

DIDASKALIA 

The Journal for Ancient Performance



*Didaskalia is an electronic journal dedicated to the study of all aspects of ancient Greek and Roman performance*

# DIDASKALIA

## Volume 11 (2014)

<http://didaskalia.net>

ISSN 1321-485

## About Didaskalia

Didaskalia (διδασκαλία) is the term used since ancient times to describe the work a playwright did to teach his chorus and actors the play. The official records of the dramatic festivals in Athens were the διδασκαλία. *Didaskalia* now furthers the scholarship of the ancient performance.

*Didaskalia* is an English-language, online publication about the performance of Greek and Roman drama, dance, and music. We publish peer-reviewed scholarship on performance and reviews of the professional activity of artists and scholars who work on ancient drama.

We welcome submissions on any aspect of the field. If you would like your work to be reviewed, please write to [editor@didaskalia.net](mailto:editor@didaskalia.net) at least three weeks in advance of the performance date. We also seek interviews with practitioners and opinion pieces. For submission guidelines, go to [didaskalia.net](http://didaskalia.net).

---

### 2014 Staff

Editor-in-Chief:	Amy R. Cohen	<a href="mailto:editor@didaskalia.net">editor@didaskalia.net</a> +1 434 947-8117
		<i>Didaskalia</i> Randolph College 2500 Rivermont Avenue Lynchburg, VA 24503 USA
Associate Editor:	C.W. (Toph) Marshall	
Assistant Editor:	Jay Kardan	<a href="mailto:assistant-editor@didaskalia.net">assistant-editor@didaskalia.net</a>
Interns:	Grace Gardiner Kiaorea Wright	<a href="mailto:intern@didaskalia.net">intern@didaskalia.net</a>

---

### Advisory Board

Caterina Barone	Oliver Taplin
John Davidson	Peter Toohey
Gary Decker	J. Michael Walton
Mark Griffith	David Wiles
Mary Hart	Paul Woodruff
Kenneth Reckford	

---

### Editorial Board

Dorota Dutsch	Dan McCaffrey
Fred Franko	Marianne McDonald
Allison Futrell	Peter Meineck
Mary-Kay Gamel	Paul Menzer
John Given	Tim Moore
Mike Lippman	Nancy Rabinowitz
Fiona Macintosh	Brett Rogers
Willie Major	John Starks

---

### Copyright

Readers are permitted to save or print any files from *Didaskalia* as long as there are no alterations made in those files. Copyright remains with the authors, who are entitled to reprint their work elsewhere if due acknowledgement is made to the earlier publication in *Didaskalia*. Contributors are responsible for getting permission to reproduce any photographs or video they submit and for providing the necessary credits.

Website design © *Didaskalia*.

*Didaskalia* is published at Randolph College.

**DIDASKALIA**  
**VOLUME 11 (2014)**  
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

11.01	<b>Review - <i>If We Were Birds</i> at the Nimbus Theatre</b> Clara Hardy	1
11.02	<b>Review - <i>All Our Tragic</i> at the Den Theatre</b> Ruth Scodel	6
11.03	<b>Review - <i>All Our Tragic</i> at the Den Theatre</b> Daniel Smith	9
11.04	<b>Review - 50th Season of Classical Plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse: Aeschylus's <i>Oresteia</i> and Aristophanes' <i>Wasps</i></b> Caterina Barone	13
11.05	<b>Currency Exchange: Staging Aristophanes' <i>Wealth</i> in New Orleans</b> Karen Rosenbecker and Artemis Preeshl	16
11.06	<b>Review - <i>Agamemnon</i> at Savannah State University</b> Ruth Scodel	37
11.07	<b><i>Philoctetes</i> as a Health Educator</b> Robert Hackey	39

---

**Note**

*Didaskalia* is an online journal. This print representation of Volume 11 is an inadequate approximation of the web publication at [didaskalia.net](http://didaskalia.net), which includes sound, video, and live hyperlinks.

