



• The Oresteia by Playwright Emilio Casillas: A Contemporary Reimagining of Three Greek Tragedies

Description

Salt Lake City, UT Attending *The Oresteia* on February 28th at the **Dumke Student Theatre** was an experience that brought ancient Greek tragedy to life with remarkable intensity and relevance. This 90-minute adaptation of *Aeschylus*'s trilogy, distilled by **Emilio Casillas**, managed to preserve the thematic weight and dramatic complexity of the original while making it accessible to contemporary audiences.

The challenge of condensing *Agamemnon*, *Choephoroi* (Libation-Bearers), and *Eumenides* (The Furies) into a streamlined production was met with both success and some limitations. The adaptation retained the core narrative of revenge, justice, and the transition from personal retribution to civic law, a foundational theme in Western drama. However, the reduction in runtime meant that some subtleties of character development and thematic depth were inevitably lost. For instance, Clytemnestra's motivations, one of the most compelling aspects of *Agamemnon*, felt somewhat abbreviated, lessening the full psychological impact of her vengeance against her husband. A more extended exploration of her inner turmoil could have added further complexity to the production.



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From the program

Playwright and Translation Collaboration

Playwright and director Casillas worked directly with the translators **Marianne McDonald** and **J. Michael Walton** (by arrangement with *Nick Hern Books*, to craft this adaptation of *The Oresteia*. Casillas specifically chose this translation for its accessibility, noting that it strikes a balance between contemporary readability and the poetic essence of Aeschylus's original work. "I love McDonald's translations because they feel contemporary without losing the poetic essence of the original," Casillas explained. He emphasized that while many older translations can feel overly formal or archaic, McDonald's work allows modern audiences to engage with the text without sacrificing its depth and complexity. This collaboration was crucial in ensuring that the adaptation remained faithful to the spirit of the original trilogy while being digestible for contemporary viewers.

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Playwright and Director, Emilio Casillas is a theatre maker from sunny San Diego and received his BFA in theatre production and design from Westminster University. Emilio serves as the artistic director of the Classical Greek Theatre Festival (CGT), is a production manager with La Musica Lirica- an opera training program in Novafeltria, Italy and is the director of programming for Davis Arts

Chorus and Collective Voice: Sing sorrow, sorrow, sorrow, but may the good prevail.

One of the defining elements of this production was the use of the Chorus, which spoke in unison for a large portion of the show. This stylistic choice reinforced the communal nature of Greek tragedy, where the Chorus serves as both commentator and moral conscience. The uniformity of their speech created a powerful auditory and visual effect, emphasizing the weight of tradition and collective judgment. As one cast member noted at the aftershow talkback, "When you're in the chorus, you have to make a collective choice, which sometimes feels limiting but also makes it that much more powerful when you all discover the same moment together." Their synchronized voices added a ritualistic intensity to the performance, particularly during moments of judgment and prophecy.

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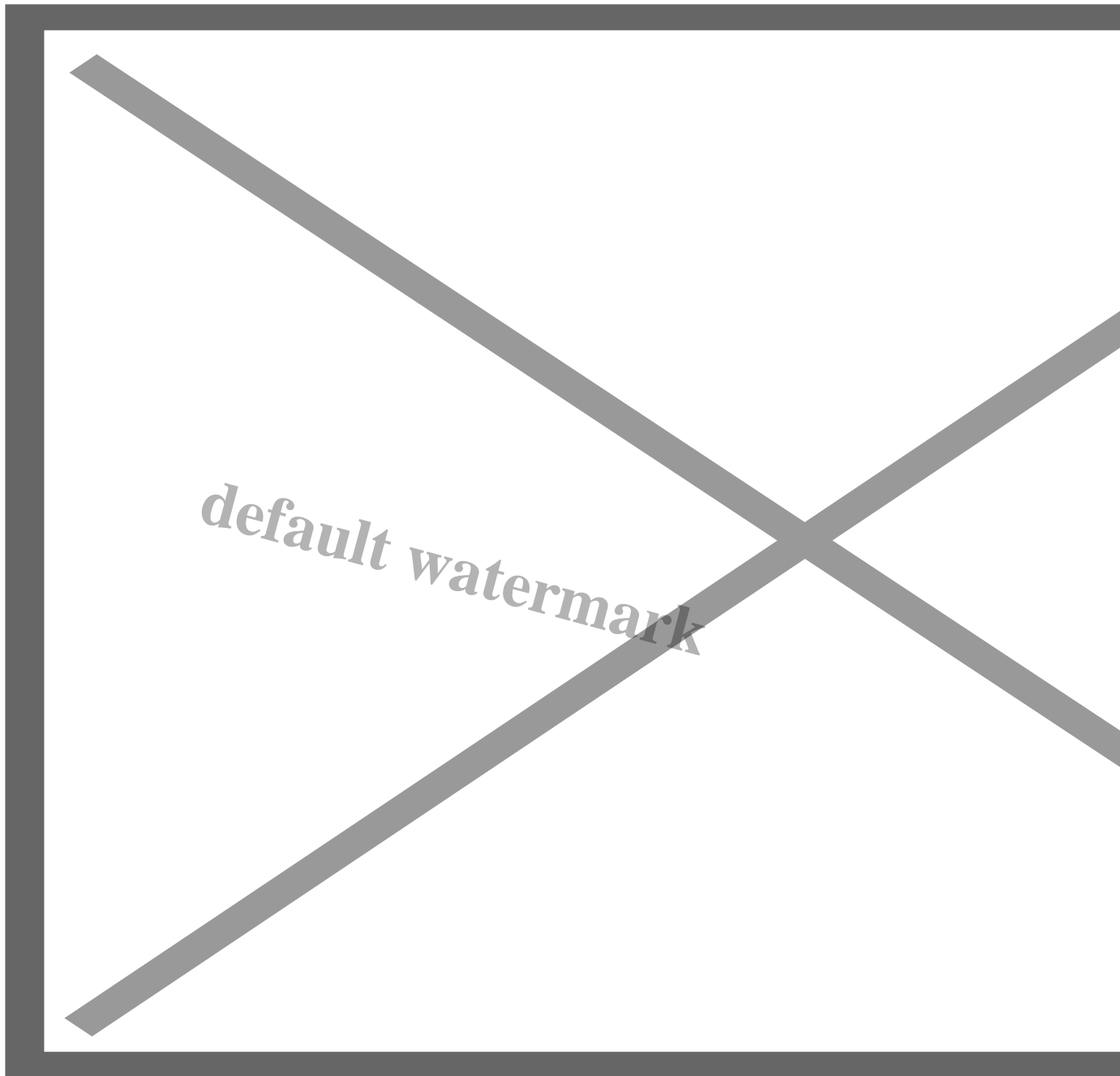


