In 1981 Enrique Pardo founded Pantheatre that he now directs together with Linda Wise and Liza Mayer. One of the foundation stones of the theater company is archetypal psychology, a path opened by Dr. Carl Jung and elaborated by Dr. James Hillman. Naturally, myth became an essential component in Pantheatre’s existence. The exploration of myth went far beyond performance, with the organization of colloquia, discussion groups, and forums of individuals from varied disciplines and professions. Actors, directors, psychologists, voice instructors, classicists, lecturers, writers, and others were invited to discuss and conceptualize creative links between myth and theater. How can the poetics of myth work on stage? How can those imaginal dimensions of myth be transported to theater, and how is an audience brought to that imagery by the theatrical experience?

James Hillman, Rafael Lopez-Pedraza, Charles Boer, Paul Kugler, Kristin Linklater, and many others participated in discussions organized all over Europe. In 1987 all this rich compendium of thought resulted in the first Myth and Theatre Festival, a week of symposia where theory was tested by practice on the floor and in workshops. This first festival observed the theme of Tragedy. Both this and the next festival in 1989—with discussions around The Alchemical Theatre—were hosted by The Roy Hart’s Centre Artistique in the Chateau de Malerargues in the south of France.

The biennial festival gained a formidable reputation in spite of its young age. It rapidly became an international forum where workshop participants included artists, professionals, lovers of theater as well as mythologists. The festival grew and in 1991 La Chartreuse, Centre National des Ecritures du Spectacle in Avignon offered it a new home with the theme Greed of Dionysos. Aphrodite, Magic, and The Enemy were featured as following festival themes. In 1999 the festival was ready to travel and New Orleans was the first city to host outside France with Hermes, Quick, Cool and Crooked as center point. In 2000 Waterford, Ireland, hosted discussions centered on Gossip. An incident involving British PM Tony Blair’s son gave the festival a press forum as never before (1). This year the festival will revisit New Orleans with Jealousy, from July 25-29 with preceding workshops starting on July 20. This will be in cooperation with the departments of Classical Studies and Drama and Speech of Loyola University and the department of Theater and Dance of Tulane University. In 2002 the festival will travel back to Europe where in Neerpelt, Flanders, Belgium, it will concentrate on Virgins.

The Myth and Theatre Festival has become, in the words of its artistic director, Enrique Pardo, “an international meeting for people from different countries and backgrounds, providing unique opportunities for reflection on mythic imagination, with special care on ‘the theater of ideas.’”

It does so in the use of mythological motifs in theater dramaturgy, following the models of tragedy and comedy. In these traditions the stories and characters of classical mythology are presented, rewritten and reinterpretated by the original founding figures—Aeschylus, Euripides, Sophocles, and Aristophanes—to contemporary variations. It does so too in the fact that a large section of contemporary performance aims at creating images which have mythical dimensions regardless of whether they include or not literal mythological references. This is what could be broadly called image theater, and includes most of physical and dance theater, and contemporary opera. Pantheatre’s own brand of choreographic theater certainly fits into this category, with the inclusion of voice and text interpretation. (2)

The festival is a blend of praxis in workshops, with lectures, performances, master classes, and discussions. One of the typical festival formats is a tribunal with two sides defending opposing opinions. An appointed judge presides, with all the festival participants as jury.

Jealousy will be explored in New Orleans this year, a fitting succession to Gossip. Jealousy, which as envy comprises one of the seven deadly sins, has been a common denominator in mythology. Jealousy undermines the best intentions of gods and men. More practically, imagine theater without jealousy-fueled intrigues (not to speak of jealousy among playwrights, directors, actors, etc.) Is jealousy a necessary companion to love and passion? Has it survived the New Age revolution? Is it a source of imagination? Or is it more portentously “a power that brushes aside the best laid plans of men and gods, and whose subterfuges coil their way through many of tragedy’s intrigues and comedy’s greatest and sometimes nastiest laughs!” (3)

This year’s festival will run with four 10-day workshops. One directed by Enrique Pardo and his choreographic theater under the title, “Triangles: Cultivating Insecurity.” “The point is risk—putting oneself artistically at risk in order to enhance the story, the image, the ensemble.” Mr. Pardo is a former member of the Roy Hart Theatre, one of the great 60’s and 70’s revolutionary theaters, especially as far as the voice was concerned. Mr. Pardo started from explorations in voice and movement, their association, but especially their disassociation. How to make images more poetically complex and ultimately how to introduce text into those images. Pantheatre is today one of the most radical and culturally rich experiments in what is labeled “physical theater” or “dance theater.”

Linda Wise is another former member of the Roy Hart Theatre. She continued to develop the Roy Hart voice techniques, using them her own way, combining them with Feldenkrais and insights from other teachers.
Linda tries to modify and to enlarge her teaching methods in this way. A voice teacher should be open to re-evaluation of methods and philosophy. For Linda the most important element in voice training is the individual, not the method. She is passionately concerned that the voice is an essential aspect of personality. Voice training is seen as working on the entire personality and personal development. During the festival Linda will direct a 10-day voice workshop titled “Emotion: how to let it fly?” Let the voice fly in all the depths and heights between what she terms “the thrilling brilliance of the Queen of the Night seeking revenge, and the murderous revenge of Othello.” She aspires to direct voices into caves and over sunny hills, into demonic and delicious excesses. The voice will be central to the release of emotions and thus undertake an expressive and artistic adventure.

Bruno Dizien will direct another 10-day workshop. He will embark on a very specific artistic journey, combining dance experiment with rock-climbing techniques, and setting up an event open to the public based on Guy de Maupassant’s Fou.: “Am I mad? Or only Jealous?” Joan Schirle will conduct a workshop with roots in a contemporary form of Commedia based on masks and movement to find comic prototypes.

Liza Mayer will direct a shorter workshop on voice. She has worked with voice pioneers Alfred Wolfsohn and Roy Hart. She has moved beyond pure methodology. She will bring together voice, breath and movement in her “Carmen For Beginners,” a back-to-basics approach. She has created a workshop specifically for those who lament, “I sing out of tune, I don’t dare to sing, as a child they told me to shut up,” with a view to instilling confidence by the simple route of a gentle warm-up, moving on to simple spoken or sung syllables, and to songs the participants choose for themselves. The objective will be a voice that is made to explode with the fireworks of Carmen or a voice that radiates the modesty of Cinderella.

Jealousy will host a number of thinkers, academics, writers, psychologists: Ginette Paris, Connie Rodriguez, Stephen Karcher, Patricia Berry, Cindy Sebrell, Jay Livernois, Cliff Bostock, and Nor Hall. David Miller and Sonu Shamasdani are projected to attend as well. All of them bring a common interest in myth and theater. They will contribute to the festival in lecturers, tribunal, and discussions with participants. Most of them will stay the run of the festival, where last-minute improvised events abound. All this gives the festival its unique raison d’etre. Sonu Shamasdani summarizes it tersely, but also very poetically as “a dance of ideas.”

In 2000 I was a participant in Waterford and, like Zeus did Methis, I was sucked in. I found the experience disconcerting and invigorating. It was impossible to be indifferent. I found the symposium gave me a different view on the approach to everything: voice teaching, acting, directing, writing, singing, or dancing. Euclid believed there is a parallelism in eternity. Perhaps the true value of The Myth and Theatre Festival is its presentation of multiple realities in theater that in turn engenders a point where they merge summer. The incident led to several gossip stories and a good deal of wild speculation on the part of the press. The main incident was Ken Follet, a millionaire backer of Tony Blair’s accusing him of running a government based on gossip.