



## Orestes

The Off Center  
Through Aug. 15  
Running time:  
1 hr, 45 min

Deus ex machina. Nowadays we think of it as a tired plot device, used when writers can't figure out a compelling ending. But to the ancient Greeks? They waged war because of the gods;

they murdered their beloved; they knew and expected that the gods wrote the rules of their fragile world.

But if they left? If they no longer answered prayers, confirmed suspicions, guided idle hands? Such daunting questions must Orestes answer – having murdered his mother at the god Apollo's behest – when the divinity that guided his actions is replaced with the furies and his vengeful community.

Adapted by director Will Hollis Snider, Cambiare Productions' *Orestes* begins at its end, with its beleaguered titular character dragging his aunt, Helen of Troy, to Apollo's altar. Orestes is followed by the furies; his sister, Elektra; his uncle, Menelaus; and the fallout of his intended matricide. Particularly in this adaptation, Orestes is a sort of inverted version of Hamlet – he kills the lascivious royal couple that usurped his father's bed and questions his faith and actions afterward. Say what you will about the Great Dane, but at least he was calculating. To be or not to be? Orestes, with his black-and-white view of the world, would've answered quickly.

Cambiare's production is stripped down in many ways. Stripped of characters, like Orestes' accomplice Pylades. Stripped of actors: The furies double as Orestes' family. Stripped of the pageantry that goes with Greek tragedy. The Off Center's traditional aisles of seats are packed into a dark corner. Sand, dust, and an old sleeping bag litter the periphery of the stage. The rafters, wrapped in electrical wires, lay open above,

and beyond the limited draping of the back wall stacked chairs can be seen.

Snider's production wants to get at a truth he saw in *Orestes*, something naked, something alone, something humanly tragic. Comfort and power loom in those fortified by faith, and its removal affects not only Orestes but his whole world. At times, having not read the text for some years, I felt a bit tossed about by Snider's adaptation. The director knew why he was subtly manipulating the narrative, splicing scenes of past and present together, but as an audience member, I felt that the truth of the play was being talked around. This *Orestes* seemed to concentrate on the moments that precipitated matricide rather than focus on the throughline of plot, which, when combined with some poetic but obtuse scenes, reduces the cohesion of the production.

The play still moves forward with a frantic energy, propelled by Gabriel Luna as Orestes. Luna brings a great deal of energy to his role and, more importantly, makes him a likable and sympathetic character. (In less capable hands, Orestes could have become a whiner.) La Tasha Stephens is notable for her powerful turn as the prosecutor at Orestes' trial.

Cambiare's *Orestes* rarely lets up on the gas pedal: It's an examination of the way tragedy pushes at our psyche. When the conviction of faith is behind our actions, we as humanity have a stronger, clearer idea of how to lead our lives. When that leaves us, well, the readiness is all. – Avimaan Syam

## classical music

### OPENING

**AUSTIN POPS CONCERT: FIDDLES & FOLK** with guest performers Vanessa Gordon, Christopher Buckley, and Jamie Desautels. *Fri., Aug. 18, 7pm. Westlake United Methodist Church, 1460 Redbud. 744-7438. \$10. www.austinpops.org.*

**TEXAS CHORAL CONSORT: A SHADOW OF LIGHT** Works by Johann Sebastian Bach, Felix Mendelssohn, and Arvo Pärt, are featured along with "Orff's Good Fortune" by Austin's own Peter Stopschinski. *Aug. 15-16. Sat., 8pm; Sun., 3pm. Northwest Hills United Methodist Church, 7050 Village Center. 372-3233. Free. www.txconsort.org.*

**AUSTIN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA: CONCERTS IN THE PARK** The town center is alive with music of the classical sort, as the symphony's summer concert series brings various sections of ASO to the park. Bring a picnic and some friends and enjoy this pleasant throwback to simpler times. This week: a **combined brass and woodwind** ensemble performs Pops hits. *Through Aug. 23. Sundays, 7:30pm. Hartman Concert Park, Long Center City Terrace Lawn. 476-6064. Free. www.austinsymphony.org.*

