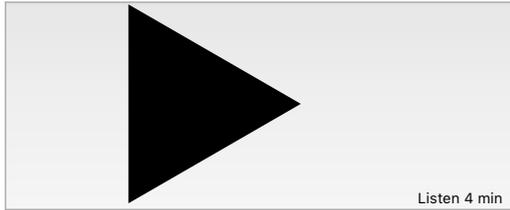
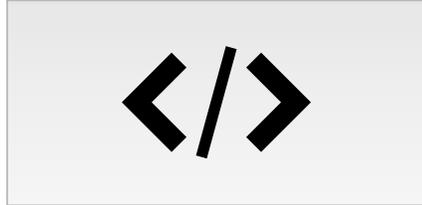
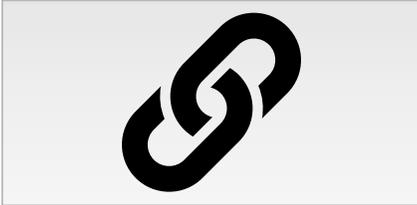
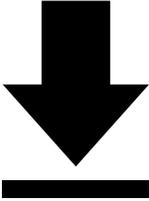




Podcast



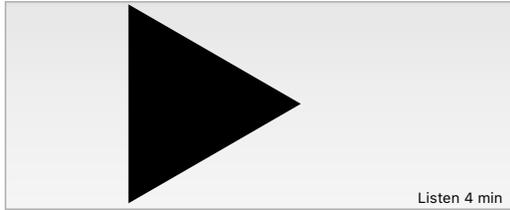
Listen 4 min



[Opening the Curtain](#)

The present soul of a classic

Hosted by [Anthony Byrnes](#) Sep. 10, 2018 [Hollywood](#)



Listen 4 min

MORE



The question of the classical soul is always looming in the air for the Getty Villa's annual outdoor drama.

Calling upon those classical Greek and Roman plays, one always wonders how academic, how true to form (and perhaps devoid of soul) will the work be? That question is particularly poignant when Anne Bogart and SITI Company are tackling the Greeks, as they are for the third time this year, with Euripides "Bacchae."

SITI Company, like the Greeks themselves, have an overabundance of form and technique. At their worst, SITI obscures their work behind this technique often leaving an audience feeling strangely outside of it: not so much unnecessary but sort of like a person staring at a great ancient statue that has such solidity it need not rely on an audience.

So sitting outdoors in the spectacular fall air in the Getty's Malibu home, I couldn't help but wonder what kind of night would I have? One lulled by technique or moved by a present soul.

Then the opening sound cue of Screaming Jay Hawkins belting "I put a spell on you" echoed from the inner chambers of the Villa.

It was joyously clear - this was *not* going to a production that hid behind its form.

Seconds later, Ellen Lauren strutted and pranced on stage as the physical embodiment of the god Dionysus. In tight leather pants with a red leopard print top, she was a viscous androgynous cross between Patti Smith and Mick Jagger working a runway. It's irreverent, it's fun, and it's absolutely perfect for the god of wine and drama.

What unfolds over the next hour and a half is beautifully personal "Bacchae" that's punctuated by a series of poignant revealing warnings delivered directly to the audience. They simultaneously offer the soul of this classic play and the soul of these talented performers. SITI has found with Euripides text a way in that feels immediate while also honoring the deeper form. It can be a bit choppy and lacking in poetry but it's immediate and present.

Being the Greeks and being a tragedy, it's not all fun and games. What starts out cheery ends, as it should, in sorrow.

What's so powerful about SITI and the Getty's approach to the Greeks is we get to simultaneously experience them and recognize their distance. It's not an easy journey into an ancient code of honor but it's a deeply worthy one.

You'll also be struck by the simple elegance of the production. SITI Company makes performing in this space look easy. They, and the Getty, are hiding a lot of hard work and the lessons of past years. The Getty has learned how and who to produce in their difficult outdoor amphitheatre. Their dogged commitment to a simple idea, bring a classical play to life in front of an audience every fall, is inspiring not only for its simplicity but for its progression. Unlike many LA companies, they are learning from their mistakes and building a profound body of work - one play at a time.

If you've never been to the Getty Villa's outdoor theatre - it's a magical night outdoors in a spectacular setting. And this year's production, shouldn't be missed: it's not often a classical soul is brought to life.

"The Bacchae" plays at the Getty Villa in Malibu through September 29th.

"Bacchae" at the Getty Villa, left to right: Eric Berryman (Pentheus) and Ellen Lauren (Dionysus). Photo credit: Craig Schwartz.

Credits

Host:

[Anthony Byrnes](#)

More from Opening the Curtain



[The paid intimacy of immersive theater Opening the Curtain Monday](#)



[Manifest masculinity Opening the Curtain Jul. 25, 2019](#)



[Brecht without the politics Opening the Curtain Jul. 15,](#)