

Preview

Orestes 2.0

Greek tragedy gets the pop culture treatment in Cry Havoc's new production directed by **Kate Revz**.
By Vivienne Egan

Orestes and his sister Electra have killed their mother, Clytemnestra, to avenge her murder of Agamemnon, their father, in accordance with filial duties. They await their fate at the hands of a faceless city-state where martial law has been instated. Citizens must vote on whether the pair will be stoned to death or have their throats slit.

This is the scenario of Charles Mee's *Orestes 2.0*, directed by Kate Revz, artistic director of Cry Havoc, one of Sydney's newest theatre companies. Cry Havoc's premier performance was a sell-out *Julius Caesar*, performed at the Australian Theatre for Young People in October 2009. "I'm really thrilled at how it went, it really superseded all our expectations," says Revz (pictured). Cry Havoc, according to its manifesto, is "a revolutionary new theatre co-operative... committed to the daring reworking of the classic texts for the contemporary stage."

An adaptation of the 408 BCE work by Greek tragedian Euripides, *Orestes 2.0* is a production of Griffin Independent. Revz, who prefers old texts to new works, admits she never imagined she'd work for Griffin: "It's the centre for new work – so I went on this big hunt for new plays that have their feet in ancient texts and I discovered Charles Mee's incredible amount of work."

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Mee is an eccentric, veteran US playwright whose revamps of classic texts are freely available on his website. His philosophy is that no play is new, and so invites practitioners to "pillage" his work freely, as he has pillaged the work of others. "He looks at classics through a prism of pop and contemporary culture, using a lot of poetry, stuff lifted straight out of *Soap Opera Digest* and TV guides in a kind of channel surf," explains Revz. "Because it's a kind of pop culture pastiche, we're going for a sickeningly plastic Hollywood aesthetic. It'll be *Alice in Wonderland* on more acid with Ancient Greek text."

Orestes 2.0 is certainly a disorienting read. The characters are in a kind of limbo between major events, allowing for them to explore and reveal their fears, beliefs and wishes. Orestes and Electra have a strangely close relationship which



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pivots around their concepts of life and death. Other figures like Helen of Troy and the god Apollo visit the tent, along with unexplained characters whose lives contribute to the images of humanity ravaged by war, showing that "the human experience is epic and domestic at the same time". Revz chose *Orestes* because of its difficulty. "That really terrified me, and for me that's a really good sign that it was worth doing. It's good to do things that frighten you – it makes you step up to the play instead of walking through it casually."

So what is the play actually about? Revz has a theory: "It's saying we need to break this cycle of going to war and of decimating countries for the gain of other countries. We get a lot of media on war but we get the diluted, polite version. I think it's also about how love is war and how love between people can destroy us just like guns can. I think there won't be a moment where you're not thinking or feeling or both when you're watching this play."

Orestes 2.0 SBW Stables Theatre, 17 Feb–13 Mar

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King Lear



5 Mar–10 Apr, Drama Theatre, Sydney Opera House
John Bell takes on the tragic patriarch in this Bell Shakespeare production. How much sharper than a serpent's tooth is it to have an ungrateful child? Find out here!

Quack
27 Aug–2 Oct, SBW Stables Theatre
Ian Wilding's new play at Griffin Theatre is about a charismatic snake-oil salesman whose medicinal compound cures a town of its ills – but at a cost.

New Creations: Bonachela/Linder



20 Mar–10 Apr, Sydney Theatre
Sydney Dance Company's first show for the year brings together works by Rafael Bonachela and Adam Linder.

The Merchants of Bollywood

23 Mar–11 Apr, State Theatre
Forty performers from Mumbai tell the story of the Indian film industry the only way they know how: through dance and song.

A Little Night Music

28 Jun–13 Jul, Opera Theatre, Sydney Opera House
Sigrid Thornton sings 'Send in the Clowns' in Sondheim and Wheeler's wistful comedic musical for Opera Australia.

August: Osage County

13 Aug–12 Sep, Sydney Theatre
Steppenwolf Theatre from the USA perform their original production of this Pulitzer Prize-winning play by Tracy Letts. It's been hailed as the great American play of our time, and incredibly funny to boot.