## visual arts

### OPENING

**MEXIC-ARTE MUSEUM: YOUNG LATINO ARTISTS AND THE SERIE PROJECT XVI** Two separate but complementary exhibitions showcase the works of established and emerging Latino artists. (See "A Claimed Space," p.32, for much more about Mexic-Arte.) Reception: *Fri., Aug. 14, 7-9pm. Exhibition: Through Sept. 27. 419 Congress, 480-9373. www.mexic-artemuseum.org.*

**LA PEÑA: CONTEMPORARY FIBER** features the amazing and intricate sculptural works of Oscar Silva. Reception (with live classical guitar music by Buzz Guerra): *Fri., Aug. 14, 6-8pm. Exhibition: Through Sept. 1. 477-6007. Free. www.lapena-austin.org.*

**CREATIVE RESEARCH LAB: HALF & HALF, PART TWO** This show is billed as "the love child of the artists and art historians of the Department of Art and Art History." As biased as we are toward bastards, we must recommend the exhibition curated by Kara Carmack, Ariel Evans, Bonnie Gammill, and Lauren Hanson. Reception: *Sat., Aug. 15, 6-9pm. Exhibition: Through Aug. 29. 2830 E. MLK, 322-2099. crlab@austin.utexas.edu.*

**OKAY MOUNTAIN: POLYMICT** This group exhibition features work by Warren Aldrich, Lillian Gerson, Logan Grider, and Ludwig Schwarz. Reception: *Sat., Aug. 15, 7-10pm. Exhibition: Through Sept. 19. 1312 E. Cesar Chavez Ste. B. www.okaymountain.com.*

**BIRDHOUSE GALLERY: MATT CONANT** The artist's array of portraits manifests "This Charming Man" on the walls of the funky Eastside gallery. Reception: *Sat., Aug. 15, 7-11pm. 1304 E. Cesar Chavez. www.birdhousegallery.com.*

**SCANLAN GALLERY: TURBULENCE** This is an exhibition of new dynamic paintings by Naomi Schlinke and Sydney Yeager. (See "Naomi Schlinke and Sydney Yeager," p.30, for more.) *Aug. 17-Sept. 17. Helm Fine Arts Center in St. Stephen's Episcopal School, 6500 St. Stephen's.*

### CLOSING

**OKAY MOUNTAIN: LIGNES** Here's an exhibition of photographic abstractions of (mostly) architectural surfaces by (former *Austin Chronicle* art director) Taylor Holland. *Through Aug. 14. 1312 E. Cesar Chavez Ste. B. www.okaymountain.com.*

### ONGOING

**DIBONA STUDIO** Oil paintings and "sculptural tattoos" by Joyce DiBona. 404 W. Milton, 851-2646.

**AUSTIN ART IN PUBLIC PLACES: TEXAS BIENNIAL** This is the first time that AIPP has commissioned temporary public art! Ryah Christensen's *Door/Not*

*Door* is near the Eastside Hike and Bike Trail, just south of Nash Hernandez Road. Bill Davenport's *Giant Mushroom Forest* is on the west end of Auditorium Shores, near the Lady Bird Lake Hike and Bike Trail. Sasha Dela's *Variiegated Continuum* is at the Mexican American Cultural Center. Buster Graybill's *Bait Box* is adjacent to the boat launch on the Eastside Hike and Bike Trail. Ken Little's *Homeland Security* is in the clearing between Doug Sahm Hill in Butler Park and the Palmer Events Center. Colin McIntyre's *Emergence* is on a landscaped mound immediately east of the Dougherty Art Center's parking lot. *Through Dec. 31.*

**AUSTIN GALLERIES: 20TH CENTURY MASTERS** Original lithographs, etchings, intaglios, and screen prints by Marc Chagall, Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso, and more. 1219 W. Sixth.

