

BWW Interview: Julia Rodriguez-Elliott

METAMORPHOSIS ANW's 30th Anniversary Season

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by Gil Kaan

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A Noise Within's next production Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* will open May 14, 2022, with previews beginning May 8th. A re-envisioning of ancient Greek myths for a modern audience, *Metamorphoses* is set entirely in and around an on-stage swimming pool. ANW's co-producing artistic director Julia Rodriguez-Elliott directs a cast of nine ANW resident artists who tackle over 85 roles in six myths: DeJuan Christopher, Geoff Elliott, Rafael Goldstein, Nicole Javier, Kasey Mahaffy, Sydney A. Mason, Trisha Miller, Cassandra Marie Murphy and Erika Soto. Julia took some time from her multiple duties as *Metamorphoses*' director and ANW's co-producing artistic director to discuss *Metamorphoses* logistics, as well as her successful working relationship with co-producing artistic director husband Geoff Elliott.



Thank you for taking the time for this interview, Julia! I last interviewed you and Geoff in 2016 for ANW's 25th Anniversary season "Beyond Our Wildest Dreams."

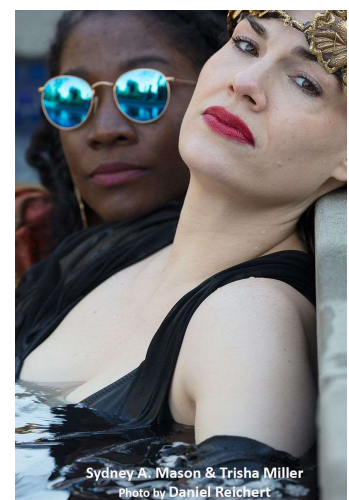
Dear Gil, I can't believe it's been so long. Hope you are doing well!

What elements of *Metamorphoses* swayed you to choose *Metamorphoses* as ANW's next production?

Our 30th Anniversary season theme is "They Shattered the Chrysalis" (we always thematically link our seasons) exploring the joys and peril of change. Our world is the midst of extraordinary change that is both joyous and painful and we wanted to examine stories involving change AND of course *Metamorphoses* is the perfect play around transformation/change. Every myth shares the common themes of transformation. I am also personally a huge fan of Mary Zimmerman's work and after directing *Argonautika*, I was anxious to delve into another of her works.

You directed Mary Zimmerman's *Argonautika* in 2019. Were you familiar with Mary's other works?

I am familiar with her work and have admired her for a long time. She tells story in a way that speaks to me. She is masterful at bridging the ancient and modern, and she challenges us to create the seemingly impossible onstage.



Was a swimming pool set always a part of *Metamorphoses* in its 1998 premiere at Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre, and in its 2002 Broadway debut?

The play was first presented 1996 at Northwestern University and it was titled *Six Myths*, and I believe that it always imagined a body of water although this first presentation did not incorporate a pool.

I've seen some very elaborate sets on the ANW stage. Would you consider *Metamorphoses*' set ANW's most challenging?

I would say the most complicated in the sense that you have to deal with all that comes with having a body of water onstage and things like water temperature, cleaning procedures, actor comfort, etc. etc. have to be addressed. There is a "META Club" across the country that have produced the play, so we have gotten lots of input on the challenges/rewards of managing the water element.

What would your three-line pitch of *Metamorphoses* be?

Celebrates the magic of theatre! "Shows that theater can provide not just escape but sometimes a glimpse of the divine." (This is a TIME magazine quote that I love.)

As ANW's co-producing artistic directors, do you and Geoff choose the shows ANW produces? Or does ANW have a selection committee?

Geoff and I ultimately choose the season. We do however get input from directors, our resident artists and, in the last year, Jonathan Munoz Proux (Director of Cultural Programming) is part of the selection team.

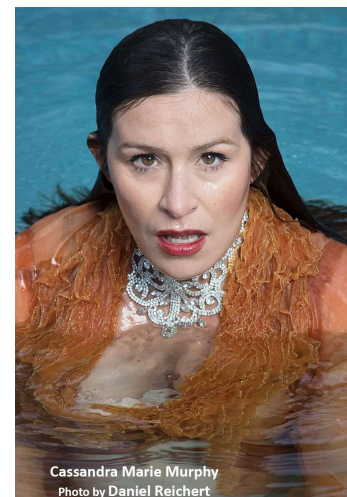
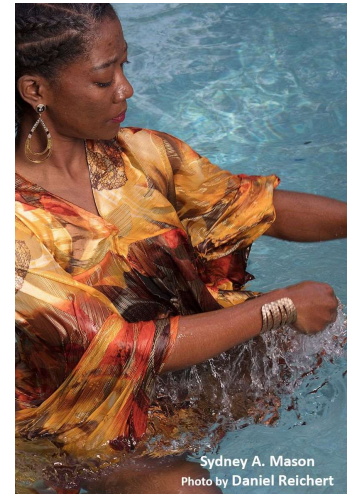
ANW's company members stay with ANW for long times. Do you sometimes choose productions to showcase spotlight certain company members? Do you ever have to audition non-company members to fill out integral roles?

We consider our resident artists when we choose a season and at times choose a play around an actor. We have a company of about 18 resident artists, so we always hold auditions and often cast non-resident artists in major roles. You might see a show where 90% of the cast are resident artists and another where 90% are non-resident artists. I would say that 50% of The Acting Company on any given season is made up of guest artists.

You and Geoff cofounded ANW in 1991. You two have been married since 1984. Were there any initial challenges in directing your husband in your first production as director/actor?

I can't say that we have ever had challenges in the Director/Actor relationship. It was something we fell into easily.

As a working couple, do you talk shop at home? Or do you delegate ANW matters to certain times only?



We talk shop at home ALL the time. When you are in the middle of a creative process you are living it 24/7, so it is hard not to talk about it plus it is very satisfying. Sometimes around administrative matters we will "table" conversations and return to them when we are in the office.

In our 2016 interview, I asked Geoff your secret to your successful marriage and working relationship. Geoff said having mutual respect and being "each other's go-to person for artistic and life questions." Can you name the one very best piece of advice Geoff gave you that you can frequently say, "Yes, thank God Geoff told me to do that!"

He is my trusted and my go-to person for artistic matters, so he has given me incredible advice over the years. One thing that comes to mind is his Opening Night advice to the artists. Opening nights can be very stressful for the artists, and he has this ritual where all the artists come together on stage, and we share space, and he will always says, "Don't try to be perfect - you won't succeed. Just be present." Great advice onstage and off.

What can ANW fans expect to see on the ANW in the near future?

We just announced our 2022-23 Season titled Daring To Love. It is a bold and vivid collection of plays with protagonists who dare to love. Our world/communities are in desperate need of healing. Each day we are all given the chance to heal or to wound, to hate or to love. We are looking forward to continuing to welcome our audiences to our return to in-person theatre.

What would Julia Rodriguez-Elliott like to do in the near future?

In the very near future, I can't wait to see how METAMORPHOSES comes to life. I am looking forward to getting away for the summer and the return to travel, and finally I can't wait to enter the 2022-23 season. ANW continues to experience tremendous growth and I look forward to playing a part in the continuing journey.

Thank you again, Julia! I look forward to seeing how swimmingly Metamorphoses goes along.

Thank you for your interest in ANW, Gil.

For tickets to the live performances of Metamorphoses through June 5, 2022; log onto www.anoisewithin.org

