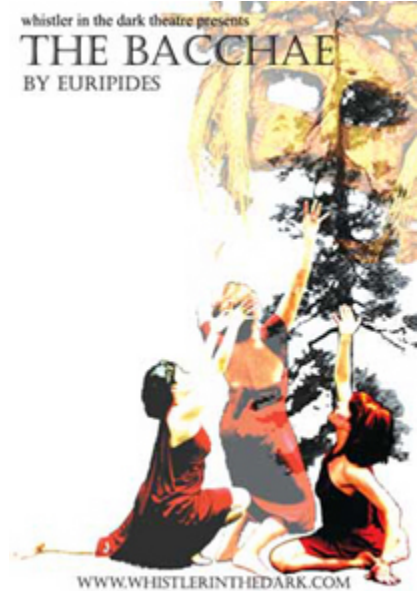


The Bacchae

by Kilian Melloy
EDGE Staff Reporter
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The best tragedies tend to be written by the ancient Greeks, and the best of the Greek tragedies tend to involve family issues--just look at what happened to Oedipus for his parental transgressions, or how the Furies lit out after Orestes after he murdered his mother.

In Euripides' play *The Bacchae*, playing through May 17 at the Boston Center for the Arts, the family tree of King Pentheus (Phil Crumrine), ruler of Thebes, happens to include a god, Dionysos. Pentheus denies the godhood of Dionysos and scorns the worship offered him by his grandfather, Cadmus (Curt Klump) and the wise elder Tiresius.

When Dionysos sends the women of the city into frenzies, Pentheus responds with skepticism and anger at what he sees as a foreign attack on his people. Dismissing "this upstart god, Dionysos," Pentheus sets out to spy on the women's revelry, with tragic results.

"*The Bacchae*" is produced by [Whistler in the Dark](http://www.whistlerinthedark.com), a troupe that doesn't need fancy props, elaborate staging, or even a theater space in which to mount a spellbinding performance (the play is performed in a rehearsal hall).

Wooden staffs and red shawls are all that's required here, along with a Greek mask, warlike and otherworldly, which is passed among the actors, who take turns channeling the god--not simply the god of wine, as the fluent translation by poet and novelist Francis Blessington takes pains to make plain, but also a god of savage, even unforgiving passions.

Blessington's rendering speaks to our time (as indeed great work of any age will do); Pentheus, decrying the "promiscuous rites" of the Dionysian worshippers, and holding forth about "a new disease" that "infects" the city's people, sounds like any blowhard politician quoted in today's newspapers.

Cadmus and Tiresius, for their part, speak of dark and divine matters, things that should give mere mortals pause: "This god is poured out to gods" is the argument offered in proof of Dionysos' true otherworldly nature. As for those orgies in the forest, "the pure will not corrupt herself"--a paradox that Pentheus simply does not grasp, but which the performers--including Melissa Barker, Jennifer O'Connor, and Elizabeth Rimar, under Meg Taintor's direction--take literally as an article of faith.

"The Bacchae" plays through May 17 in Studio A at the Boston Center for the Arts, located at 539 Tremont Street, in Boston's South End. Tickets cost \$25 (general admission) and can be obtained at the BCA box office, online at bostontheaterscene.com, or via phone at 617-933-8600. Student discounts are available.

Performance schedule: Wednesday and Thursday evenings at 7:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday evenings at 8:00 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3:00 p.m.

Running time is 90 minutes, with no intermission. Post-performance discussions are offered after each show. More information and tickets available at www.whistlerinthedark.com

Kilian Melloy reviews media, conducts interviews, and writes commentary for EDGEBoston, where he also serves as Assistant Arts Editor.