Photo Credit: Doug Carter

However, this approach also presented challenges, as some members of the chorus had difficulty staying in unison. This inconsistency occasionally disrupted the intended effect and raised questions about the role of the chorus in Greek theatre. A more musically-driven approach, such as having the chorus sing certain lines, might have enhanced the cohesion and impact of their performance. This adaptation highlighted the complexities of presenting ancient theatrical conventions to modern audiences, offering an opportunity to reflect on how best to balance authenticity with accessibility. The line “Sing sorrow, sorrow, sorrow, but may the good prevail” encapsulated the chorus’s dual role—expressing sorrow while invoking hope—and underscored the thematic depth of their collective voice.

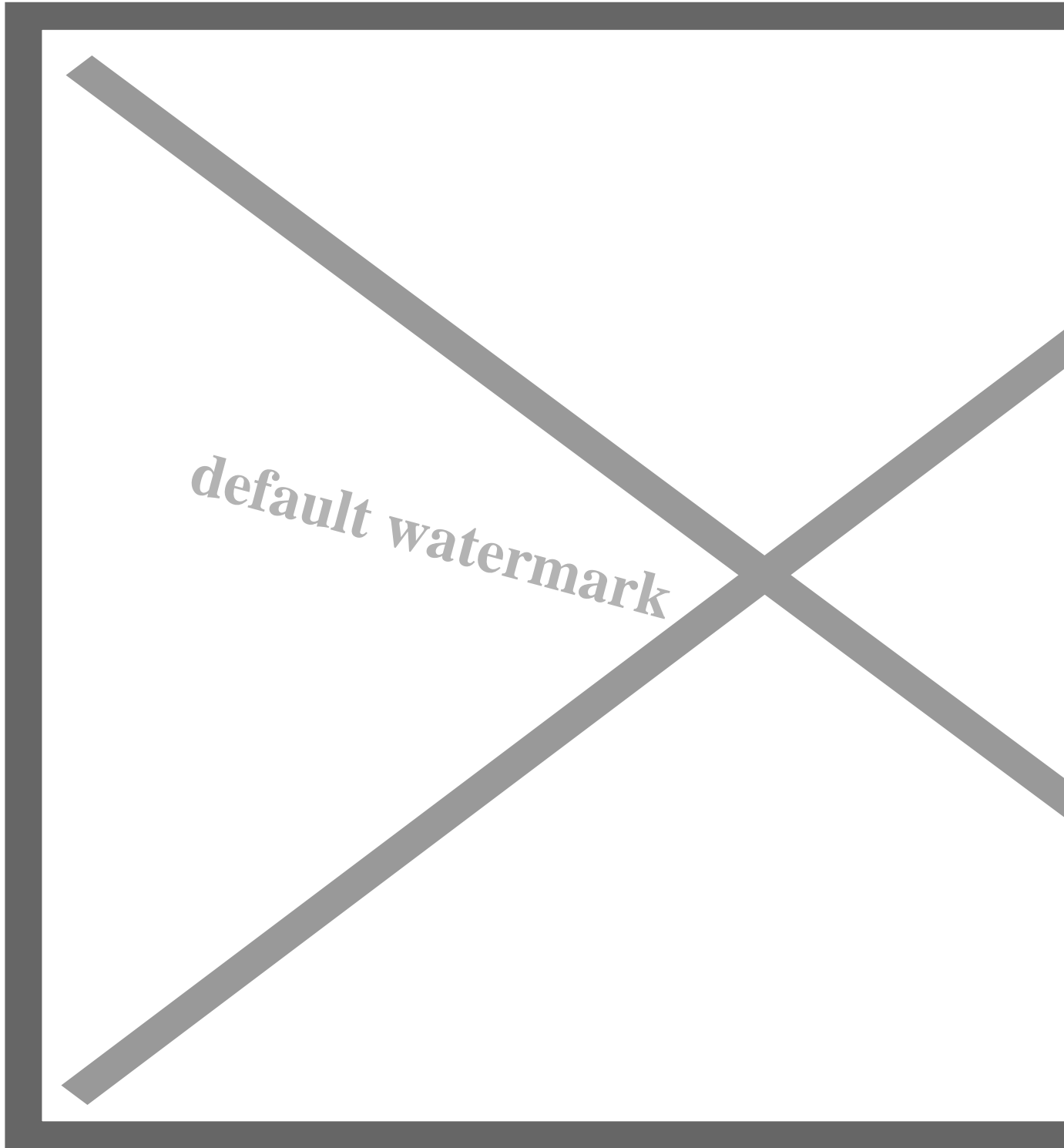


Photo taken on February 28th, Image Credit: Rhetorical Review

Scene Design and Technical Aspects

Lighting and sound design played a crucial role in setting the tone for each segment. The use of shadows and stark lighting effectively underscored moments of tension, particularly in scenes involving the Furies. Costume design struck a balance between historical authenticity and modern stylization,

reinforcing the timelessness of the themes. The minimalist set design also allowed the actors' performances to take center stage, though more dynamic use of the space could have heightened the visual interest.

The technical elements of the production played a pivotal role in bringing *The Oresteia* to life. The scene design, led by **Spencer Brown** and executed with precision by the scene shop crew, embraced a minimalist approach, which allowed the actors and the narrative to take center stage. The set consisted of a raised platform, with stark, geometric lines that evoked a sense of both ancient austerity and modern abstraction. This design choice effectively conveyed the timelessness of the story while remaining flexible enough to serve the varied needs of the three distinct parts of the play.

Lighting, designed by **Maddie Keil**, was especially impactful in enhancing the atmosphere and emphasizing the dramatic shifts in tone. The use of shadows, especially in the scenes involving the Furies, was particularly effective in adding an aura of menace and foreboding. Keil's lighting choices allowed for quick transitions between moments of domestic tension, the larger communal justice of the Chorus, and the deep existential questions raised by the gods and the Furies. The interplay between light and shadow not only served the practical purposes of scene changes but also underscored the play's darker themes, such as vengeance, justice, and fate.

The sound design, under the direction of **Griffin Irish**, further heightened the atmosphere, with occasional booming sound effects that punctuated key moments of the story. The sounds of footsteps, particularly in the haunting scenes with Clytemnestra, were amplified, creating an eerie sense of inevitability. While the sound effects were impactful, there were moments when the transition from silence to loud sound felt slightly jarring. A more gradual escalation in sound intensity could have further amplified the emotional tension.

