

Undo Eurydice's death!*

Orpheus' beautiful wife Eurydice is bitten in the heel by a poisonous snake shortly after the wedding and dies. In his desperation he decides to descend into the underworld and ask the ruling couple of the realm of shadows to return her.

Passer-on:

I am the passer-on who spreads the word,
so that what happens does not happen in vain,
so that people can learn from the gods, and the gods from people,
so that life can learn from death, and death from life:
For where news outlasts death, there hope begins.**

The dream of love and eternal life is an archetype of human fantasy, which seeks to capture the unimaginable of the irretrievable loss of a loved one and of one's own 'no longer being' in a form with music, poems and images.

ORPHEUS - Concert Installation

is an interdisciplinary project conceived by the GEDOK Berlin music group, which attempts to approach the great mythological figure of ORPHEUS from a female perspective. Artists from GEDOK Berlin (musicians, composers, a dancer and a visual artist) explore the myth of ORPHEUS.

The concert begins with chamber music works from different eras that allow different points of view on the Orpheus/Eurydice theme. The second part will premiere two staged compositions by **Mayako Kubo (Japan)** and **Susanne Stelzenbach (Germany)**, in which the Orpheus myth is presented from a Japanese and European perspective and the cultural differences in dealing with this topic become audible and visible.

In the Christian religion, everything began with the Fall of Man, with human curiosity, with doubt, impatience and disobedience (*desirable characteristics of emancipated citizens in a modern knowledge society*): paradise and eternal life were thus forfeited forever as a punishment.

The Greek world of gods and demigods has human traits: Orpheus' sweet lyre playing and his wonderful singing delight Persephone, the goddess and ruler of the underworld, and her husband Hades so much that they give him his wife back on the condition that he is not allowed to turn around to look at her until the gate to the underworld has been passed through. He, too, cannot control his curiosity, his doubts and his impatience and looks around: Eurydice is lost forever!

In the Greek myth, the artist and his unearthly beautiful art also die in the end. The grieving Orpheus thinks only of Eurydice, sings his touching songs only in memory of her and denies his love to all other languishing women. In revenge, jealous, angry maenads tear him to pieces. (*The same could happen to a modern pop star if he were to fall into the hands of his fans.*)

The old Japanese creation myth of Izanagi and Izanami from the Nihongi Chronicle is more realistic and assumes mortal gods. The union of the lovers/siblings gives rise to the fire god Kagutsuchi no Kami, who inflicts fatal burns on his mother during childbirth. Like Orpheus, the grieving Izanagi descends into the realm of the dead to look for his sister/wife. Although Izanami does not want him to see her, Izanagi ignores her wishes. To his horror, he sees her eaten by worms and flees. Izanami pursues him as a demon, who can only be stopped when Izanagi blocks the entrance to the underworld with a boulder: here, the punishment for exceeding the limits set for humans is much more drastic and dramatic. Mayako Kubo takes up the Japanese Izanagi motif wordlessly and meditatively and uses harp and archaic sounds of stones in a sparse instrumentation. With her abstract composition she seeks a parallel to the unimaginable timelessness of eternity.

Susanne Stelzenbach (project idea, overall musical and organizational direction) approaches the Orpheus myth from a European perspective with lines from the poem "**Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes**" (1904) by **Rainer Maria Rilke** and the use of voice, piano, violin, tape and live electronics. For her, Eurydice is a drug-addicted young woman in the big city who experiences life and death between hallucination and noisy, garish intrusions of reality. The dancer **Anna Barth** will develop "... a feeling for space/time, stretched between eternity and the moment, remembering and forgetting, life and death...".

I will visualize **hope and futility** using the means of a light production and the Janus head of life/death and, in collaboration with the musicians and the dancer, work out the difference between the romantic, desperate poetry of the Rilke poem and the archaic drama of the Chronicle Nihongi.



© Gisela Weimann, self-portrait with Mexican Calavera mask in front of the painting "Death gives wings", 1987

*Ovid ("Eurydices, oro, properata retexite fata!") - 31 / X, 1 – 85, XI, 1 – 66

**Chronicle Nihongi in the radio play adaptation by Erich Fried

Gisela Weimann, Berlin 2007 (concept, visual development, direction of the performance)