

Yana Zarifi (*Artistic Director*) Yana's academic background is in the Classics and the Social Sciences. She is an honorary Research Fellow of the Royal Holloway University of London. She has directed classical Greek plays - including most of Aristophanes' - in London, Paris and in the US. The Thiasos Theatre Company arose from her dedication to the re-performance of Greek drama through the use of Eastern theatrical traditions and her desire to reinstate the dancing and singing chorus to the central place it once occupied in Greek theatre. Her next project will be to produce Euripides' *Helen*, which she hopes to perform in Egypt, where she was raised.

THE MUSIC

The music for *The Bacchae* has several functions: to be a vehicle for the words of the choruses, to create dance rhythms, to highlight key points in the unfolding of the drama and to demonstrate that the Dionysiac thiasos thinks and acts as one. The musical vocabulary tends towards monody rather than counterpoint, the accompaniments provided by percussion rather than harmony instruments. A strong feature of this production is the work of the multitalented band of maenads who have fearlessly taken on the many demands on their abilities in singing, dancing and playing percussion.

-- John White

THE DANCE

Infused with the spirit of Dionysos, everything in nature moves. Dance is at the heart of Dionysiac worship and uncovers aspects of the *Bacchae* inexpressible in words alone. I have drawn on a wide repertoire of classical and modern dance, using narrative, mimetic and abstract movements inspired by Middle-Eastern, classical Greek and African cultures. I have sacrificed slavish adherence to a style in order to create dances relevant to the text integrating music, song, emotion and narrative. The extent to which this has been achieved is due to the embodiment of the text and the music by our performers.

-- Glen Snowden

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

We have tried to remain faithful to the human experience from which this ancient and culturally influential play emerged rather than to a written text. This has led us to adherence to the letter of the text as well as to deviations.

The production occasionally sacrifices easy accessibility in order to allude to its origins. For instance, ancient Greek is spoken when Dionysos, as god, creates thunder, fire and an earthquake to destroy Pentheus' palace. The choreographic interpretation of the earthquake is based on the alternations of short and long syllables in the Greek rather on collapsing scenery or pre-recorded sound effects. In a similar spirit, the translation preserves the Greek poetic rhythms that are not natural to the English tongue.

By contrast, the production occasionally also deliberately distorts Euripides' text in order to emphasize two interrelated aspects of Greek theatre: its religious context and the centrality of the chorus. Theatre and religion are no longer associated as they once were in antiquity. In order to evoke this interconnection we have drawn on two kinds of human experience that are relatively familiar to us today and which feature prominently in the *Bacchae*: trance, and elements later found in the Christian tradition.

For example, Dionysos-as-mortal, in order to impel Pentheus to wear female dress, calls on Dionysos-as-god to first put Pentheus 'outside his mind' and 'into him a light-headed frenzy'. Agave is evidently in trance when she tears up Pentheus and is led out of her entranced state by her father Kadmos. The behaviour of the Theban maenads on the mountain is often referred to as frenzied and possessed, and the choral songs abound with evocations calling to the god to appear. Thus, we have deliberately broken up the original entry song so as to create the impression that it is the chorus who evoke Dionysos and not the other way around. Equally, we have made the chorus integral to the process of creating the trance (through the use of their voices, movements and singing bowls), which reduces a hostile Pentheus to a compliant victim and is integral to bringing Agave back to her senses.

As for the Christian tradition, much of Agave's lament over the body of Pentheus was lost from the manuscript of the play, and preserved only in a Byzantine narrative - adapted to tell of the crucifixion - called the *Christus Patiens*. Our setting of this is inspired by an even later phase of the Greek traditional lament, its performance by the women of Pontos and of a village called Erythrae in Asia Minor. Like Jesus, Pentheus is wept over and reconfigured by his mother. This reconfiguration hints at resurrection, but the hint expresses the pathos of tragedy, for - in contrast to Jesus - Pentheus remains fragmented and dead. In this production, he is 'crucified' on a pentagonal structure symbolising a cross.

