

‘The Bacchae’ impelled by intimacy, intensity

By Donn Saylor
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It is a brave undertaking. Director Meg Taintor has staged the Euripides tragedy *The Bacchae* with no frills, no pyrotechnics, no fanfare. Devoting her directorial scope to the intense intimacy of the original play (here in a lovely translation by Francis Blessington), Taintor helms a cast of five talented young actors on a nearly bare stage and inspires them to make Euripides’s story their own. And, by extension, ours as well.

When we walk into the BCA’s Rehearsal Hall A (where the Whistler in the Dark production is running through May 16), the actors are warming up in front of us on the small performance area. This is a brilliant touch. Watching these players loosen up and tap into their creativity, we first begin to sense we are about to witness something truly unique. From their warm-up exercises, the actors burst into the production, lending the whole thing a feel of naturalness and ease. This is a far from easy accomplishment when you’re dealing with Greek tragedy.

The Bacchae tells the story of the denizens of Thebes, who turn away from the god Dionysos and are promptly punished by falling into blazing hysteria. Meanwhile, the youthful king Pentheus battles with Dionysos to reclaim the city, and a misunderstanding of monolithic proportions leads the spirited young king to a most unlikely fate.

With just one lone prop (a Dionysion mask) and a few small sashes of fabric, the ensemble makes this story come startlingly alive. The intensity and urgency created builds gradually to a fever pitch, until they – and we – discover the cruel twist of fate that awaits Pentheus. Cast members [Melissa Barker](#), [Phil Crumrine](#), Curt Klump, Jennifer O’Connor, and Elizabeth Rimar each play multiple roles, and in the whirlwind of the script (the production rings in just under 90 minutes), it is imperative to hang on and pay attention. From the moment we wander into the performance space and see these actors stretching and preparing, they exude an almost hypnotic pull...a pull that builds to a humdinger *snap* of an ending that sends us reeling back to the land of the mortals.

For more info: Visit the Whistler in the Dark website

<http://www.examiner.com/x-1471-Boston-Theater-Examiner~y2009m5d4-The-Bacchae-impelled-by-intimacy-intensity>