**CORONADO STUDIOS** The Serie Project, a nonprofit Latino arts organization hosted by Coronado Studios, produces, promotes, and exhibits serigraph prints created by diverse artists. 6601 Felix, 385-3591. www.serieproject.org.

**TEXAS FOLKLIFE GALLERY: RANCH GATES OF THE SOUTHWEST** Photographs by UT design professor Daniel Olsen and designer Henk Van Assen. *Through Sept. 4. 1317 S. Congress, 441-9255. www.texasfolklife.org.*

**FAB GALLERY: URBAN/STREET** New works for these concrete and crumbling times by Bethany Johnson(!), Russell Burns, Tim Creswick, Krutie Thakkar, Bonnie Gammill, Mala Kumar, Kallista Stephenson, and others. *DFA Building, 23rd & Trinity. www.thefabgallery.com.*

**BROCCA GALLERY** Sculpture by Gary Yarrington and mosaics and paintings by Augusto Brocca. *Through Aug. 1103 E. Sixth. 468-9792. www.broccagallery.com.*

**STUDIO C GALLERY: PONIES & PENGUINS** New works by Holly Bronko and Alexandra Valenti. 2309 Thornton.

**GAY FAY KELLY: IN BETWEEN** Photography and video by Carrie Kenny. As part of the exhibition, the first 80 viewers may take away a small photograph from stock the artist has provided. Call for appointment. *Through Aug. 21. 1811 W. Eighth, 478-7676. www.gayfaykellyart.com.*

**NEW EAST ARTS GALLERY: FACING EAST** The documentary photography by Kaleema H. Al-Nur, Ann Armstrong, Martha Grenon, Adolfo Isassi, and Neesha Thakkar captures life in Central East Austin. 1601 E. Fifth #106.

**EYE CONTACT ART** showcases the work of Joshua Garcia and others. 12400 Amherst #102, 825-8577. www.eycontactart.com.

**L. NOWLIN GALLERY: GUATAMALA** Lesley Nowlin's photographic portraits from Guatemala. *Through Aug. 29. 1202 W. Sixth. www.inowlingallery.com.*

**PRO-JEX GALLERY: THE NATIVE AMERICANS** Stunning photography by Edward S. Curtis. *Through Aug. 31. 1710 S. Lamar, 472-7707.*

**ARTAMICI FINE ART GALLERY** Artists from Argentina, Mexico, Chile, and Peru; paintings by Augustina Rodriguez, Oscar Riquelme, and Pablo Taboada; drawings by Gilberto Ramirez; and metal sculpture by Augusto Brocca. 78 San Marcos, 457-0171. www.pablotaoboadastudio.com.

**ARTHOUSE: NEW AMERICAN TALENT 24** features several Austin-based artists among the national diversity and will give you a glimpse into what's happening in the more noncommercial world of images and objects, as selected by the University of Chicago's Hamza Walker. *Through Aug. 23. 700 Congress, 453-5312. www.arthousetexas.org.*

**AUSTIN ART GARAGE** Original art by emerging Austin artists. 2200 S. Lamar Ste. J, 351-5934. www.austinartgarage.com.

**AUSTIN ART GLASS** This glassblowing studio and gallery offers functional and decorative glass art, classes, and more. 1608 S. Congress, 916-4527. www.austinartglass.com.

**FRANCISCO MATTO: THE MODERN AND THE MYTHIC** This Blanton show provides a rediscovery of Matto's work and highlights the tremendous influence that his five decades of landscapes, cityscapes, portraits, abstractions, and sculptural totems had on subsequent Latin American artists. *Through Sept. 27. MLK & Congress, 471-7324. www.blantonmuseum.org.*

**BLUE MOON GLASSWORKS** Unique handmade glass art and jewelry. 108 W. 43rd, 380-0770. www.austinbluemoon.com.