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Polaroid Stories

Cast: 5m., 5w. A visceral blend of classical mythology and real life stories told by street kids, Naomi Iizuka’s Polaroid Stories journeys into a dangerous world where myth-making fulfills a fierce need for transcendence, where storytelling has the power to transform reality in which characters’ lives are continually threatened, devalued and effaced. Not all the stories these characters tell are true; some are lies, wild yarns, clever deceits, but whether or not a homeless kid invents an incredible history for himself isn’t the point, explains diarist-of-the-street Jim Grimsley. “All these stories and lies add up to something like the truth.” Inspired in part by Ovid’s Metamorphoses, Polaroid Stories takes place on an abandoned pier on the outermost edge of a city, a waitstop for dreamers, dealers and desperadoes, a no-man’s land where runaways seek camaraderie, refuge and escape. Serpentine routes from the street to the heart characterize the interactions in this spellbinding tale of young people pushed to society’s fringe. Informed, as well, by interviews with young prostitutes and street kids, Polaroid Stories conveys a whirlwind of psychic disturbance, confusion and longing. Like their mythic counterparts, these modern-day mortals are engulfed by needs that burn and consume. Their language mixes poetry and profanity, imbuing the play with lyricism and great theatrical force. Flexible staging.
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Cover photo: Actors Theatre of Louisville’s 21st Humana Festival of New American Plays featuring Danny Seckel and Denise Casano. Photo by Richard Trigg. Cover design: David G. Serkel
POLAROID STORIES

by

NAOMI IIZUKA

An adaptation of Ovid’s

Metamorphoses

Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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Polaroid Stories was first workshopped site-specifically through The Playwrights Center in Minneapolis, Minn. En Garde Arts also workshopped the play in New York at PS 122.

The first performance was at the Humana Festival of New Plays, Actors Theatre of Louisville, March 1997. Directed by Jon Jory, it included the following cast:

D (dionysus) .................. SCOT ANTHONY ROBINSON  
Philomel .......................... MONICA BUENO  
Eurydice .......................... KIM GAINER  
Persephone/Semele ................ DENISE CASANO  
Orpheus .......................... BRUCE MCKENZIE  
Narcissus ....................... MICHAEL RAY ESCAMILLA  
Echo ............................. MIRIAM BROWN  
G (zeus, hades) .................... NELSON VASQUEZ  
The Lydian Sailor .................. DANNY SECKEL  
Ariadne .......................... CAITLIN MILLER  

Scenic Designer ..................... PAUL OWEN  
Costume Designer .................. MARCIA DIXCY JORY  
Lighting Designer .................. GREG SULLIVAN  
Sound Designer ..................... MARTIN R. DESJARDINS  
Properties Designer ................ MARK J. BISSONNETTE  
Production Stage Manager ........ DEBRA ACQUAVELLA  
Assistant Stage Manager .......... CIND SENENSIEB  
Dramaturg ........................ MICHAEL BIGELOW DIXON  
Casting ........................... LAURA RICHIN CASTING  

Polaroid Stories was most recently produced by Campo Santo at Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco, Calif., 1998.
POLAROID STORIES

A Play in Two Acts
For 5 Men and 5 Women

CHARACTERS

D (dionysus)
EURYDICE
PERSEPHONE (also SEMELE)
ORPHEUS (also TEREUS)
PHILOMEL
SKINHEADgirl (a.k.a. neon girl)
NARCISSUS
ECHO
SKINHEADboy (a.k.a. oklahoma boy/speedracer)
G (a.k.a. zeus, hades)

Set requirements: Minimal
Approximate running time: 2 hours
ACT ONE
fucked-up love songs

Prologue

(In the darkness, PHILOMEL begins to sing. A fragment of an old song, familiar and haunting. Her voice is solitary, unadorned, childlike. The sound of the streets grow around her voice: traffic like the ocean, trains rumbling underground, a pay phone ringing and ringing, pieces of radio, a bass line, glass shattering, a faint siren faraway. In a sea of noise, PHILOMEL's song is gradually lost.)

THE FATE OF THE LYDIAN SAILOR
the story of oklahoma boy

(A small light in the darkness. Shadows like fish underwater. A light. D appears, a figure in the darkness.)

