

Myths and Hymns

Music and Lyrics by Adam Guettel

"I used these dissimilar cosmologies as points of departure and discovered as I went along that they have a lot in common—a desire to transcend earthly bounds, to bond with something or someone greater. They seem to complement each other, reflecting different parts of us: the myths, our behaviors; the hymns, our prayers."

~Adam Guettel

THE MYTHS

DAEDALUS AND ICARUS:

Trapped in a labyrinth with no way out but up, Daedalus fashions two pairs of wings out of feathers and wax—one for himself and one for his son. After warning Icarus to fly in his shadow, the two lift off. In possibly the most infamous instance of "father knows best," Icarus fails to heed his dad's advice and soars straight into the sun.

See also: youthful ambition; parent-child rivalry; navigating in the nude

PEGASUS AND BELLEROPHON:

Bellerophon and Pegasus used to be the best of pals. After a long career of Chimera-slaying and damsel-saving together, Bellerophon decides it's time for the two of them to fly up and claim some Olympian real estate. Angered by Bellerophon's hubris, the gods send a gadfly to bite Pegasus' bum mid-flight so she'll buck and send her rider tumbling back down to earth.

See also: perceived betrayal; false accusations; jazz-scattering gadflies

HERO AND LEANDER:

Long-distance relationships, they say, are doomed to fail, and the tragic tale of Hero and Leander proves to be no exception. Without Skype or cell phones to bridge the distance between Europe and mainland Asia, Leander sets out every evening after sundown, swimming the 3 miles across the Hellespont strait in order to visit his beloved Hero. But his journey is cut short one stormy night when the lighthouse torch normally guiding his way is blown out. Hero finds Leander's body washed up on shore the following morning and drowns herself out of despair.

See also: soul mates; love suicide; importance of lighthouse maintenance

SISYPHUS:

Back on earth, Sisyphus was a big-shot. As he neared the end of his life, he couldn't bear the thought that the days of adding dastardly deeds and cunning feats to his resume would soon be over. Death, he decided, was for noobs. Though his elaborate plan to cheat death temporarily succeeded, before he could add that notch to his belt the gods discovered his ruse and enacted their revenge. From that point on, Sisyphus has been forever condemned to the underworld where he must roll a giant boulder up a mountain, a boulder that will tumble back down each time he's about to reach the peak.

See also: Sisyphean task; exercise in futility; long term risk of hernia

FUN FACT: Sisyphus was Bellerophon's grandfather. Like (grand)father, like (grand)son?

...AND THE HYMNS

The Temple Trio is a hymnal comprised of 388 Presbyterian songs of worship, published in 1886 during a powerful surge of revivalism in America. Adam Guettel came across a copy while perusing the shelves of a used bookstore, and found himself fascinated with the straightforward, sure-footed faith that permeated each measure. Several songs in *Myths and Hymns* were adapted from lyrics Adam discovered in this relic of American religion, his original orchestrations breathing new life into verses cut whole-cloth from their yellowed pages.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Icarus was not an achiever...

is the first lyric Adam Guettel wrote of what eventually became *Myths and Hymns*. He was twenty-two. It emerged fully formed, with all the edge and groove the song, *Icarus*, would ultimately achieve. A bit later he stumbled on a Presbyterian hymnal, and felt drawn to investigate choral chant as well. Myths, Adam posits, reflect our behaviors, as hymns do our prayers. As we worked on staging this, we found it still more complex. We were plunged into questions of how we make meaning, art, love, and life.

The music dazzles. You feel the pulse of a brilliant artist testing his powers in a spectrum of musical styles. Whether Adam's writing jazz, funk, gospel, R & B, art song, hymn, you name it, he can write a melodic line. The songs are haunting, cocky, lyrical, funny, majestic, silly, and transcendent.

The Roy De Carava photo above inspired our set. It was taken during a break in a Duke Ellington recording session in a makeshift Harlem sound studio in 1955. I love the solitary musicians, hanging lights, coat rack, and ladders. Our space in Lester Martin is full of openings and potential, just like the songs – a constructed storage space mirroring the one in which some of the most transcendent jazz was played.

We were lucky to have one evening to work with Adam Guettel. He was on fire for the full three hours, an intense and charismatic artist and teacher. He inspired the singers with metaphors of motion and directionality: "It's like driving a car, here's where you accelerate." or "Do you ski? Here's where you take the first mogul?" or "If the Lord is in the room, where is he? He's up there. Sing it to him." He made no secret of his struggle with addiction that preceded the decision to take account of his life. That process is the journey of *Saturn Returns*, and actually the ongoing journey of *Myths and Hymns* itself. The singers understood this immediately.

