

The "Orpheus" of George Balanchine with music of Igor Stravinsky was my chief and last work of the theater of 1948.

The scene opens with Orpheus at the grave of Euridice. A bow is thrust in the ground, from its string his harp is hung. Their strings are silent. Nymphs dressed in dry twigs dance disconsolately between three white rocks.

The figure of Death appears to conduct Orpheus to the nether world to which his longing has permitted him to go. Death has a thick black loop that stretches between crotch and head covering his face. Orpheus wears the mask of the artist that blinds him to reality but opens his vision to art.

A white silk curtain that covers the proscenium comes tumbling down as the rocks now luminous float up behind. The effect is that of vertigous descending.

Hades is framed by tongues of red flame and white bones that slowly move. Gray and black are the colours of death. Gray the rocks that burden the shades that once were human.

Orpheus plucks his harp and the congestion of ghosts subsides, and the great black rock that stands at center gradually turns to reveal Euridice clinging to Pluto, from whose mouth, held by his teeth dart a star of flames.

But the enchantment of his music prevails and Euridice is freed from the thrall of death.

The passage of life is again shown by the descending silk curtain, wildly agitated as it reaches the floor by the clawing spirits of the dead.

Euridice follows the compelling music. But Orpheus, as is known, doubts himself and the truth of his art. He tears off the artists mask of blindness and without it sees death as the final and irrevocable reality. Euridice disappears instantly drawn back under the curtain by the unhappy spirits hovering behind.



The luminous rocks float out of sight. The magic of art is replaced by harsh reality. The Furies with wild red hair, entwined by spirals of red surround Orpheus now helpless, and tear him limb from limb.

But creativity and spring time are ever recurring. Appollo appears holding high a giant head of Orpheus singing.

From behind a flat green hill rises the bonelike wraith of his spirit. Green leaves have started to sprout, and the harp is seen within this as it rises upward.