THE METAMORPHOSES

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Me and the Missus checked out the Berkeley Rep's production of Mary Zimmerman's "Metamorphoses" on New Year's day. Suffice it to say the packed house roared with approval after the 90 minute pastiche of stories came to a hushed close. Owing to the difficulty of entering and exiting the performance area - consisting of a huge pool of water surrounded by a square of 30-inch pine board walkways -- there were only three "curtain" calls.

The first character the audience is introduced to in Mary Zimmerman's ``Metamorphoses'' -- and some would argue the most important character -- is the water.

Still and inky as the play begins, the enormous square of liquid on the Zellerbach Playhouse stage looks more like Mylar or a sheet of dark glass. When the play opened in Chicago, the unsuspecting audience would audibly gasp when an actor first stepped into the pool and broke the glassy surface.

That step that King Midas takes into the pool, just minutes into Zimmerman's collage of ancient myths based on the Roman poet Ovid's ``Metamorphoses,'' is only the beginning. For the next 90 minutes in the Berkeley Repertory Theatre's hit production, the cast thrashes, splashes, swims, floats, drowns and dissolves in the pool. At different moments, the water represents the ocean, tears, language, sex and the unconscious.

``It's appropriate to the `Metamorphoses' because water is such a corruptive, corrosive force,'' Zimmerman said. ``It's symbolic of transformation, and the water itself transforms from scene to scene.''

The adaptation of Ovid's 8th century masterpiece spun out an enchanting array of music, visuals, drama and pure magic. The Chicago-based Looking Glass company pulled out the stops in drawing from the multidisciplinary, multitalented ensemble, including original music score, song, Grutowsky-style acrobatics, dance, mime, and impressive method acting ability.

Ovid is her main source material here but Edith Hamilton's *Mythologies*, Rilke's version of the Orpheus legend and Pina Bausch's dance concepts are acknowledged.

Zimmerman has devised a triumphant success in pulling from the ancient myths and imbuing them with contemporary significance, including bits of Carl Jung (recited during the comic Phaeton/Apollo vignette) and quotations from Rilke. The use of an indoor body of water was an extraordinary coupe of dramaturgy. Volatile and mutating, at times a calm reflective surface, at others a raging ocean, the 4 to 10 inch deep pool becomes a character in itself, expressive and powerful in relation to the lighting and the actors in and around its surface.

It does not matter that we have all known the stories for centuries; from the leather-jacket on Hermes to the spoiled-brat Phaeton reclining on an air mattress in his private swimming pool as he complains to his therapist, the stories enthrall. Midas, wearing a business suit, has the follower of Bacchus put up in the backyard "cabana" before rushing off to another stockholder's meeting. Aphrodite, wearing a red dahlia above her Rita Hayworth dress, takes a drag on her cigarette before spitting out her venomous curses to the messenger goddess. There is more. If you go to any theatre at all in the Bay Area this year, check this one out.

Chris Kipiniak Cast:: Anjali Bhimani (Myrrha and others), Raymond Fox (Midas and others), Kyle Hall (Hermes and others), Doug Hara (Phaeton and others), Felicity Jones (Aphrodite and others), Chris Kipiniak (Erysichthon and

others), Louise Lamson (Alcyon and others), Erik Lochtefeld (Orpheus and others), Mariann Mayberry(Eurydice and others) and Lisa Tejero (Therapist and others). Set Design: Daniel Ostling. Costume Design: Mara Blumenfeld

Afternote: The play went on to Broadway mainstage, where it earned a Tony for Best Play for Director Zimmerman in 2002. Daniel Ostling garnered a nomination for Best Set Design.