In closing I have to honor the gifted teaching artists and deeply learning students at Bennington College who have given themselves so completely to this project. I'm not Daedalus, and I don't know how to make wings, but I know we are going to fly.

I am reminded of the Persian epic, *The Conference of the Birds*. It tells the story of a flock of birds of different feathers questing to find a mythical, eternal bird whose name "*si morph*" means "*thirty birds*." As the birds fly, they become exhausted and many drop out of the arduous journey. Finally they fly over a mountain and see their reflection in a crystal sea. In the clear water beneath them, they see it.

There are 30 birds.

Aloft and in formation, a migratory V. How wonderful if that's what God could see.

By Jean Randich

ENSEMBLE

Bahar Baharloo, Chris Beatley, Leah Dagan, Elissa Daniels
Alex Diaz, Ian Gillis, Ezra Lowrey, Bronwyn Maloney
James Overton, Riley Skinner, Ginger Zimmerman

CREATIVE TEAM

Director.....	Jean Randich
Music Director.....	Bruce Williamson
Choral Director.....	Tom Bogden
Set Design.....	Andromache Chalfant
Costume Design.....	Chip Schoonmaker with the Costumes Projects Class
Lighting Design.....	Michael Giannitti
Sound Design.....	Scott Lerher, Sam Popkin, and Dan Winger
Stage Manager.....	Emily Grayson
Technical Director.....	Mike Rancourt
Costume Shop Manager.....	Richard Macpike
Master Electrician.....	Rob Post
Sound Technician.....	Dan Roninson
Assistant Director.....	Amanda Buckley
Dramaturg.....	Chelsea Bernard
Costume Projects Class.....	Taya Jae, Yael Rose, Sophie Sauvayre, Anna Eckert-Kramer, Sarah Goldsmith, Kevser Kesici
Assistant Lighting Design.....	Chris Defillip

MUSIC

Conductor, keyboard, alto saxophone.....	Bruce Williamson
Piano.....	Sam Burhoe
Bass.....	Zak Filler
Guitar.....	Roi Karlinsky
Drums.....	Jake Landau
Alto and soprano saxophone.....	Singer Morra
Bass clarinet and clarinet.....	Abby Mahler
Bass clarinet and baritone saxophone.....	Jeremy Stewart
Violin.....	Rainjana Haynes and Emma Piazza
Viola.....	Tess Morrison
Cello.....	Celeste Schepp
Rehearsal Pianists.....	Sam Burhoe, Valerie Peters, Yoshiko Sato

CREW

Live Video.....	Brady Williams
Assistant Stage Managers.....	Natalie Osborne and Emily Anzalone
Lighting Board Operator.....	Chris DeFilipp
Sound Operators.....	Dominic Romano and Dan Winninger
Wardrobe.....	Oona Kilcommons, Arden Jordan, and Kate Howard
Wardrobe Maintenance.....	Annie Labins
Make-Up.....	Emiline Mesmer
Stage Crew.....	Tommy Melvin

SHOP CREWS

Scene Shop Crew Bahar Baharloo, Joseph Barone, Christina Cooper, Corina Dalzell, Amanda Haggerty, Carl Johanson, Jeremy Kiracofe, Celia Robertson, Ana-Miren San Millan

Scene Shop Lab Crew: Phoebe Blanding, Jordan Ezra, Samuel Fiedler, Emily Gaynor, Julia Haskell, Clea Howard, Jessie King, Maya Knell, Alexa LaFerte, Gianfranco Saal, Eloise Schieferdecker, Jeremy Schrager, Jaclyn Triebel, Audre Wirtanen, Rachael Zeltzer

Costume Shop Crew: Sheridan Baker, Bahar Baharloo, Corina Dalzell, Nikki Derse, Anna Eckert-Kramer, Sonja Einem, Kione Kochi, Sierra Marcum Yael Rose

Costume Shop Lab Crew: Audre Bennett, Nina Berinstein, Andrew Elk, Rebecca German, Genya Rocca-Owodunni, Alex Scott

Electrics Crew: Evangeline Neuhart, Rory Cullen, Carolyn Lewon, Anna Kroll, Anna Brown, Meghan Herzfeld, Nathan Paul, Kathryn Henderson, Corey Ecay, Nick DiLeonardi, Isabelle Miller, Amy Johnson

