-Broadway production of *Eurydice* said that the free associating could give you the fidgets, but at the same time, the play's powerful emotional core draws you in.

The William and Mary production of *Eurydice* was cast in mid-November, to allow students to audition before the rush of semester's end and the holidays. They return to campus in early January to start rehearsals.

When the show does go on, February 25 - 28, Elizabeth hopes the appeal will be the simplicity and innocence of this retelling. There is "a quirky humor and whimsy set against an emotional poignancy. It speaks from the heart." She concludes, "I can guarantee you that audiences will be wrapped in a sensory otherworld unlike any *Orpheus* and *Eurydice* they've seen."

It's a story of power and limits. For *Eurydice*, there is passing joy and pleasure. But in the end, the choice to be made is a sober one. Will she be sad? Will she choose to put it out of her mind and exist in an empty calm? Goodbye 2009. Hello 2010. NDN

Tickets for Eurydice are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students or children. They may be purchased from the William and Mary Theatre Box Office at Phi Beta Kappa Hall or online at <http://wmbboxoffice.tix.com>. Call 757-221-2674 for more information.