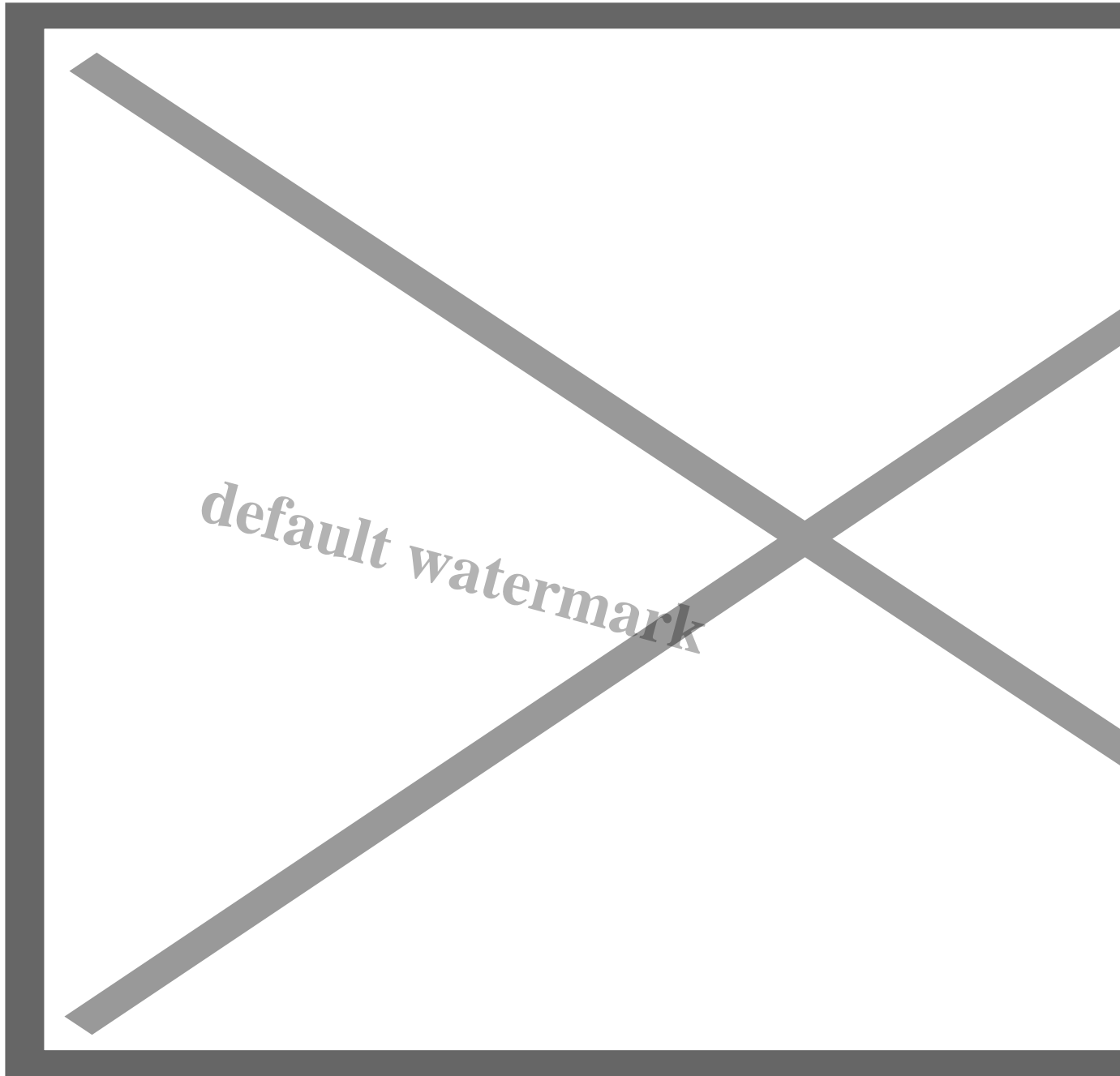