SPECIAL THANKS

Souleymane Badolo, Chris Edwards, Linda Hurley, Suzanne Jones, Susan Sgorbati

SONG LIST

Overture

Children of the Heavenly King

Leah Dagen, Bronwyn Maloney, Riley Skinner

At the Sounding

Ensemble

Saturn Returns

James Overton, Ensemble

Icarus

Ezra Lowrey, Chris Beatley, Ensemble

Migratory V

Elissa Daniels, Ensemble

Pegasus

Bahar Baharloo, Elissa Daniels, Ezra Lowrey

Link

Ensemble

Hero and Leander

Alex Diaz

Sisyphus

Ezra Lowrey, Ensemble

Come to Jesus

Bronwyn Maloney, Ian Gillis

How Can I Lose You

Riley Skinner

There's a Shout

Ginger Zimmerman, Ensemble

Awaiting You

Alex Diaz

The Great Highway

Ensemble

There's a Land

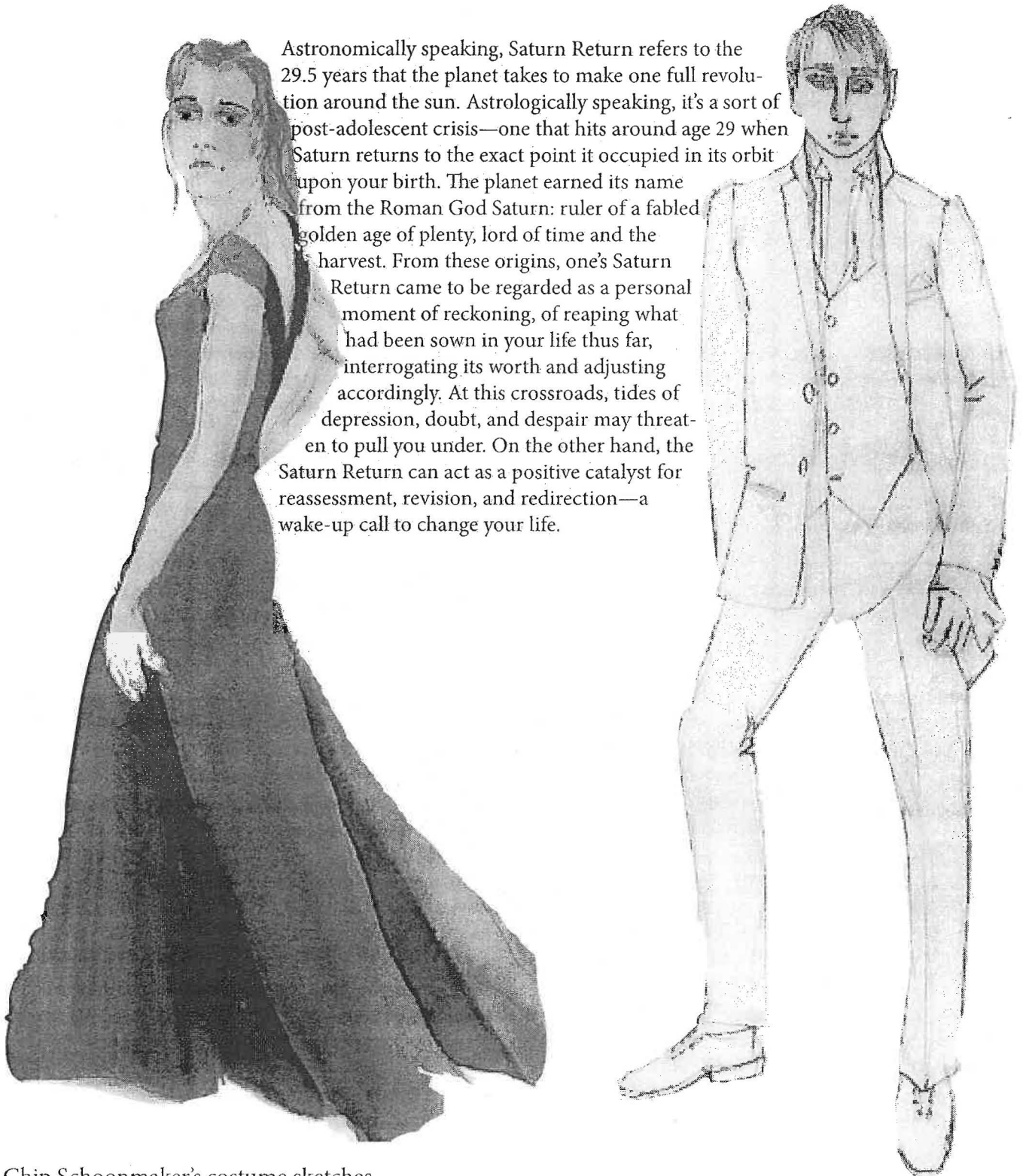
Ensemble

Saturn Returns Reprise

Ensemble

"What have I done with this first cycle of my life? Who have I become?"
-Adam Guettel