D. this is how it begins, this is where—
i seen him out of nowhere, crazy amped-out boy
crazy oklahoma boy,
i found him up by port authority,
scheming and scamming, nickel diming what he can—
i watch him awhile, see him get all's he can get,
and then he goes, he gets high on spray. oklahoma boy likes spray.
spray's cheap, he says, and then he smiles like a psychopath.
tell you what, he says to me, i ain’t got a friend in
this whole world,
are you my friend, he says to me,
what you got for me, friend? i got a kingdom, i says
to him,
behold my kingdom,
and he thinks that’s the funniest thing.
he laughs so hard he falls down.
and then we get high. we fly.

oklahoma boy likes speed,
he likes it cause it makes him go so fast it makes him
go fucking speedracer fast with them fucking speed-
racer eyes.
one night, he rips me off, digs around till he finds my
stash,
i hear his fingers, i hear his eyes clicking in his head,
i hear him laughing in the dark
so high he can’t hardly stand, he can’t hardly breathe,
and then he takes my stuff, he goes away—
pockets full of quarters, he finds some arcade, video
world is all there is all there ever was,
oklahoma boy disappears for days,
all speedracer eyes, big eyes, black as night, full of
laser beams and showers of light, galaxies and plan-
ets, whole worlds exploding in his head, and it’s so
bright,
what it is, right, it’s so bright, for a second you think
you can see then all there is is black—

(Darkness.)
A LIST OF MINOR GODS AND GODDESSES

(Voices in the dark call out from every direction. Sometimes the voices cut each other off. Sometimes they overlap. A sea of names spoken fast and loud. The names are statements, taunts, teases, fighting words.)

M3. my name is bandit
F1. my name is tina
M2. my name is blondboy
M1. My name is ramon
F2. my name is mohawk girl
F3. my name is lupe
M4. my name is viper
F4. my name is lisa j
M5. my name is crazy todd
M1. my name is ninja b
F5. my name is desiree
M2. my name is david c
F1. my name is rochelle
M3. my name is tiny
M4. my name is paco
M5. my name is skater pete
F2. my name is mai thai
F3. my name is baby punk
M1. my name is tiger
M2. my name is little ray
F4. my name is candy
F5. my name is loca
F1. my name is skinheadgirl
M3. my name is baby j
M4. my name is nazi mike
M5. my name is tweeeker shawn
F2. my name is nothing girl
M1. my name is oklahoma boy
F3. my name is jamie b
M2. my name is zero
M3. my name is shadow
M4. my name is scratch
M5. my name is nicky z
M1. my name is dogboy
M2. my name is skinhead steve
F4. my name is happy girl
M3. my name is marco
M4. my name is psycho john
F5. my name is melody
M5. my name is scarface
M1. my name is kaos
F1. my name is disappear

(The voices reverberate, echo. And then there is silence.)

HOW EURYDICE CROSSES THE RIVER OF FORGETFULNESS
the journey between two worlds

(EURYDICE is crossing the River of Forgetfulness. She
walks through the water. Ancient trash floats across the
water’s surface, which gleams black as oil. PERSEPHONE waits for her on the other side. She is the queen
of the dead.)

EURYDICE. my name is disappear. my name is disappear.
PERSEPHONE. hey! who do you think you’re talking to, disappear?
EURYDICE. i’m talking to anybody who’s listening
PERSEPHONE. is that right?

EURYDICE.
  i’m talking to somebody who knows how it goes—
you know how it goes, i know you do, too—see it in your eyes. so you tell me then, cause i want to know, tell me about the places i’ve never been to,
tell me about all the places i’m gonna go to

PERSEPHONE. don’t you start that song with me, little girl

EURYDICE.
  i said to him, this town is too damn small for me
  this town ain’t good for nothing—
  i want to get out of here
  i want to see the world
  i want to see some fireworks in this life, is what i said to him

PERSEPHONE. you ain’t telling me nothing new, nothing i ain’t heard before

EURYDICE.
  i want to be famous
  i want to sleep in satin sheets

PERSEPHONE. girl, please
EURYDICE.
    i want to dance and dance all night long
    i want to go someplace in this damn life, is what i said to him—

PERSEPHONE. heard that, heard that, heard that all before

EURYDICE.
    but see, it’s like this: i got a man like a bad dream
    follows me no matter where i go

PERSEPHONE. heard that, too

EURYDICE.
    i feel his eyes on my back
    i feel his breath on my neck, no matter how far i get to

(ORPHEUS appears out of the shadows, approaches.)

EURYDICE.
    and he’s all
    shut up, you ain’t going nowhere, what are you think-
    ing, girl, who are you kidding? 
    and i’m looking at him
    and all i can think is
    who
    are
    you
    to
    me?
    who were you ever to me?
like you matter to me
like anything you say is going to make a difference to me
like i want to stay in that nowhere town doin nothing all my life
like i want to be with you forever
like i want that

PERSEPHONE. little girl
EURYDICE. i ain’t no little girl
PERSEPHONE. little girl is all you are—
EURYDICE. i ain’t no little girl, all acting like you know me
PERSEPHONE. i know you, little girl. i know you like i know myself.

(ORPHEUS comes so close to EURYDICE, a chain fence is all that separates them.)

ORPHEUS.

what are you thinking, little girl—
—you ain’t going nowhere—

EURYDICE. —you can’t touch me—
ORPHEUS. —is that right—
EURYDICE. —where i’m going to, baby, you ain’t never going to find me—
ORPHEUS. —shut up—
EURYDICE. —how do i look walking away?
ORPHEUS. —you ain’t walking away—
EURYDICE. —how do i look walking away from you, baby, how do i look to you—
(ORPHEUS tries to follow her. He climbs the fence and falls, crashing to the ground.)