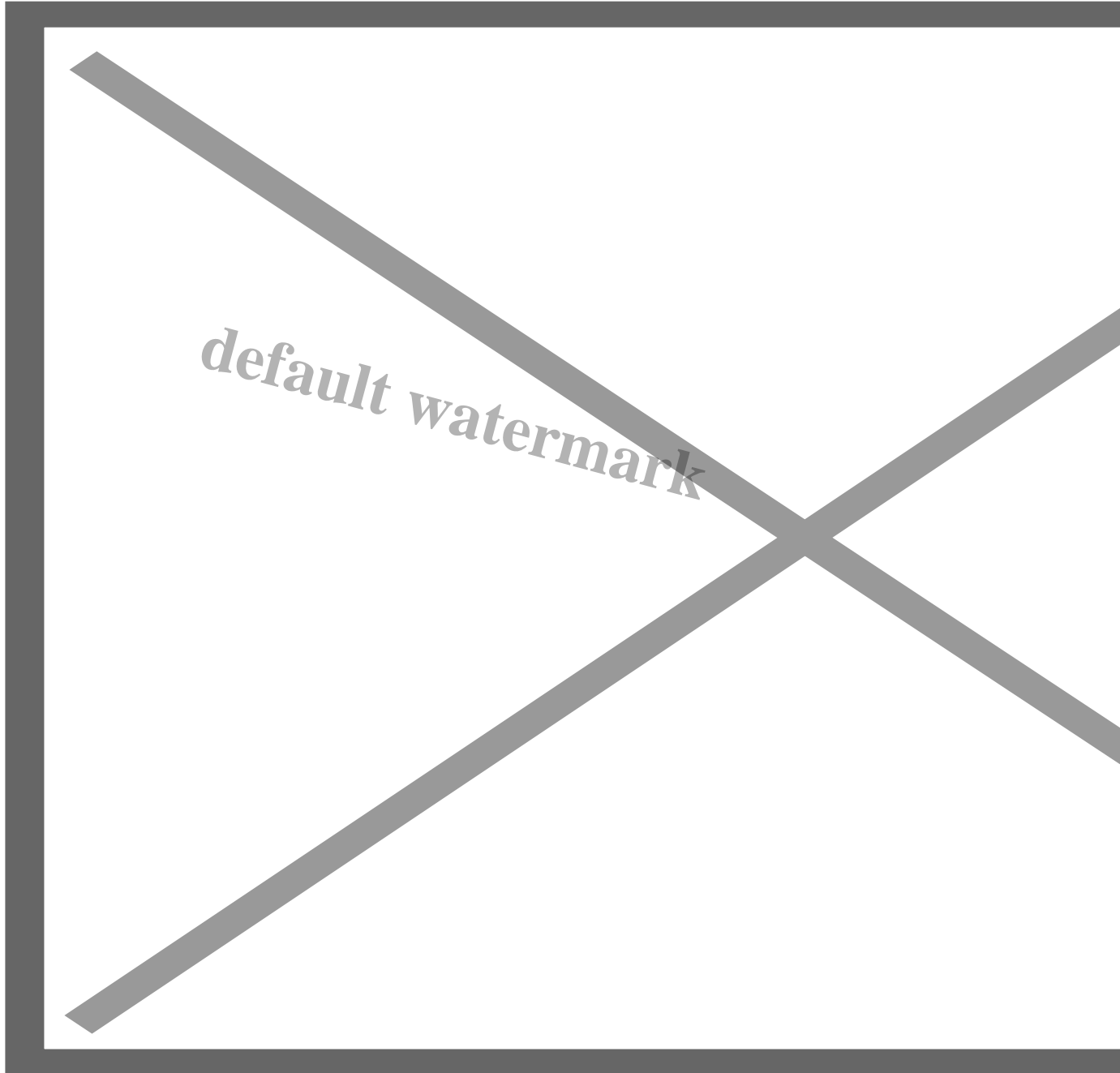


