

\* Greek Project

Program

Presenting Scenes

from

THE SUPPLIANTS

Aeschylus

ELECTRA

Sophocles

ALCESTIS

Euripides

These particular scenes were chosen to illustrate  
various uses of the chorus by the Greek authors.

Outdoor Theatre  
Bennington College

Monday, May 8, 1950  
at 4:00 p.m.

\* Senior Project - Joan Walls

The first scene is from The Suppliants, the earliest extant play of the first great playwright of Greek Drama. The play tells of the flight of fifty women from their insistent suitors. The women are the daughters of Danaus and the suitors are the sons of Aegyptus, Danaus's brother. The daughters flee to Argos, or Greece, and there they plead with the king of the Greeks, or Argives as they were called, for protection. The king, unable to promise such help without consulting his people, has gone off to the city to obtain their consent. The daughters are left to themselves and while awaiting the king's return see the boats of Aegyptus landing and watch as a messenger of Aegyptus comes to take them away. The distracted maids, hoping for the return of the king, try to delay him.

In this play the role of the chorus is that of the protagonist. Since the roots of Greek Drama stem from dithyrambic choruses which sang on the festival days, it does not seem so strange that Aeschylus should have used a whole chorus as the protagonist. In this particular play we can also see the idea of the first single actor beginning to emerge in both the personage of the messenger and the king.

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The second scene is from Electra by Sophocles, the second author of importance both in historical sequence and in the development of Drama.

Electra's father has been assassinated by her mother and her mother's present husband before the action of the play begins. The plot therefore deals with Electra's constant mourning, awaiting the return of her brother, Orestes, and revenge of her father's murder. In this scene Electra is found mourning by the chorus before the palace. The chorus, always trying to maintain harmony, attempts to reason with her. Iphinassa and Chrysothemis are Electra's sisters and at the moment Aegisthos, Electra's stepfather, rules the land.

The role of the chorus in Electra is that of a minor supporting character rather than the protagonist. We see here also the first actor emerging in full as the protagonist. Even more interesting is the fact that this character is a woman when most of the tragic heroes were men.

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The third and final scene is taken from a play called Alcestris by Euripides, the last and perhaps the most accomplished in the technique of playwriting of these three playwrights. In the play Admetos, the king, is told that he must die unless he can get someone else to do so for him. His wife Alcestris volunteers to take his place. In this scene Alcestris has just died and the chorus, awed by the power of fate, sings a choral ode in which it acknowledges her power, prays to her and finally tries to reason with Admetos not to resist her. Here we see how the chorus has disintegrated to an inactive rather than an active role commenting on the previous action of the play before the whole action can proceed.

THE SUPPLIANTS

Cast

The Chorus of Suppliant Daughters

Linda Borden  
Suzanne Lochhead  
Joan Tewksbury

The Messenger

Lawrence Arrick

The King

Richard Deacon

Dance Choreography - Al Pessio

ELECTRA

Cast

Electra

Phyllis Meili

The Chorus

Carol Bondy, Gail Greig,  
Barbara Pavell, Richard Deacon

Dance Choreography - Gail Greig

ALCESTIS

Cast

Admetos

Al Pessio

The Chorus

Betty-Anne Gillett  
Suzanne Lochhead  
Barbara Pavell

The Leader of the Chorus

Richard Deacon

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Stage Manager

Barbara Pavell

Assistant Stage Manager

Joan Maggin

Costume Designer

Regina Klein

Costume Crew

Carolyn Keese, Ruth Lyford, Richard Deacon

Construction Crew

Carolyn Lissner  
Constance Milhomme  
Drusalina Romano