However, ancient and modern polytheistic religions differ from Christianity in the relationship between dance and thought. To Christianity dance is marginal, whereas this production attempts to make credible to a modern audience the unfamiliar sight of women dancing out sophisticated thought, to reunite dance with philosophy. We hope to indicate that the energetic performance of choral dance and song in a theatre space reproduces some of the human processes which once impelled women to become maenads in the cult of Dionysos. For instance, the extensive activities of the omnipresent chorus could restore to the Bacchae something of its ritually created communality and communal blessed illusion.

Finally, the masks at the back of the chorus' heads express their close association with animality and fertility, and the openings of the eyes and mouth are designed to be reminiscent of the Greek tragic mask and the roots of tragedy in ritual surrounding animal sacrifice.

Yana Zarifi

TRANSLATING THE DIONYSIAC

Translations of Greek drama often try to make the text more accessible by reducing the unfamiliar to the familiar. In my view this is to eliminate the most important reason for producing Greek drama. If we go to the theatre merely to experience what we are already familiar with, that is sad. I have therefore tried in my translation to reproduce the meaning of the Greek as accurately possible (within the limits of actable English). In the same spirit of faithfulness to the original I have tried to reproduce, as far as seemed possible, the compelling rhythms of the Greek, particularly of the songs sung by the chorus. The fact is that Greek tragedy is on the one hand unfamiliar, capable of expanding our consciousness with the sophisticated elaboration of a world-view quite unlike anything familiar to a modern audience, but on the other hand not so remote (as is e.g. some ancient Babylonian literature) as to be meaningless for us. However ancient, it belongs to our cultural tradition.

What is this expansion of consciousness? Much of it has to do with the nature and cult of the god Dionysos. The Dionysiac is - thanks partly to its influential formulation by Nietzsche - a category still used by philosophers, and so may be our oldest living symbol. Dionysos is a god with the power to confuse the fundamental oppositions by which the Greeks construct their world. Central to the *Bacchae*, for instance, is a series of such confusions. One such fundamental opposition is between human and god, which Dionysos confuses by appearing in the play as a human. Another is between human and animal, which is confused in Dionysos appearing to Pentheus as a bull and in being invoked by the chorus to appear as a bull, as well as in Pentheus being torn apart as if he were an animal. A third unity of basic opposites is of male and female: Dionysos is effeminate, Pentheus dresses as a maenad, and the maenads on the mountainside act like males. And then there is opposition between Greek and barbarian: Dionysos is in a sense a barbarian god, who comes from Asia, and yet he was born at Thebes. Finally, it seems that in the maenadic group (in the theatre and on the mountainside) there occurs a dissolution of the boundary between individuals. Blessedness - sing the chorus early in the drama - includes 'joining your soul to the group', whereas, at the opposite extreme, the boundaries enclosing the consciousness of the tyrant Pentheus remain rigidly impermeable: even when face to face with the power of the god, he remains stubbornly isolated.

What is the point of this dissolution of oppositions? Inasmuch as they are the oppositions by which the Greeks construct the foundations of their world, oppositions beyond which therefore they generally cannot think, their dissolution produces a consciousness that is unfamiliar, ecstatic, potentially dangerous, and potentially creative. To become a maenad in the cult of Dionysos - like the chorus, the maenads on the mountainside, and even eventually Pentheus himself - is to lose your everyday mind and to see things in a new and fundamentally different way. The tragic poet was himself a devotee of Dionysos.