Photo Credit: Doug Carter

Costume design, managed by **Andrea Benson Davenport** and executed by the costume shop technicians (**Sofia Nyquist, Katherine Larson, El Patterson, Trinity Medina**), was subtle yet effective. The costumes reflected the characters's roles within the tragedy, with Electra's garments being notably simple yet disheveled, a visual cue to her fractured emotional state. Agamemnon's costume was designed with a regal but aged appearance, emphasizing his once-powerful status, while Clytemnestra's attire was both imposing and regal, signaling her complex role as both a victim and avenger. The color palette throughout the costumes leaned heavily on muted earth tones with occasional flashes of red and gold, which served to highlight moments of violence and power.

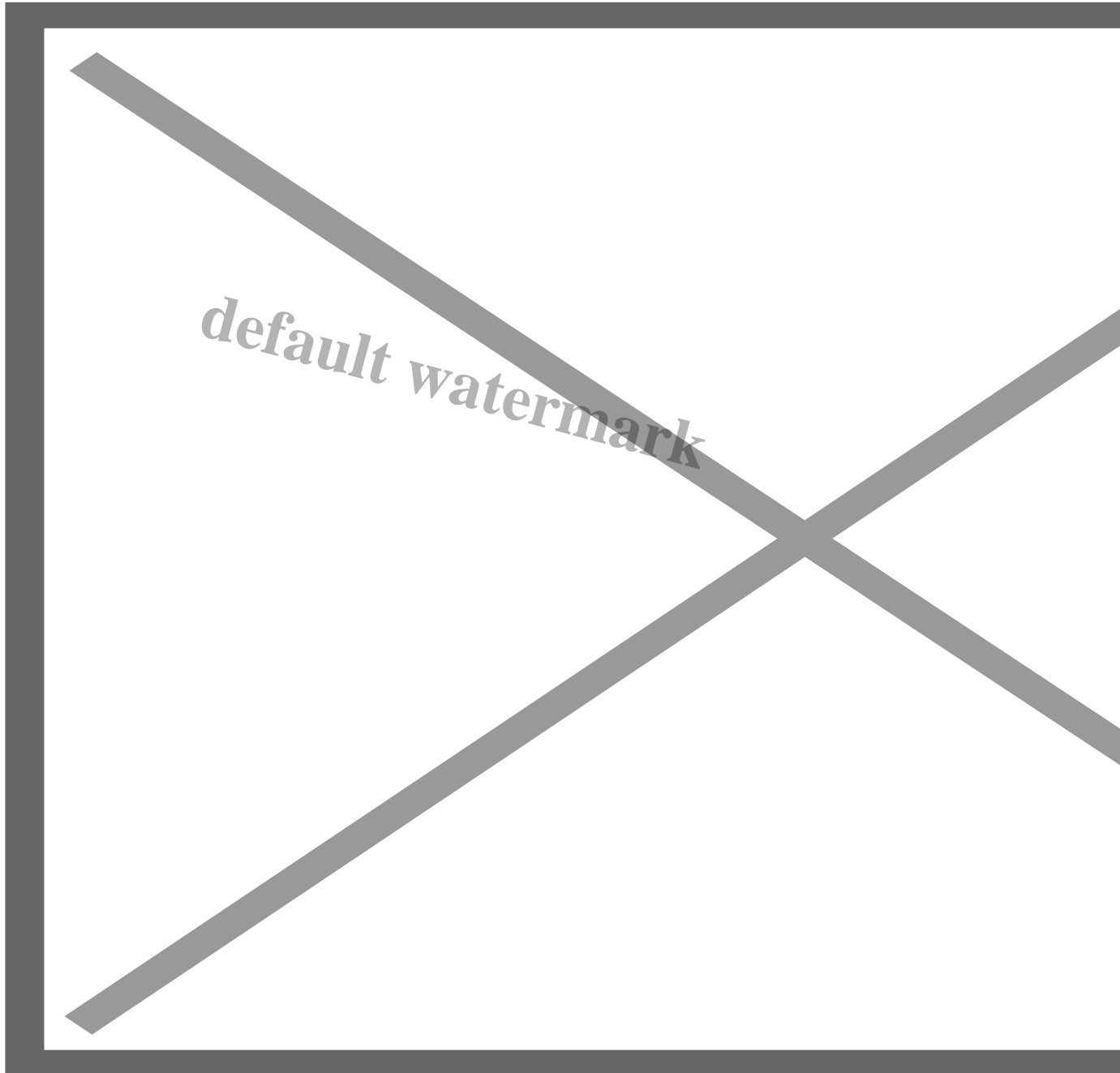
Using fabric for the columns was not only effective but also a stroke of genius in the set design. The decision to construct the columns from fabric allowed for a dynamic and haunting transformation of the space, enhancing the supernatural elements of the production. This design choice directly contributed to what I found to be the most impactful aspect of the play: the Furies.