ORPHEUS. baby—
EURYDICE. i take the bus across a thousand miles
ORPHEUS. i can see you
EURYDICE. i sleep i sleep
ORPHEUS. i can see the veins under your skin, i can see your heart beating
EURYDICE. i sleep i sleep, i sleep like a dead person. it’s like i disappear. and when i wake up, i’m a thousand miles away, and it’s all like “where you from, you got a place to stay, how’d you like to come spend the night, how’d you like a little of this, how’d you like a taste just a taste, come on, baby, this shit is good—”
PERSEPHONE. ain’t nothing new, i know how this goes:
ORPHEUS. hey, girl
PERSEPHONE. “hey, girl”
ORPHEUS. i’m talking to you
PERSEPHONE. “hey girl”
ORPHEUS. i’m talking to you
PERSEPHONE. “yeah, i’m talking to you—you got a name? where are you from? you got a place to stay? you need a place to crash awhile—hey—”
ORPHEUS. hey, girl—i’m talking to you, ain’t nobody else in the world but you—
PERSEPHONE. “how’d you like to spend the night, how’d you like a little of this”
ORPHEUS. i can see you. baby, i can see straight through you.
PERSEPHONE. “how’d you like a taste, just a taste”
ORPHEUS. don’t you walk away from me
PERSEPHONE. “come on, baby, this shit is good”

ORPHEUS.

don’t you walk away from me when i’m talking to
you—
hey—hey, i’m talking to you—bitch—

(The sound of a woman singing through a sea of static
snow. ORPHEUS tries to climb the fence one more time.
He falls, crashing to the ground, tries to climb again
and again.)

EURYDICE.

you look like someone who knows how it goes, so
i’m going to tell you how it goes,
i’m high, right, and this guy
he says to me, where are you from—bitch—
he wants to touch me, get inside of me, know every-
thing about me.
he wants to know how i got all these scars on my
pretty little body.
i tell him, sweet as i know how: baby, i forget.
i drink from the river of forgetfulness.
i forget the names i forget the faces i forget the stories
i forget all kinds of shit.

when he’s asleep, i roll him, i kick his ass, take his
cash, take his fancy watch
and i’m looking at him
and all i can think is
who are you to me,
like you know me
like you think i’m going to tell you the truth
like you think i’m going to give you that—

yeah, baby, i got scars
i got scars all over, but i don’t even know this story, see.
ain’t no story, cause i forget.

(EURYDICE gets to the other side of the river and dis-
appears with PERSEPHONE into the darkness. On the
other side of a chainlink fence, on the other side of the
river, ORPHEUS watches EURYDICE disappear. He has
blood on his hands from where the chainlink cut his skin.)

THE STORY OF NARCISSUS
  gazing in the mirror

(NARCISSUS is a skinny, beautiful boy in dirtied-up
rave wear. ECHO is a runaway girl, plain and un-
washed.)

NARCISSUS. yeah, so, how it goes, right, how it goes is
  like: and then and then
ECHO. and then and then and then and then
NARCISSUS. it’s like it’s like
ECHO. it’s like it’s like
NARCISSUS. it’s like this, check it out: i meet this guy,
  right, and we go to his place and it’s phat it’s plush
ECHO. it’s phat it’s plush
NARCISSUS. it’s all glass and chrome
ECHO. glass and chrome
NARCISSUS. black leather, plush pile, big-screen tv with surround sound
ECHO. surround sound
NARCISSUS. mirrors everywhere, on the walls, in the hall, on the ceiling, looking at myself
ECHO. looking at myself
NARCISSUS. and we’re kicking back, and it’s cool
ECHO. it’s cool
NARCISSUS. and he’s like, are you hungry? and i’m like, yeah, i’m hungry, and so we order in, and i eat steak and eggs and fries and some pizza and all this ice cream and shit, and i’m eating like a pig cause i’m starvin
ECHO. i’m starvin
NARCISSUS. and we’re drinking all this wine, and he’s like, this is nice wine, and i’m like, yeah, it’s ok, nothin’ special
ECHO. nothing special
NARCISSUS. and he busts out this big fat doobie, and i’m like, all right, and we get high
ECHO. we get high
NARCISSUS. and i say to him, dude, if this is the high life, dig, the high life is ok by me, and that makes him laugh so hard, and i see his teeth like tiny pearls all shiny white, and i’m like, dude, you are so ugly
ECHO. you are so ugly
NARCISSUS. and he laughs, and he’s like, how about a movie, so he pops in a tape, and it’s like scarface, and it’s like my favorite movie, i love that movie, that movie is so excellent
ECHO. so excellent
NARCISSUS. “say hello to my little friend”
ECHO. “little friend”