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# Making a splash: Cabrillo's 'Metamorphoses' flows with theatrical magic



BY JANA MARCUS

November 3, 2025

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The Cabrillo College Theatre Arts Department's production of "Metamorphoses" is a stunning fusion of myth, movement and water — a sensory feast that transforms the Black Box Theater into a pool of divine storytelling.

The Black Box Theater at Cabrillo College has always been a fun place to see a show. Its dimensions shift with every new production — from musicals to dramas — but nothing has ever given the space such exquisite life as the Theatre Arts Department's fall production of "Metamorphoses" performed in the round. This time, the Black Box feels more like a dreamscape — shimmering, fluid and alive.

"Metamorphoses," written and originally directed by Mary Zimmerman, turns ancient myth into modern poetry for the stage. Based on the classic tales of "Ovid," Zimmerman weaves together vignettes of gods and mortals grappling with love, loss, greed and transformation — all unfolding around and within a pool of water that serves as both literal and metaphorical centerpiece. From Midas turning everything he touches to gold to Orpheus reaching for Eurydice in the underworld, each story ripples with humanity's eternal longing for connection and change.

First staged at Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre in 1998 and later earning Zimmerman a Tony Award for Best Direction on Broadway in 2002, "Metamorphoses" has always been defined by its water. Zimmerman wrote the script with water as a living, breathing element of change within the myths, and water is the true star of Cabrillo's production, which embraces it with breathtaking flair.

Set designer extraordinaire Skip Epperson has again created a visual masterpiece. The stage itself is a gleaming pool, framed by tall columns and patinaed brass doors. Actors dip, dive, float and glide through the water — even making dazzling exits through hidden underwater tunnels. At one point, it rains around the circumference of a massive, glittering chandelier, reshaping the entire theatre into a sensory spectacle.

There are so many delightful surprises in the staging, props and effects that I won't spoil them here — they truly must be experienced. That magic is thanks not only to Epperson's marvelous design but also to the technical wizardry of Marcel Tjioe and the moody, evocative lighting by Kelly Mack. Together, they create a world that is both ethereal and tactile — a visual feast for the eyes and the imagination.

That aesthetic continues with costume designer Maria Crush's thoughtful palette of beige, white and peach tones, which evoke an ancient, sun-baked world. The costumes feel timeless — part mythic, part modern — with subtle splashes of red, gold or turquoise that elevate the palette. The overall effect is like a living fresco, painted in soft pastels and illuminated by the water's reflective surface.

Director Andrea L. Hart has done a beautiful job weaving all of these elements into a cohesive whole, honoring Zimmerman's original vision while making the production distinctly Cabrillo's. Her direction strikes a balance between grandeur and intimacy — the myths feel both larger than life and deeply human. Hart uses the pool and its surrounding platform with precision and playfulness, creating moments that are sensual, meditative and often very funny. The inclusion of original music by Chris Salem and moments of a cappella singing adds another layer of atmosphere, giving the production a haunting, ceremonial quality.

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This fall production features an ensemble of 21 actors who flow in and out of multiple roles with grace and commitment. The cast is a wonderful mix of Cabrillo students and seasoned local favorites, all working seamlessly to tell these timeless tales. Standout performances include Ward Willats as Midas/Cinyras, bringing warmth and depth to the king who learns the hard way that gold isn't everything; Ian Grant as Phaeton/Poisedon/Hermes, who delivers both humor and heart; Nikki Unger as Psyche/Narrator offers a heartfelt performance — her voice both grounding and guiding, like a steady current; and Cody Balcomb Bartok as Ceyx/Eros, and differing characters, offers a glowing performance with emotional sincerity throughout the play's shifting waters.

The show runs 90 minutes without intermission, but there is so much visual and emotional magic on stage that it feels like it goes by in an instant. It is, at once, a theatrical spectacle and a spiritual meditation. "Metamorphoses" blurs the line between myth and modern life, inviting you to reflect as much as to marvel. Its language is lyrical, its staging elemental, and its themes timeless, reminding us that though the gods may be ancient, their stories still mirror our own: our hunger for meaning and our search for grace.

In this moment of upheaval and reinvention in America, "Metamorphoses" feels surprisingly current. We're all navigating our own transformations — whether personal, cultural, or political — and trying to find balance in uncertain times. Zimmerman's myths remind us that change isn't just chaos; it's a form of creation. Her stories of love, loss and renewal echo the heart of democracy itself: the belief that we can evolve, that compassion can outlast fear, and that beauty can rise from the flood. In the end, "Metamorphoses" isn't just about the gods, it's about us, and the ongoing act of becoming something better together through change.

Don't miss this stunner — a luminous, living work of art that turns the Cabrillo Black Box into a pool of transformation.