Furies (Myranda Lloyd, Center) and Athena (Olivia Solomone), Photo Credit: Doug Carter

We are first introduced to the Furies after (**spoiler ahead**) Orestes kills his mother, and their entrance is masterfully executed during a blackout. Because the columns are made of fabric, the Furies—dressed in black, with tar-like makeup and elongated black claws—are able to emerge from within them, as if they are materializing from the very structure of the stage itself with lights illuminating them. This visual moment is striking, as it gives the impression that the Furies have been lurking within the space all

along, waiting for the right moment to reveal themselves, but only are visible to those they decide to haunt. The effect is chilling, as their sudden appearance blurs the line between the physical and the spectral, reinforcing their role as relentless, inescapable forces of vengeance. The interplay between light, shadow, and the fabric columns creates an eerie, almost dreamlike atmosphere, making their introduction one of the most visually and thematically powerful moments in the play.



The Furries (Myranda Lloyd, Katherine Larson, and Karina Barnes) Photo Credit: Doug Carter

The technical aspects of *The Oresteia* were well-executed, complementing the actors's performances and the thematic elements of the play. The lighting, sound, and costume design were integral in creating the immersive world of ancient Greece while allowing for a contemporary resonance. The

scene design, although minimalist, worked effectively to highlight the emotional and philosophical depth of the story, providing a visually compelling backdrop for the tragedy's unfolding.

Talkback Insights

Following the performance, the post-show talkback provided valuable insights into the adaptation process and the production's impact. Director and playwright, Casillas, discussed the challenges of condensing *The Oresteia* while maintaining narrative clarity, explaining, "The challenge was knowing that we were aiming for an evening-length production. There were going to be really heavy cuts to the text." He further noted that many traditional choral odes, while beautiful, were cut due to their lack of relevance to modern audiences, stating, "They are referencing things that modern audiences don't and won't understand."

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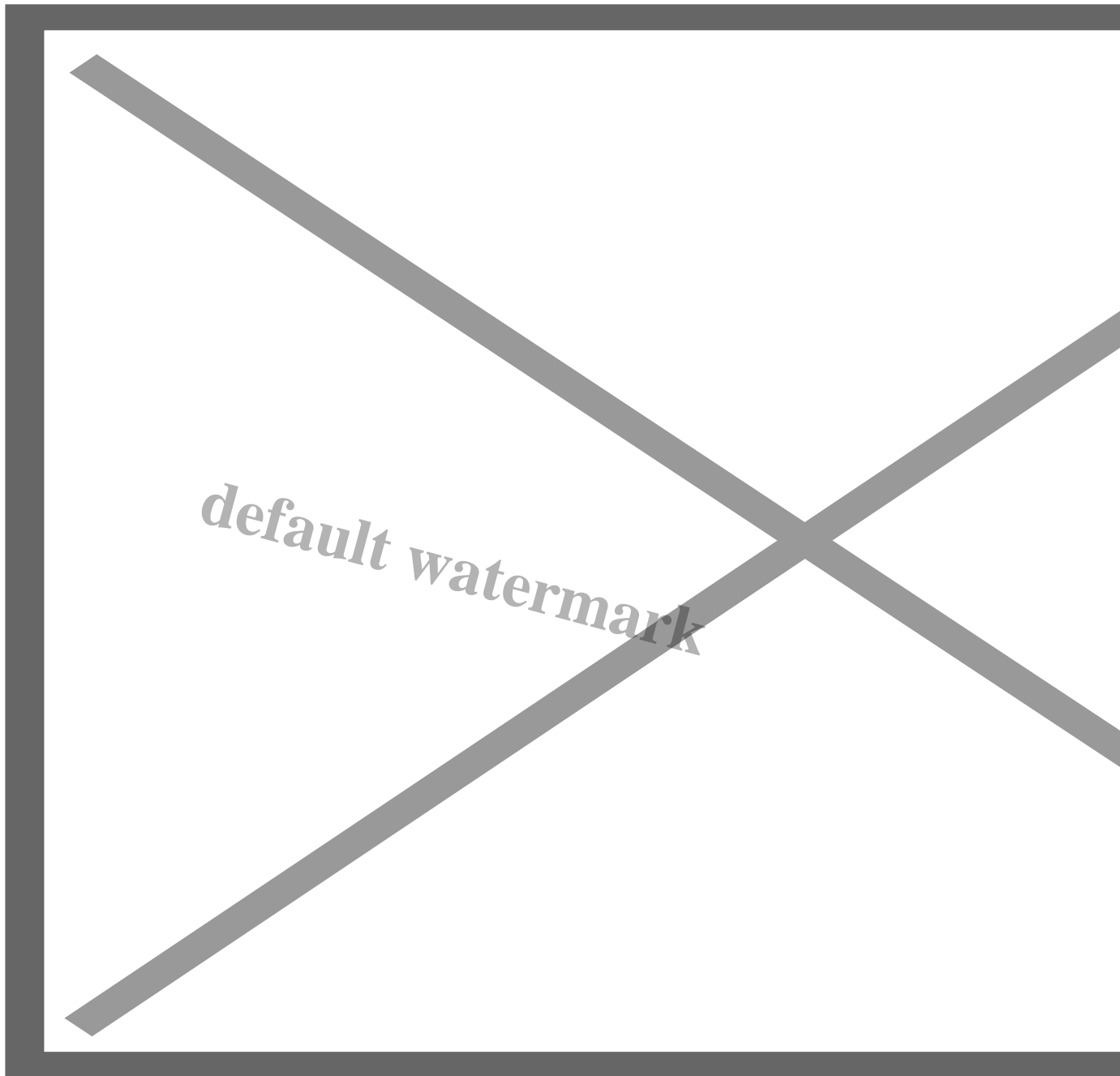