One way in which the Greeks were able to channel and control this process was in the ritual of mystery cult. Ancient mystery cult is difficult for us to reconstruct, partly because it was meant to be kept secret, and partly because in our world it has no (or almost no) place. Roughly speaking, Dionysiac mystery cult involved the passage of the initiate through a process of ignorant suffering and anxiety (envisaged as a rehearsal of death) into the blissful eternal life of the Dionysiac group. I have no doubt that the *Bacchae* dramatises a myth that corresponds to (or explains) such a ritual. This is the only explanation of various otherwise inexplicable passages of the play, for example the narration of the odd behaviour of Pentheus as he tries in vain to imprison Dionysos within the house (this corresponds closely to one of the few descriptions we have of the death-like sufferings of the initiate). Of course the blissful outcome of the initiation has to be kept secret from the uninitiated, and so cannot be revealed in myth or drama, with the result that Pentheus undergoes an irreversible death. But the idyllic state of the maenads on the mountainside would probably be understood by the initiates in the audience as a picture of the next world. The most fundamental of all the boundaries dissolved by Dionysos was between the opposites of life and death.

-- Richard Seaford

Gemma Robinson (Maenad): Gemma trained at ARTTS International. Her theatre credits include Norma Hubble in *Plaza Suite*, Gertrude in *Hamlet*, Sheila/Audrey in *Mixed Doubles*, Narrator in *Passion*, Princess Bella in *Sleeping Beauty*, Leah in *Day of Atonement*, Sadie in *Dover Soul*, Insect Ensemble in *The Insect Play What I Wrote*, Claire Zachanassian in *The Visit*, Mrs Pinchwife in *The Country Wife*, Low-Dive Jenny in *The Threepenny Opera* and Marlene in *Top Girls*. Film credits include *Meet the Woman of my Dreams* and *Minutes of Life*, and she is currently in rehearsals for *Me2*, an existential thriller. Gemma has also recently completed a commercial for Teaching in Medway.

Richard Seaford (Translator): Richard is Professor of Greek Literature at the University of Exeter. He is an acknowledged authority on the *Bacchae* and on Dionysiac religion, as well as author of numerous publications on Greek literature and religion from Homer to the New Testament. His latest book, entitled *Money and the Early Greek Mind*, is due to appear in February 2004 and he is currently writing a book on Dionysos.

Glen Snowden (Choreographer): Glen trained at the Royal Ballet School and toured with ballet companies in Italy, Germany and Canada, dancing roles from the major classical and modern repertoire, also dancing with the Sanlucar Flamenco Company in Seville. He now works at the Drama Centre London and most recently has worked with EP Opera Company as choreographer for *Carmen*, *Bastien and Bastienne* and *L'Isola disabitata*; also *The Saint of Bleeker Street* at the Peacock Theatre for Trinity School of Music.

Georgina Sowerby (Agave): Georgina trained at Drama Centre London. Theatre includes *The Children's Hour* (National Theatre), *Don Juan comes from the war* (National Studio), Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Regents Park), Sonja in Howard Barker's *Uncle Vanya* (International Tour), Miss Ayola in *Dona Rosita the Spinster* (Almeida), two plays for the International Writer's Season (Royal Court), Nastassja in *Cosmonaut...* (Tron Theatre, Glasgow), *Passing Places* (Greenwich/Derby Playhouse) Beatrix Potter in *Peter Rabbit* (Unicorn). Television includes *Life Support*, *Poirot*, *Monarch of the Glen*, *The Planman*. Georgina teaches and directs at the City Lit, Method Studio and Drama Centre London. She is also a founder member of Moving Arts.

John White: (Composer): John White was born in Berlin and studied at the Royal College of Music in London. As a piano recitalist he has performed in the USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa and Europe. He has composed 3 operas, 25 symphonies, 140 piano sonatas and countless works for vocal and chamber ensemble. Although a leading figure on the experimental music scene, John has a long-established relationship with the theatre, has been musical director for many musicals in London's West End, and composer for many productions for the Royal National Theatre, the RSC and various regional theatres. He is currently musical director of *Tales From The Vienna Woods* at the Royal National Theatre.

Danielle Urbas (Maenad): Danielle graduated from the Drama Centre, London in July 2002. Her theatre credits include Alma Mahler in *Mahler & Rachmaninov*, Varya in *The Cherry Orchard*, Queen Caroline in *The Art of Success*, Mina in *Vager in the Flesh* and Madam Du Da at the 2003 Edinburgh Festival.

