

## Theatrical baptism: Circle play set in pool

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By Joe VanHoose

The inaugural season for the new Circle Ensemble Theatre has been filled with firsts and risks that have paid off. Riding that momentum, the theater company decided to save its biggest risk for last.

This weekend, much of the set for “Metamorphoses,” the ensemble’s final show of the season, will be water. Water is the central metaphor in the play, but it also is quite literal. Many characters will end up acting out their roles in the Ashford Manor swimming pool.

“When ‘Metamorphoses’ opened on Broadway, it had a pool built into the stage,” said Kathleen Hogan, who plays Alcyone, one of the lead roles. “Just to be clear, we’re not doing synchronized swimming, not at all.

“In a nutshell, this is all about transformation through the medium of water.”

Actors are in the water a lot, she said. At one point, there’s a storm. There’s also a boat. There are so many water-based tricks, the crew rehearsed for an extra week.

But all those challenges have Hogan excited. She recently finished working on Robert Redford’s new film, “The Conspirator,” which she called a dream experience. But she’s more pumped up about this drama.

“I am more excited about this show than I have been about being in anything in 10 years — it is that amazing,” she said. “The cast is amazing, Mirla (Criste) is a wonderful director.

Ashford Manor could not be a better venue for this show. The support has been great.”

Under Criste’s direction, “Metamorphoses” draws from Greek myths and archetypes that anyone in an audience can relate to, Hogan said.

The stories are based on Ovid’s transformation myths, but they are set to the modern language.

“This show is hilarious, and it’s also very, very poignant,” Hogan said. “There are parts, even after the rehearsals, that I can’t stop crying.”

“It’s about how people can change us and how we change,” added Joelle Re’ Arp-Dunham, the ensemble’s artistic director. “And it’s about love and how we attract other people. Every single piece has change in it.

“Water works really well as that change medium.”

The water also creates an opportunity for some incredible acting, as the group has come up with creative ways on how to move through the water. There have been a lot of challenges, but those have just led to more creativity.

That’s really the story of the Circle Ensemble Theatre, which performs under the Athens Area Art Council’s umbrella. Everything has worked out better than the founders — Arp-Dunham, Hogan and Lisa Mende — could have predicted.

“So many things have gone the way we wanted it to,” Arp-Dunham said. “Little things have been happening that have affirmed that we’re doing the right things. We keep taking chances and doing things out of the box, and we keep getting rewarded.

“We really trust each other, and we’ve all grown as actors. We can’t wait to continue next season.”