**The Myth of Orpheus & Eurydice**

**following mainly the version told in Ovid‘s *Metamorphoses***

Orpheus, the son of God Apollon (in other versions of a mythical Thracian king) and Kalliope, the muse of poetry, is a famous poet and singer, who charms with the power of his art not only his human audience but also wild animals, mythical creatures as well as trees and rocks.

He falls in love with the nymph Eurydice, but after their wedding she is bitten by a snake and dies.

Orpheus, almost mad from grief, decides not to accept the death of his beloved wife, but to follow her to the realm of Hades, the underworld, where the shadows of the dead are dwelling.

With the beauty of his mournful singing he convinces the ferryman Charon to let him cross the river Acheron at the border of the underworld, while in some versions of the story he likewise charms the tripleheaded watchdog Cerberos and the furies of revenge and retaliation.

Persephone and Hades, the divine Queen and King of the realm of shadows, are moved by the passion of his sorrow and the emotional expression of his longing for his lost love.

They allow him to return with Eurydice to the world of the living, but on their way back he must not look at her.

While they are leaving the darkness of the underworld together, Orpheus cannot resist any longer and he turns to look at his wife. Immediatly she vanishes back to the realm of the shadows, dying a second time.

Orpheus retreats to the mountains of his homecountry, renouncing the love of women.

His songs and ballads, which he accompanies with his lyre, a string instrument he was given as a child by his father Apollon, lure the animals out of the wilderness. They gather peacefully around him, listening to his music.

But a group of female worshippers of the God Dionysos attack him in their frenzy and tear and hack him to pieces. Together with the lyre Orpheus‘ severed head is floating down the river, still murmuring sounds of lamentation until the singer’s head finally reaches the sea and in the end the island of Lesbos, where it turns into a powerful oracle, while the lyre is changed into a constellation of stars still to be seen in the nightly sky.

Some believe that Orpheus was transported to Mount Olympos, the home of the Gods, where he joined his divine father Apollon, but there are also some who say that his soul fled to the underworld to be reunited with his beloved Eurydice.

**The Story of Layla & Majnun**

**following the epic created by the Persian poet Nizami in 1188 after earlier Arab sources**

*(some episodes of the complex story are cut)*

The boy Qeis is sent by his father, the leader of a Bedouin tribe in Arabia, to a teacher for children from noble families. There he meets Layla, a beautiful and charming girl, whom her parents also wanted to learn to read and write. The two young people fall in love with each other, but they cannot keep it a secret: there love is noticed by the others, so Layla’s father takes her back home to the tribal grounds. The separation drives Qeis mad. He does not stay with his own people, but tries to stay near Layla’s dwelling, roaming the area and composing love poems of such beauty that they get known by everybody.

His father asks for Layla’s hand on behalf of his love-sick son, but Layla’s father rejects the proposal calling Qeis an indecent lunatic unfit for marriage, who has dishonoured Layla by making their love public in his songs. When Qeis condition worsens due to this rejection, his father travels with him to Mecca, hoping for healing there. But Qeis prays to God for even more and perfect love.

Returning unchanged the young man leaves his tribe and lives only in the wild mountains and desert areas, barely eating, creating passionate songs and poems of love, longing and desperation.

The people call him ‚Majnun‘, meaning ‚mad,crazy‘. But they love his songs and spread them, so that Majnun’s poetry reaches also Layla, who writes love poems and letters of her own, throwing these messages into the wind.

She has to hide her love and her suffering and has to give in when her father marries her to Ebn Salam, a young and noble Arab. But she refuses her husband the matrimonial rights, threatening that she would rather be killed than raped by him. Out of love Ebn Salam accepts her refusal.

In the meantime Majnun is visited by his father and later by his mother as well, both trying to persuade him to return home, to give up his hopeless love and take care of himself again. When he explains that his love is the very centre of his life, they realize that their pleading is in vain and take their farewell. Soon after both of them die; Majnun is mourning for them but cannot change his fate and infatuation.

Through a mysterious old man, who already has secretly transported letters to and fro between the two lovers, Layla invites Majnun to meet her at night in a garden. Seeing each other throws both of them into a highly emotional state, but they don’t touch, only exchanging words of love. Majnun, after having recited his passionate poetry to Layla, suddenly flees and returns to the wilderness, where animals have started to gather around him, living peacefully together, sharing his food and listening to his poems.

Ebn Salam dies, probably exhausted by his unreturned feelings for Layla,who can show her tears now, because the people think that she weeps for her husband while she is crying over her separation from Majnun. But soon after Layla falls ill as well, on her deathbed revealing to her mother her everlasting love for Majnun.

When Majnun hears of her death, he rushes to her grave, accompanied by his animals. The people flee the beasts, so he has the site to himself, his grief and lamentations. Growing weaker day by day he finally dies, spread across his beloved Layla’s tomb. The animals watch over him until he has turned into a skeleton. Only then they retreat to the wilderness, thus giving way to the people who stand in wonder, mourning for Layla and Majnun, who are buried in the same grave, finally united in death.