Brenda R Kaye (Administrative Manager): Having trained as a Stage Manager at RADA, she worked in the West End and regional repertory theatre and then spent many years as a drama and theatre manager in South Africa, also teaching Stage Management, Arts Administration and Theatre History. Since returning to London, she has held arts and theatre administration posts with the Thorndike Theatre, Leatherhead, the Drama Centre London, the Roundhouse, London, A&B and the Islington International Festival.

Martin Lawton (Kadmos): Martin trained at the Central School, began working in 1957 in weekly rep and toured the U.S. with the Old Vic. He spent 12 years teaching and bringing up two sons. From 1977, he stage managed at Vienna's English Theatre for a decade, during which time he often broadcast for the schools service of Austrian radio (ORF). In 1991 he played the ghost of Agamemnon in Akemi Horie's production of *Libation (Elektra)* at the Lillian Baylis Theatre. He can be seen as the "hearse driver" in the Rowan Atkinson film *Johnny English*, and appeared as a judge for BBC TV in *Silent Witness*. He is married to Valda Aviks, who is currently playing three horrific characters in *Jerry Springer: The Opera*.

Olivia Lipscombe (Maenad): Olivia qualified with BA (Acting) Hons from Italia Conti. Theatre credits include Mum/Sphinx and Waitress in Stephen Berkoff's *Greek* (Riverside Studios), Dorothea in *Don Q*, Story Teller in *Children of Eden* (Landor Theatre), Angela in new musical comedy *Copus* (Edinburgh Festival). Olivia has played leads in *Annie Get Your Gun*, *The King & I* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and opposite Gareth Hunt in *Peter Pan* (Stag Theatre). She has sung for the TUC Conference in Brighton and the Prince's Palace in Monte Carlo. TV includes a cameo role in *As If* (Channel 4) and *Interview with Tony Robinson* (BBC2). She recently devised a children's show, *Speilweiser*, (Stratford Circus and Glastonbury Festival).

Lawrence McGrandles Jnr (Cowherd): This is Lawrence's third production with Thiasos, his first being *Wealth* which was performed in England and America as well as featuring on BBC's *The Road To Riches*. Lawrence's theatre credits have included; *Card Index* (BAC, as part of Time Out's Critics' Choice season), *Treasure Island* (New Palace Theatre), *Comic Potential* (The Lyric), *Merchant Of Venice* (New Palace Theatre), *Amadeus* (The Old Vic), *Canterbury Tales* (Riverside Studios), *Il Turco In Italia* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne Opera House). Lawrence's television credits have included *Poirot: Evil Under The Sun*, *Road To Riches*, *Where It's At*. Lawrence trained at the Drama Centre London.

Mick and Jo Moore (Lighting): Mick and Jo Moore are theatre professionals from Cambridge. Mick has clocked up a huge number of credits as a lighting and sound designer in many branches of the entertainment industry and can occasionally be drawn back into directing. He met Jo in a rehearsal room and what started as an effective working partnership recently became a marriage. In odd moments out of the dark they go for long walks ideally in the Lake District maintaining an interest in Jo's former career in Conservation and Ecology. The Bacchae is their fourth production with Thiasos.

Simon Rhodes (Palace Attendant): Simon Rhodes graduated from the Drama Centre in 1999, and is delighted to return to the Thiasos company following of Aristophanes' *Peace* in 2001. Among some opera, play readings and short films, theatre credits include: *After Liverpool* (Wild Street Conspiracy), *Peter Pan* (Tabernacle), *The Plebeians Rehearse The Uprising* (Arcola), *The Hebrew Lesson* (New End Theatre), *Having A Ball* (Medway Little Theatre). Simon is also a committee member of the Operating Theatre Company.