Astronomically speaking, Saturn Return refers to the 29.5 years that the planet takes to make one full revolution around the sun. Astrologically speaking, it's a sort of post-adolescent crisis—one that hits around age 29 when Saturn returns to the exact point it occupied in its orbit upon your birth. The planet earned its name from the Roman God Saturn: ruler of a fabled golden age of plenty, lord of time and the harvest. From these origins, one's Saturn Return came to be regarded as a personal moment of reckoning, of reaping what had been sown in your life thus far, interrogating its worth and adjusting accordingly. At this crossroads, tides of depression, doubt, and despair may threaten to pull you under. On the other hand, the Saturn Return can act as a positive catalyst for reassessment, revision, and redirection—a wake-up call to change your life.



Chip Schoonmaker's costume sketches

ADAM GUETTEL

COMPOSER AND LYRICIST



Adam Guettel (pronounced "Gettle"; b. 1965), son of Mary Rodgers and grandson of legendary composer Richard Rodgers, is an American musical theater composer and lyricist best known for 2005's *The Light in the Piazza*, for which he won a Tony Award. Guettel grew up in New York City's Upper West Side and performed as a boy soprano in operas including *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Metropolitan Opera and *The Magic Flute* at the New York City Opera. He attended Phillips Exeter Academy and graduated from Yale in 1987. His early works include 1996's *Floyd Collins*, *Love's Fire*, and *Saturn Returns* (recorded as *Myths and Hymns*).

DRAMATURG'S NOTE

The most recent Gallup Research Polls indicate that 17.8% of Americans claim no religious affiliation, the report citing the steady rise of atheism since the late 1960s as "one of the most significant trends in religious measurement in the United States." College authority Princeton Review ranks Bennington's student body as the #2 Least Religious among all American colleges. Given the seeming irrelevance of spirituality to the daily lives of most Bennington students, why stage a song cycle about it? What do myths and hymns have to say to an audience of presumed atheists?

Well, if you accept Joseph Campbell's thesis that "all religions are true but none are literal," potentially quite a lot. Through that lens, Greek mythology and Christianity are simply mythological and religious meaning-making machines, one of many metaphorical vehicles for exploring the mysteries of the universe. Atheism doesn't preclude spiritual insight and experience; spiritual experience doesn't require adherence to a particular doctrine. Adam Guettel invokes both myths and hymns not to preach to a choir, but to convey a more universal human quest for transcendence and community, a universal human struggle of boundless ambition pitted against binding limitations.

According to atheist philosopher Staks Rosch, spirituality "isn't one thing; it is two things. It's the feeling we get 'when we are truly in relationship with others' and that 'deep sense of incomprehensibility at the wonder of sheer existence.'" I believe the theater, and this show in particular, facilitates both—the lights go down and a sacred space is invoked. In this secular church, this liminal space straddling reality and imagination, there exists the opportunity to experience "meaning in the presence of mere being"—for believers and non-believers alike.

By Chelsea Bernard



DRAMA FACULTY AND STAFF

Andromache Chalfont
Kathleen Dimmick
Chris Edwards
Michael Giannitti
Linda Hurley
Kirk Jackson
Dina Janis
Sherry Kramer
Richard MacPike
Robert Post
Michael Rancourt
Jean Randich
Sue Rees
Jenny Rohn
Dan Roninson
Charles Schoonmaker

MUSIC FACULTY AND STAFF

Michael Bisio
Tom Bogdan
Nathan Botts
Kitty Brazelton
Nicholas Brooke
Frederic Hand
Susie Ibarra
Suzanne T. Jones
John Kirk
Julie Last
Scott Lehrer
Christopher Lewis
Randall Neal
Nathaniel Parke
Valerie Peters
Susan Reiss
Dan Roninson
Rachel Rosales
Yoshiko Sato
Allen Shawn
Jeremy Stewart
Polly Van Der Linde
Kaoria Wahiyama
Bruce Williamson
Michael Wimberly

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