

Bacchae Doesn't Miss a Beat
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The Ubysey
January 25, 2005

My experience with Euripides' classic tragedy, "Bacchae", all began back in my first year at UBC, when I was stuck in a rut in the Arts One program finding myself feeling more idiotic with each passing lecture. Then one week the program threw "Bacchae" in front of my lecture group, a Greek tragedy with a picture of Elvis Presley on the front. I opened the play and within about an hour I read it from front to back and was immediately engaged with classical tragedy. It told the story of Dionysus, the ancient Greek god of wine, the vine, intoxication, ecstasy and, as the PuSh festival satellite production of "The Bacchae—An Electronic Opera" says, "the beat."

Vancouver's Screaming Weenie Productions adds a modern twist to the play imagining the ancient city of Thebes as a modern city ruled over by a tyrant conservative prince, suddenly threatened with the onslaught of the god himself, who brings a new culture to a city that never saw anything like him before. This is exactly how I imagined the production when I first read the play and, in most respects, Screaming Weenie pulls it off.

The stage itself is the dance floor of a nightclub setting, with seven towers (appropriate, given that the city of Thebes was famous for its seven gates) —one for local DJ/composer Tracey Draper, and six more to facilitate the actors, who do little more than stand on a stage and individually sing and use spoken word-dialogue, with the accompaniment of an electronic score by Draper, to relate the myth of Dionysus and the assault of his influence upon Thebes.

The production itself is opened by the spoken word of Tiresias (played by slam poet Rachel Flood), whose character is expanded here to serve as the chorus. Dionysus is portrayed with an ambiguous sexuality by Troy Jackson, who grabs the attention of his audience with every note he sings. He stands in sharp contrast with RC Weslowski's portrayal of Pentheus, the conservative Theban prince who does everything he can to stop the cult of Dionysus from infecting the people of his city. However, his situation soon becomes more complicated when he discovers that his own mother, Agave (Deanna Teeple), has joined the Dionysian rituals, which routinely involve drinking, dancing, and becoming subliminally susceptible to the music the god has brought to Thebes. As the production progresses, Pentheus loses control over the city he has fought so hard to suppress, efforts that eventually bring him to his ruin at the hands of the wine god.

"The Bacchae—An Electronic Opera" is an innovative production, updating the play to a modern setting and having the audience itself represent the "Bacchants," members of the god's cult, who are expected to sit entranced at the story being told. One of the biggest surprises about the production is its character focus—the characters one least expects to stand out above the rest are the most prominent in this production.

Deanna Teeple is the star of the show, belting out her words as Agave in song. She has a powerful, beautiful R&B voice that stands out above the rest, even above Jackson's strong vocalisation. The vocals are easily the show's strongest element, although they don't quite work when the actors are supposed to harmonize over

Draper's score. On top of that, although the actors do what they can, the story might be lost on anyone who does not know the play already or cannot understand a story told through slam poetry and song.

This production succeeds at relating Euripides' play in an appropriate setting and although it might make you bob your head with Draper's beats, it won't make you get up and dance.