CAST

Chorus of Asian Maenads

Louise Bailey
Evie Dawnay
Elia Diaz
Fiona Gelderman
Laura Hooper
Olivia Lipscombe
Gemma Robinson
Danielle Urbas
Deanna Johnson
Neil Howman
Martin Lawton
Sam Peter Jackson
Simon Rhodes
Lawrence McGrandles Jnr
Georgina Sowerby

Dionysos
Teiresias
Kadmos
Pentheus
Palace Attendant
Cowherd
Agave

Musicians

Quin Arbeitman
Simon Rhodes
Georgina Sowerby

Credits:

Directors
Choreographer
Composer
Musical Director
Design Consultant
Design Interpretation
Lighting Design
Production Manager
Costume Construction

Yana Zarifi and M J Coldiron
Glen Snowden
John White
Quin Arbeitman
Farrah
Nina Ayres
Mick & Jo Moore
Peter Barnett
Becci Hill
São Mourato
Mariam Phillips
Ella Woodward
Nic Willett
Sophie Cowood
São Mourato
Souvenir Studios
Farrah
Brenda R Kaye

Penthius' Skullcap
Headwear
Wardrobe Mistress
Set Construction
Poster & Programme
Administrative Manager

Thiasos would like to thank ---
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The Company:

Quin Arbeitman (Musical Director) – Quin studied jazz piano at the University of Miami, but ironically he has only managed to make money as a professional musician since becoming an actor. In 2001 he came to London from Austin, Texas to star in the chorus of Aristophanes' *Peace* for Thiasos. He stayed on to study for a year at the Desmond Jones School of Mime and Physical Theatre. He will stay even longer if the Home Office grants his plea for political asylum.

Nina Ayres (Design Interpretation): Nina trained in Theatre Design at Central School of Speech and Drama. Since graduating in 1997 she has worked both as a designer and a maker for various productions on stage and screen. Her recent theatre credits include the designs for *Morgan and Ridge* (Rose's Thoughts Dance Co.) and *Mina's Story* (Green Candle Dance Co.), both currently touring. Her recent screen credits include costume design assistant for *International King of Sports* for Endemol productions and Art Director on a short film, *Grandma*, out in the new year. Nina wants to continue with both her design and interpretation skills and has recently made props and costumes for the Royal Ballet and the National Theatre.

Louise Bailey (Maenad): Louise graduated from Drama Centre London in July 2003, where she played such parts as such parts as Arkadina in *The Seagull*, Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Agrippina in Racine's *Britannicus*. She represented Drama Centre London in the Laurence Olivier Competition, *All Roads Lead To Neasden* for Radio Resonance 104.9fm and, since leaving, has worked for The London Film School and The London College of Printing. She has recently been selected as a 2003 Spotlight Prize finalist. TV credits include *Mae West Documentary* (BBC/October films), *Just Write!* (Channel 4). Film credits include *Puritan* (Parliament Films).

MJ Coldiron is an associate director of Thiasos Theatre Company. She trained as an actress in London and has worked professionally as an actress, teacher and theatre director in the US and UK. For Thiasos she directed the Balinese mask sequences in *Hippolytos* and has co-directed *Wealth* and *Peace* with Yana Zarifi. Dr. Coldiron is an Asian theatre specialist, with particular expertise in masked dance drama and research interests in performance ethnography and the psychophysiology of performance. Her book on the relationship between the actor and the mask in Balinese dance-drama and Japanese Noh theatre will be published by Edwin Mellen Press this year. She currently teaches postgraduates in Musical Theatre and Advanced Theatre Practice at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

Evie Dawnay (Maenad): Evie Dawnay graduated from Drama Centre London in July 2002, where she played such roles as Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Mary Brenham in *Our country's Good* and Bianca in *Women Beware Women*. Since then, her theatre credits include Eva in *Soul Reader* (Etcetera Theatre). Her TV credits include *Murphy's Law* for the BBC. Her film credits include Aurora Dawn in *The Fairbank Hotel* (ZZ productions).

