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[Review: 'Orestes' at](#)

By [Claire Canavan](#) | Tuesday, August 4, 2009, 11:28 AM

“Orestes,” a new adaptation of Euripides’ classic Greek tragedy from writer and director Will Hollis Snider, takes the audience into a dark world where death rules and faith is questioned. If you’re looking for distraction from today’s troubles, you probably should stay home and watch an episode of “So You Think You Can Dance.” But if you’re soothed by the idea that people have long faced down tragedy, “Orestes” might prove to be a paradoxical kind of comfort.

“Orestes” takes place in a world already in ruin. The stage and floor are layered with fine dust, and chunks of concrete litter the edges of the space. The gods seem to have abandoned humankind, and the world is a chaotic place steeped in tension and revenge.

As the action begins, a desperate Orestes (Gabriel Luna) pleads to the gods for help. Obeying a decree from Apollo, Orestes has just killed his mother Klytaimnestra (Karina Dominguez) to avenge the death of his father. Now Orestes finds himself questioning his faith in the gods as he is tormented by Furies (creepy heads on sticks) and put on trial for his actions by the Voice of the People (La Tasha Stephens). While the original version ends as Apollo returns to solve all the problems, this adaptation has an ambiguous ending that gives the play an even darker twist.

The cast works well as an ensemble and the actors strive to meet the challenge of the text. Luna plays Orestes with passion and stamina, but other performers fall into the trap of shouting as a way to show their intense emotions. The show opens at maximum intensity and stays relentless in its pace, at times leaving the audience wishing for more moments of variation.

What ultimately makes “Orestes” worth seeing is the way this contemporary adaptation focuses on the plight of a confused individual who questions the wisdom of having blind faith in anything — an eerily timely theme as Americans find their faith in higher institutions shaken to the very core.

(Claire Canavan is a freelance critic and writer for the American-Statesman.)

‘Orestes’ continues at 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays through Aug. 15 at [The Off Center](#), 2211 Hidalgo St. \$12-\$15.

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