Photo Credit: Doug Carter

A key theme that emerged during the discussion was the relevance of *The Oresteia* in today's world. One cast member noted, "Unfortunately, themes of revenge-based justice are still incredibly relevant. We see cycles of retribution playing out in political and social conflicts today." Another actor emphasized the play's exploration of justice systems, adding, "This play is fascinating because it presents a law-based justice system as superior to revenge-based justice, but at the same time, we see that not everyone in the story feels like they have gotten true justice."

The talkback ultimately reinforced the power of Greek tragedy to resonate with modern audiences. One audience member remarked, "The struggles of these characters—family loyalty, the weight of vengeance, and the search for justice—feel just as relevant today as they must have thousands of

years ago.â?•

Standout Performances

One of the highlights of this production was witnessing seasoned actors and retired educators, such as **Richard Scharine** and **Barbara Smith**, interacting with student actors. It was heartwarming to see the collective talent and years of experience shared on stage in support of Greek theatre, students, and the arts. During the post-show talkback, many actors mentioned that this was their first time performing alongside non-student actors, and they found the experience incredibly valuable. They described the shared discoveries, particularly within the choral group, as â??magical,â?• noting how the collective effort enhanced the impact of their performance.

Casillas highlighted how all the actors, regardless of experience, were on the same playing field during the performance, fostering an environment where everyone could learn from one another. This blend of veteran and student actors enriched the overall experience, promoting a sense of unity and mutual growth.