Elia Diaz (Maenad): Elia trained at the Drama Centre London. Recent theatre credits include the title role in *Yerma* and Adela in *The House of Bernarda Alba* for the Galileo Theatre in Madrid, *Mr Happy Girl* (Soho Theatre), Viola in Theatre Nomad's production of *Twelfth Night* (Gulbenkian Theatre and Calgary Festival) and *Blood Ties* for the British Festival of Visual Theatre. Her television roles include *Periodistas* for Tele 5 Spain various short film projects here and in Spain.

Farrah (Design Consultant): A stage designer of eclectic style, he has been affiliated primarily with the Royal Shakespeare Company since 1962, but has worked with other English companies and also abroad. Previously, from the early 1950's, he had been designing in France as a close collaborator of Michel Saint-Denis in the National Theatre at Strasbourg. A native Algerian, Farrah had been a self-trained painter doing freelance work in France before his encounter with Saint-Denis, who brought Farrah into theatre and eventually introduced him to the Royal Shakespeare Company as his fellow-artist. Farrah has also taught theatre design at Strasbourg (1955-61) and, as a guest, at the National Theatre School of Canada (1968-69). In three decades of designing, Farrah has worked with some thirty directors on more than 250 pro-ductions which include designs for plays, operas, musicals, ballets in many countries including Holland, France, Tunisia, Canada, USA, Germany, Austria, Italy and Mexico.

Fiona Gelderman (Maenad): Fiona Gelderman graduated from Drama Centre London in July 2003. Since then she has worked for the Metropolitan Film School, played a behaviourally-modified girl on "Resonance FM" and a martini-swilling cardsharp in the film *Solitaire For Two*. She also takes care of the company dog.

Laura Hooper [Maenad]: Laura trained at East 15 Acting School. Film and TV credits include; *The Rat Catchers*, *Lonely Hearts* and *Nine Days Of Hell*. Theatre credits include; Helena in *Look Back In Anger*, Mel in *Shakers Re-Stirred*, Insect Ensemble in *The Insect Play*, Helen in *Trojan Women*, Chorus in *Orestes* and Lady Torrence in *Orpheus Descending*. Laura has just finished a production of *Hecuba* in which she played Epsilon/Chorus.

Neil Howman (Old Comedy): Neil trained at LAMDA. He recently appeared in the British film *To Kill A King*. Theatre includes Gary in *The Night Before Christmas* (Riverside Studios), *Henry V* (Courtyard Theatre, Maidenhead), Banquo in *Macbeth* (Tour), Marcel Proust in *Remembrance of Things Past* (RNT), Vanya in *Uncle Vanya*, Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*, Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, King Arthur in *Sir Gawain And The Green Knight*, Ned Weeks in *The Normal Heart*, Mike in *The Ruffian on the Stair*, Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (Tour), Frank in *Three More Sleepless Nights* (Tour), Ferrado in *The Malcontent* (Shakespeare's Globe). Neil also played The Soldier in *The Unarmed Soldier* for Channel 4 Films.

Sam Peter Jackson (Pentheus): Sam Peter graduated from the Central School of Speech and Drama in June 2003. Productions at Central included Tony Kushner's *A Bright Room Called Day*, Nick Dear's *The Art of Success* and *MASHUP!*, which Royal Court writer Che Walker devised with a small group of acting students. Since leaving drama school Sam has appeared in *Corpus* at the Edinburgh Festival and his television credits have included *Lust for Murder* (LWT), *The Dambusters* (Channel 4) and the upcoming BBC drama, *D-Day*.

Deanna Johnson (Dionysos): Theatre credits include *What !?* (Old Vic), *Story of an African Farm* (Young Vic), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith), Nurse in *Romeo & Juliet* (Redhill Theatre), Prospero in a national tour of *The Tempest*, Mephistophilis in a Canadian tour of *Faustus*. Deanna was a core member of Floating Point Science Theatre for five years, artistic director of visual theatre company, Theatre Beyond, and a regular guest performer with Montage Theatre. Fringe includes *Schwartz Champagne* and *Time to Jump* (both at the ICA) and the Player King in *Hamlet* (Courtyard).