## The 50th Season of Classical Plays at Syracuse's Greek Theatre: Aeschylus's *Oresteia* and Aristophanes' *Wasps*

May 9 to June 22, 2014

L Ciclo di Spettacoli Classici

Teatro Greco di Siracusa

Syracuse, Italy

Reviewed by **Caterina Barone**

*University of Padova*

Aeschylus's *Oresteia* was chosen to celebrate the 100th anniversary of classical plays at the Greek Theatre in Syracuse. The tradition began in 1914 with the staging of *Agamemnon*, organized by the promoting committee of the time, which later evolved into the INDA (Istituto Nazionale del Dramma Antico–National Institute of Ancient Drama). Celebrating the centenary with the entire trilogy seems like a logical step. It is however less easy to grasp the INDA's decision to split the work in two shows (*The Agamemnon* separately, *Coephoroi* and *The Eumenides* combined), entrusting the staging to two different directors: Luca De Fusco for the first, Daniele Salvo for the latter two. The resulting lack of homogeneity interferes with comprehension and full appreciation of Aeschylus's superb ideological design. The two separate shows were conceived and directed differently, with different qualitative results; both nevertheless featured leading actors of an excellent level, and were received favourably by the audience. The first is more introspective and refined, the second more geared towards the spectacular. What they do have in common is Monica Centanni's communicative and evocative translation, as well as stage settings and scenery designed by sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro (who also designed the costumes). Pomodoro created an abstract space, inhabited by geometrical architectural elements and by a majestic bronze portal, which marks the entrance to the palace of the Atreidai, the backdrop to the tragic fate of this accursed clan.

For the *Agamemnon*, Luca De Fusco covered the large proscenium with a thick layer of peat: the members of the Chorus and some of the tragedy's characters sink into it, at times to the point of being almost buried. Agamemnon (Massimo Venturiello) in his turn also emerges from that earthy expanse, rising from a chariot that holds him like a sarcophagus, and is exhumed by the frantic movements of the Chorus. Beside him stands the seer Cassandra (Giovanna Di Rauso), his illustrious prisoner, who shares the lethal fate that awaits the victorious leader after Troy, a fate that will be delivered by the hand of Clytemnestra.

The dark soil which devours the characters is a strong sign with various values, representing the grave of reason, murdered by the madness of the war against Troy, as well as an ancestral womb protecting and



*F. Scianna as Oreste and E. Pozzi as Clytemnestra in Coefore. Photo by Franca Centaro.*



*M. Venturiello as Agamemnon in Agamemnone. photo by G. L. Carnera.*

keeping alive the meaning of that ancient saga, later to transmit it to posterity through an evolutionary genesis of sorts. The action takes place in an archaic and primordial time dimension, and the deep contact with earth and soil creates a sense of the chthonic dimension permeating the world of the living. Pain and suffering penetrate into all characters, beginning with the sentinel (Marco Avogadro), whose anguish foreshadows the gory events to come. And there is no triumph in the victorious survivors: no triumph in the Herald (Mariano Rigillo), who recounts with dismay the woes of the long siege and finally collapses overwhelmed by tears; no triumph in Agamemnon himself, who rises bare-chested from the chariot and later wears his weapons again to enter the palace, the very weapons that hold no power to defend him. He is guided into the palace—walking on red carpets, a visual representation of his hubris—by the ghost of his daughter Iphigenia, the victim of his madness.



**Banda Osiris and the cast of *Vespe*.**  
**Photo by Maria Laura Aureli.**

Above all others looms Clytemnestra (Elisabetta Pozzi), ambiguously persuasive in the monologues of the deception, and then fierce in the execution of her vengeance. The golden armour she wears as she greets Agamemnon stresses her warlike dimension: a woman “with a manly heart” who nevertheless longs for peace in the end, after so much blood has been shed. The tragedy ends with Aegisthus (Andrea Renzi) rendered neurotic by the events, in which he appears as but a faded and cowardly supernumerary, utterly unable to control them.

The music by Antonio Di Pofi, played entirely on a piano with a percussive sound, was written in contrast with the archaic atmosphere of the ancient drama, as if to stress the contemporary gaze we cast upon the roots of our culture; the movements performed by the Chorus and by the dancers (choreographed by Alessandra Panzavolta) tend instead to evoke a timeless dimension, albeit steeped in classical poise.

