



Classical Music Review

The New New Things

Ricky Ian Gordon gets a magical premiere at Lincoln Center.

By Peter G. Davis



Illustration by Sean McCabe (Photo credit: From left, Timothy Greenfield-Sanders/Courtesy of B.A.M.; Duncan Hannah/Courtesy of Lincoln Center)

..... Ricky Ian Gordon's *Orpheus and Euridice* is so intimate and private that one almost feels intrusive commenting on it. *Orpheus*, which recently received its world premiere in Lincoln Center's "Great Performers" and "American Songbook" series, was written as a response to the illness and death of Gordon's partner. All composers drawn to this Greek legend are surely in some way attracted by the bereavement, guilt, and grieving that the myth explores, not to mention the fact that Orpheus himself is the virtual embodiment of music and its power to move, heal, and restore. Gordon has clearly been stirred by all that, reshaping the basic material in original ways to make his own statement.

What began as a modest request from clarinetist Todd Palmer for a companion to Schubert's ballad *The Shepherd on the Rock* eventually developed into a 70-minute theater piece that, like the Schubert song, calls for soprano, clarinet, and piano but also adds a troupe of dancers. The soprano doubles as Euridice and a narrator, Orpheus exchanges his lyre for a clarinet with no loss of musical eloquence, and eight dancers represent the Furies, blessed spirits, and, in the end, a moved audience of wondering humanity. Both Gordon's text and music are couched in an accessible idiom of disarming lyrical directness, a cleverly disguised *faux* naivete that always resolves dissonant situations with grace and a sure sense of dramatic effect—the mark of a born theater composer.

Not many new works, especially one with these unusual requirements, get such a magical first performance in which every element seems so perfectly integrated. As directed and choreographed by Doug Varone, the action is in constant movement—even the pianist (Melvin Chen) and his instrument are whirled about the stage at certain key moments. Soprano Elizabeth Futral as Euridice and Palmer as Orpheus perform their regular musical duties to maximum effect while joining in the dance without a suggestion of hesitation or awkwardness. The otherworldly nature of Allen Moyer's gray gauze settings and Jane Greenwood's pale costume designs couldn't be more to the point. *Orpheus and Euridice* is a fragile creation, and it was lucky to be born with such tender care.

Orion

By Philip Glass.
Howard Gilman Opera House, Brooklyn Academy of Music.
October 4.

Orpheus and Euridice

By Ricky Ian Gordon.
Rose Theater, Lincoln Center.
October 5.