

The Bacchae – An Electronic Opera  
By Colin Thomas  
*The Georgia Straight*  
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Created by Tracey Draper, Ilena Lee Cramer, Rachel Flood, Glenn Garinther, Troy Jackson, Shane L. Koyczan, Maggie Blue O'Hara, George Pan, Christine Stoddard, and Samantha Tucker. A Screaming Weenie Productions presentation. A PuSh International Performing Arts Festival satellite.

At 252 East 1st Avenue until Saturday, January 29

I had a good time, but a bigger crowd--more sweating, undulating bodies--probably would have made for a better one.

My guess is that *The Bacchae--An Electronic Opera* works best as a kind of background entertainment, a stimulating element in an evening of chaotic party pleasures. In that context, it would also be in sync with its subject matter: Dionysus was the god of wine who inspired his followers, the Bacchae, to bloody orgies, after all. But there weren't enough of us to flat-out party the night that I was there, and the show isn't sufficiently strong to do all of the work on its own.

The idea here is to create a kind of rave. Screaming Weenie Productions is staging this story of Dionysus in a warehouse-cum-disco, and Tracey Draper's hiply insistent house music drives the evening.

The basic elements are few: music, singing, and rap. Six performers stand isolated on platforms, microphones in hand. There is absolutely no action other than dancing, interactions between characters are limited to a few glances, and, despite strengths, this adaptation of Euripides' narrative sometimes feels like a collection of footnotes.

Dionysus and the Bacchae arrive in Thebes. Imprisoned by King Pentheus, they destroy the walls of their jail and revel in the hills. Pentheus's mother, Agave, who once doubted the divinity of Dionysus and his father, Zeus, joins them. Blinded by the power of her emotional release, Agave kills Pentheus, who has crept into the forest to spy on the partiers; she believes her son is a wild beast.

There's plenty of interesting thematic content here: the oppressiveness of the patriarchy, the lure of rebellious excess, the necessity for balance. I wish the collective that created this *Bacchae* had explored these themes more viscerally and less deliberately, though. Yes, related stories about Semele, Artemis, Europa, and the gang illustrate and underline the ideas in question, especially the systemic brutalization of the feminine, but I'd rather experience one core story in a sensual, emotional way than be told several in a distancing manner.

Still, there's a lot to like here. The vocal arrangements aren't very complex, but Draper's music had my old bones bouncing and the performers all have their charms. Deanna Teeple, who plays Agave, has a stunning, blow-out-the-walls R & B voice. Troy Jackson's Dionysus moves like he was born dancing, and spoken-word artist Rachel Flood is just plain cool. Nathan Whitford's lighting and visual designs are very

handsome. And many of the concepts in the text, including the use of the mantra "Breathe in. Breathe out" in a number about balance, work because their imagery is concrete and apt.

I had a pleasant time taking in *The Bacchae*, but it wasn't what I'd call bacchanalian; I was too busy keeping track of subplots and relationships to want to take my shirt off and grab somebody.