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Psyche: A Modern Rock Opera
Greenway Court Theatre

Reviewed by Bob Verini
September 1, 2014

The unarguable triumph of *Psyche: A Modern Rock Opera* is the choreography of Janet Roston, which sets a company of 10, many of them veterans of university ballet and modern-dance programs, to dizzying displays of complex movement. From their first worshipful celebration of the young Psyche (Ashley Ruth Jones), through their incarnation of various spirits and demons doing the bidding of vengeful Greek gods, the ensemble is continuously expressive and interesting.

At several points Roston and director Michael Matthews bring in trapezes for airborne acrobatics; they're not as impressive as the aerial work we'll see at the Pantages in *Pippin* next month, yet somehow, perhaps because of their proximity to us, they come across as even more moving.

In other respects, expressive, moving, and interesting are not adjectives that can be consistently applied to Cindy Shapiro's two-and-a-quarter hour, through-sung, atonal Emo retelling, in semi-modern terms, of the myth of Psyche and Cupid (here called Eros, perhaps to avoid any distracting hint of Valentine's Day). Her score is one long moan, dynamically scored (by musical director Jack Wall) but lacking in eloquence and dramatic tension; the characters sing what they're feeling and rarely if ever use the music to make decisions or create action. "Life is so difficult I cannot bear it / I might as well end it" is typical of the on-the-money nature of the lyrics, and the device of having singers repeat their verbs ("You must follow, follow"; "It's time to travel, travel") grows stale.

Despite five pages' worth of program notes and synopsis, and excellent sound design by Cricket Myers, it proves virtually impossible to follow the narrative via visual or aural means; the existence of those five pages is actually a pretty potent hint that someone fears the audience won't catch on. Our lifeline, and the sole source of the evening's wit, is projected footnotes (yep, still more commentary) to tell us what has just occurred or what is being said, which proves helpful but clunky. Often the comments are downright sassy, as in "Psyche is fucked" or "Eros is fucked." What's significant here is that the spectator would have absolutely no way of discerning the fuckedness of either character in the absence of those side notes, a sure sign that something on stage is simply not communicating.

If this work is to have a life beyond its six-week engagement at the Greenway Court, Shapiro might do well to introduce Psyche in such a way as to earn our empathy and interest. Right now she's a construct who never comes alive as a character, and thus she inspires indifference. Shapiro would also be wise not to banish Eros (Michael Starr, an impressively chiseled hunk o' beefcake) to the attic for the entirety of Act Two, like the first Mrs. Rochester; give him a love song to remind us he's there, for Pete's sake, and maybe one with a melody we can turn our ears and hearts around to, for once. And Eros is both the son and lover of Aphrodite (Laura L. Thomas, lively if pitchy); couldn't more be done with that?

Despite all the great dancing and strong production values, *Psyche: A Modern Rock Opera* never escapes its crippling, pretentious self-importance. The soul of humanity, so the Greek myths tell us, was born at the hands of Psyche. Greater infusions of humanity couldn't do Psyche any harm, for sure.