In *Coephoroi* and *Eumenides* Daniele Salvo relies on paroxysmal, exasperated, vocal and physical expressiveness, just as he did the year before when he directed *Oedipus the King*. At the beginning of the tragedy the Chorus of coephoroi accompany Electra (Francesca Ciocchetti) to the grave of her father, achieving a strong visual and emotional impact. The atmosphere is tense and solemn; the grief of Trojan slaves dressed in black garments and veils blends with the despair felt by the young daughter of Agamemnon in a riotous sound mixture, supported by the complex musical symphony created by Marco Podda: archaic echoes and classical tonalities in an amalgam that evokes a cinematic feel. Later, pursuing the emotional peak which is the openly declared stylistic approach chosen for his staging, the director follows an ascending climax, up to the point of breaking one of the taboos of Greek theatre: murder taking place on stage. Orestes (Francesco Scianna) slaughters his mother (Elisabetta Pozzi) in front of the spectators, in a Grand Guignol of sorts that seeks justification in tragic afflatus. The appearance of the Erinyes, dressed in a leotard that makes them look like colourful skeletons, adds more fuel to the wildfire of violence and fury.

And so the play reaches its last act, in which *Eumenides* represents the founding of western justice as an overcoming of the archaic law of retaliation. The tragedy opens with the distressing appearance of the Pythia (Paola Gassmann) aghast from her vision of Orestes besieged by the Erinyes, and it develops into a journey through monumental statues, stunning choreographies and spectacular effects, such as the appearance and the displacement of the god Apollo (Ugo Pagliani) on a movie-set dolly, or the introduction of gigantic scales on stage. All is geared towards magniloquence, except for the role of

Athena, interpreted by Piera Degli Esposti, who confers measure and aplomb to the image of the founding goddess of the Aeropagus. In the bedazzlement caused by lights and smoke, the ending features the appearance of a naked young woman with a newborn in her arms, as if to signify the coming of a golden age, heralded by the transformation of the Erinyes into Eumenides: a device chosen for dramatic effect that dispels all traces of the unhinging unresolvedness that is intrinsic in the ending of the *Oresteia*—an aspect that has been repeatedly stressed by exegetes, literati, and directors.

A “sword-and-sandal” style staging, executed with great attention to detail, exploits Daniele Salvo’s ability to coordinate complex movements onstage (choreographed by Alessio Maria Romano) and to gratify the taste of a broad audience. But is this the right way to keep the essence of the classical tradition alive? The massive issues raised by Aeschylus’s text—the administration of justice, the relationship between men and women, the value and role of ancestral forces in the social fabric of a pacified society—fall apart and are pulverised by the impact of staging effects. All remains on the surface, enfolded in a formal exaggeration that overflows, and often demolishes, the bounds of balance.

The cycle is completed by the staging of Aristophanes’ *The Wasps*. This work contains the author’s criticism of the administration of justice in Athens at the end of the fifth century and an exposure of the perverse mechanisms governing trials by a jury of citizens. It also contains reflections on old age and on the role of the elderly in society, as well as on the emotional bond between sons and fathers.

*The Wasps* is not one of the best works by the Athenian playwright and it features a hiatus between the two different thematic nuclei, although they find an embodiment in the main character, the elderly Procleon, with his addiction to courts of law. Marco Avogadro attempts to bridge this dramaturgical gap by capitalizing on the play’s levity and relentless gags, but this emphasis detracts from the balance of the play, putting more focus on entertainment than on structural themes. Conversely, balance and efficacy are achieved in the search for parallels between the Athenian world and contemporary society, without the use of implausible forced analogies. Modern relevance is also suggested by Alessandro Grilli’s translation, which pays attention to the contemporary while never substituting it for the ancient. Original names and characters are preserved and allusions to politicians are aimed at depicting a certain type of person rather than a specific individual.

A characteristic feature is that the Banda Osiris, who complement the play with irreverent and outlandish music, are present onstage. They participate with musical and physical forays, transforming their instruments into imaginative figures (composite brass hornets, stylized ballerinas), and enliven the action by emphasizing its surreal and satirical aspects. A potpourri of opera selections with a completely new twist (surprisingly performed by soprano Adonà Mamo), fragments of classical music, canzonettas, the fanfare of the Bersaglieri corps, Italian partisan and fascist anthems, and much more creates a musico-dramaturgical dimension of its own, parallel to the verbal. The protagonist (Antonello Fassari) is opposed by his son, Anticleon (Martino D’Amico), and supported by the Chorus of old men (guided by Francesco Biscione and choreographed by Ivan Bicego Varengo) who share with Procleon his passion for trials and courts of law: they are buzzing wasps, perched in the cells of the beehive wall that serves as a background. For their part, the household slaves Sosias (Sergio Mancinelli) and Xanthias (Enzo Curcurù) support their young master. It all ends with Procleon dancing frantically in his underwear: deprived of his main occupation, the old man frolics pathetically, inebriated with music and wine.