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by **Don Grigware** September 5 <http://www.broadwayworld.com/los-angeles/article/BWW-Reviews-Stunning-SITI-Company-Presents-Aeschylus-PERSIANS-20140905#>

*Persians*/by *Aeschylus*/directed by [Anne Bogart](#)/created and performed by SITI Company/translated by Aaron Poochigian/Getty Villa - the Barbara and Lawrence Fleischman Theater/Thursdays-Saturdays through September 27



Since high school I have found Greek tragedy a repetitious, tedious bore - lots of emoting with zero action and no laughs. As I watched the magnificent SITI Company from New York perform Aeschylus' very first tragedy *Persians* at the Getty Villa in Malibu, things took a different turn, I somehow became fascinated ... primarily by [Anne Bogart](#)'s fluid staging and the company of 9 impeccably disciplined and graceful actors.

It is no easy task to bring a work first presented in 472 BC to the contemporary stage, keeping it alive, fresh and interesting to watch. Despite Aaron Poochigian's fine translation, there is that repetitious patter by the Persians bemoaning losing the war to the Greeks and the constant wailing over that loss. But Bogart manages to move her actors around the big open outdoor stage with such ethereal grace, that is impossible not to be riveted to their unpredictable movements bordering on ballet...and to the strange rhythms of their speech patterns and bizarre musical phrasing in sung passages. It's a mixture of fantasy and reality. Watching them walk, run, sit and roll around the floor and almost float across the stage in a dreamlike state made me feel as if I were with Puck in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It's when the movement stops and those loud plaintive moans and groans start up that we go from deep sleep-like mode to the painful strains of existence.



Stagecraft is always fun and exciting. When the Queen ([Ellen Lauren](#)) walks across the stage with a very long train suspended from her headgear, on it, near the end, is the huge bust of the King or one of the Gods - which she is dragging behind her. I gasped at her posture and elegant stride, as if nothing were weighing her down. Or when Lauren as the Queen drapes the train around the stage and then picks it up a little at a time, so as not to impede anyone's movements! It is so easy to stumble over a prop, but no tripping here, thank goodness! Subtle, but breathtaking execution! That piece of gold cloth, by the way, serves many purposes, besides being a part of the costume, it seems; for example, it forms a circle to keep the Queen exclusively within and others out, etc And then there's the messenger ([Will Bond](#)) who stands with an oar at his back with his left arm up against it for what seems at least a half hour while he relates the story of Xerxes and his defeat by the Greeks - without flinching or moving a muscle. What poise! What skill!

The acting ensemble are outstanding, one and all. Besides the stunning Lauren and sturdy Bond, [Stephen Duff Webber](#) steps out of the chorus to play the King's ghost and Gian-Murray Gianino to assume the role of Xerxes. The others include: Akiko Alzawa, [J. Ed Araiza](#), [Eric Berryman](#), Leon Ingulsrud, and Emily Spalding. Bravo!



Bravo also to costume designer Nephelie Andonyadis, to [Brian H. Scott](#) for hisset with billowy see-through curtains adorning the entrance and to Darren L. West for his exquisite sound design.

Significantly curious about this play is that, although written by a Greek, no Greek characters are present or even alluded to by name. It is the Greek conception of the Persians and how they felt, defeated, at the hands of the Greeks.

Even though I push many classical pieces to the back of my schedule, I must admit, I am happy to have seen *Persians* for its brilliant execution by director [Anne Bogart](#) and the incomparable SITI company. See it, through September 27 only at the lovely Getty Villa, whose museum facade serves as the stunning backdrop for the play.

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