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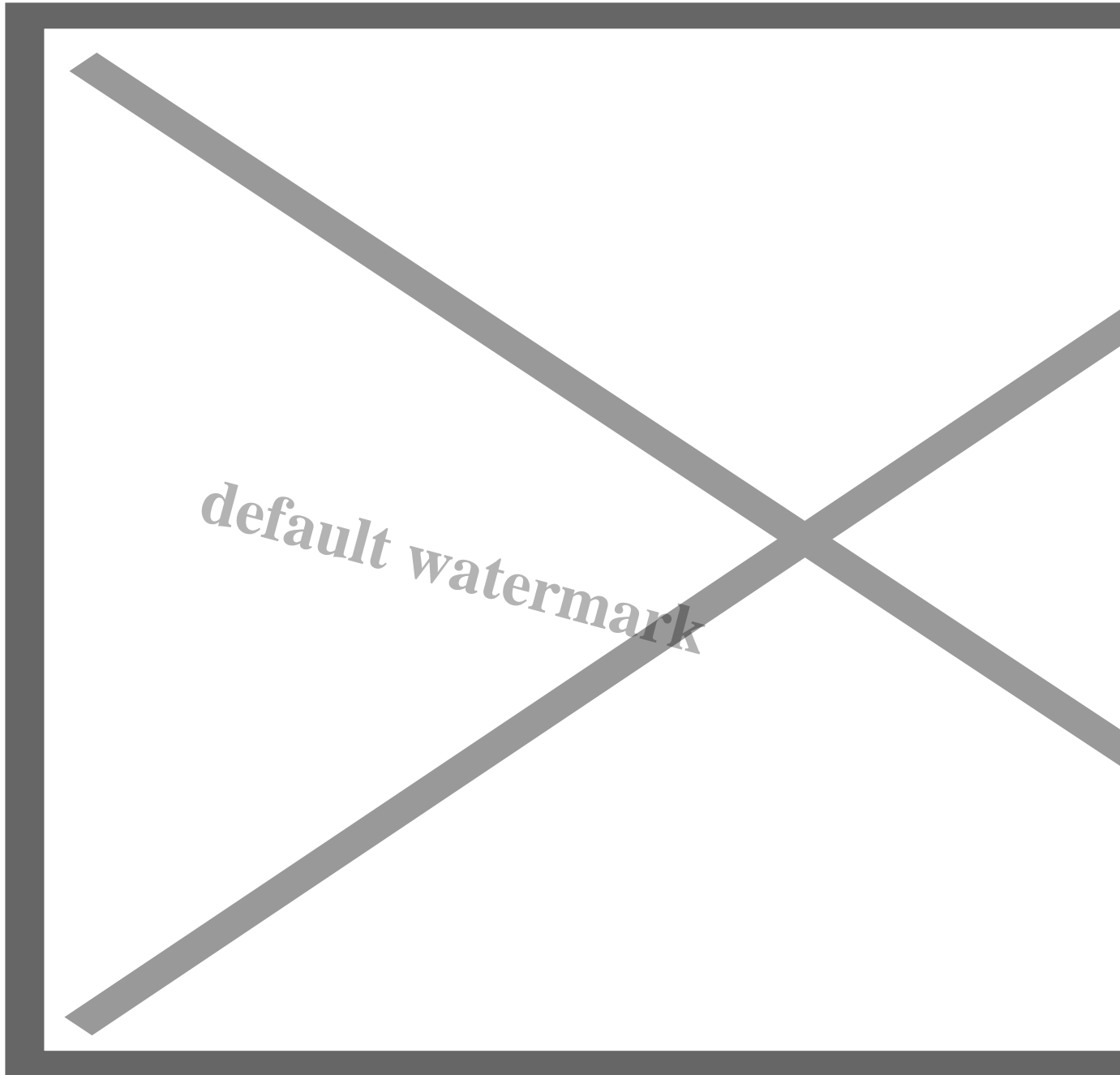
Cast 1

Actors reflected on how this collaboration deepened their understanding of the craft. One student shared, “For many of us, it was our first time acting with someone who wasn’t a student, and that brought a whole new dynamic. Suddenly, you’re acting opposite someone with years of experience, and it really changes the way you approach the role.”

Students also spoke about how working in this new genre challenged them: “I think it’s fair to say that for some of us, just making it through the performance without losing ourselves completely was a victory,” one said. “But honestly, there was so much to learn from each other in the process, and that was what kept us grounded.”

Another student reflected, “It felt like a real challenge, but also really rewarding. We had to adapt and compromise, especially when working with such a diverse group, but that’s how we survived intact. Every time we were all in the same space, it just made it that much stronger.”

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Richard Scharine, Photo Credit: Doug Carter

Richard Scharine’s portrayal of the Watchman/Chorus/Juror brings a grounded presence to the production. As the Watchman, Scharine sets the tone for the play’s opening with a quiet but palpable tension, his watchful eye embodying the sense of impending doom. In the Chorus and as a Juror, Scharine’s vocal clarity and rhythm contribute to the collective voice of the play, grounding the larger narrative within the community’s perspective. His steady presence throughout the performance helps anchor the unfolding drama.

Barbara Smith’s portrayal of Cilissa is a standout moment in the production. Her role as Cilissa adds a layer of maternal concern and vulnerability.

Todd Hamlett's portrayal of Aegisthus brought a sharp, calculating edge to the character, embodying the treacherous nature of this figure in Greek tragedy. Hamlett's performance captured Aegisthus' manipulation and self-serving ambition, highlighting his role as both an instigator and a pawn in the web of familial conflict. His delivery of lines was precise, creating an unsettling presence that lingered even after his scenes.

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Cast 2

Varlo Davenport's expressive face and physicality help bring the Chorus to life, with each movement and gesture adding depth to the collective experience. As a Juror, Davenport contributes a sense of objectivity and judgment, grounding the audience in the weight of the decisions being made by the characters.

Jase Perkins's portrayal of Orestes captures the internal conflict and emotional depth of the character with remarkable precision. Perkins' delivery is powerful yet vulnerable, allowing the audience to feel Orestes' torment as he grapples with duty, guilt, and the complexities of vengeance. His nuanced performance brings a modern sensibility to the ancient figure, making Orestes' struggles relatable while maintaining the gravitas of the original text.

Olivia Solomone's portrayal of Athena is equally captivating, bringing a commanding presence and grace to the role. Solomone seamlessly embodies Athena's wisdom and strength, balancing her divine authority with a sense of compassion and fairness. Her performance elevates the character, making Athena not just a figure of power, but also a guiding force for resolution and reconciliation.

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Cast 3

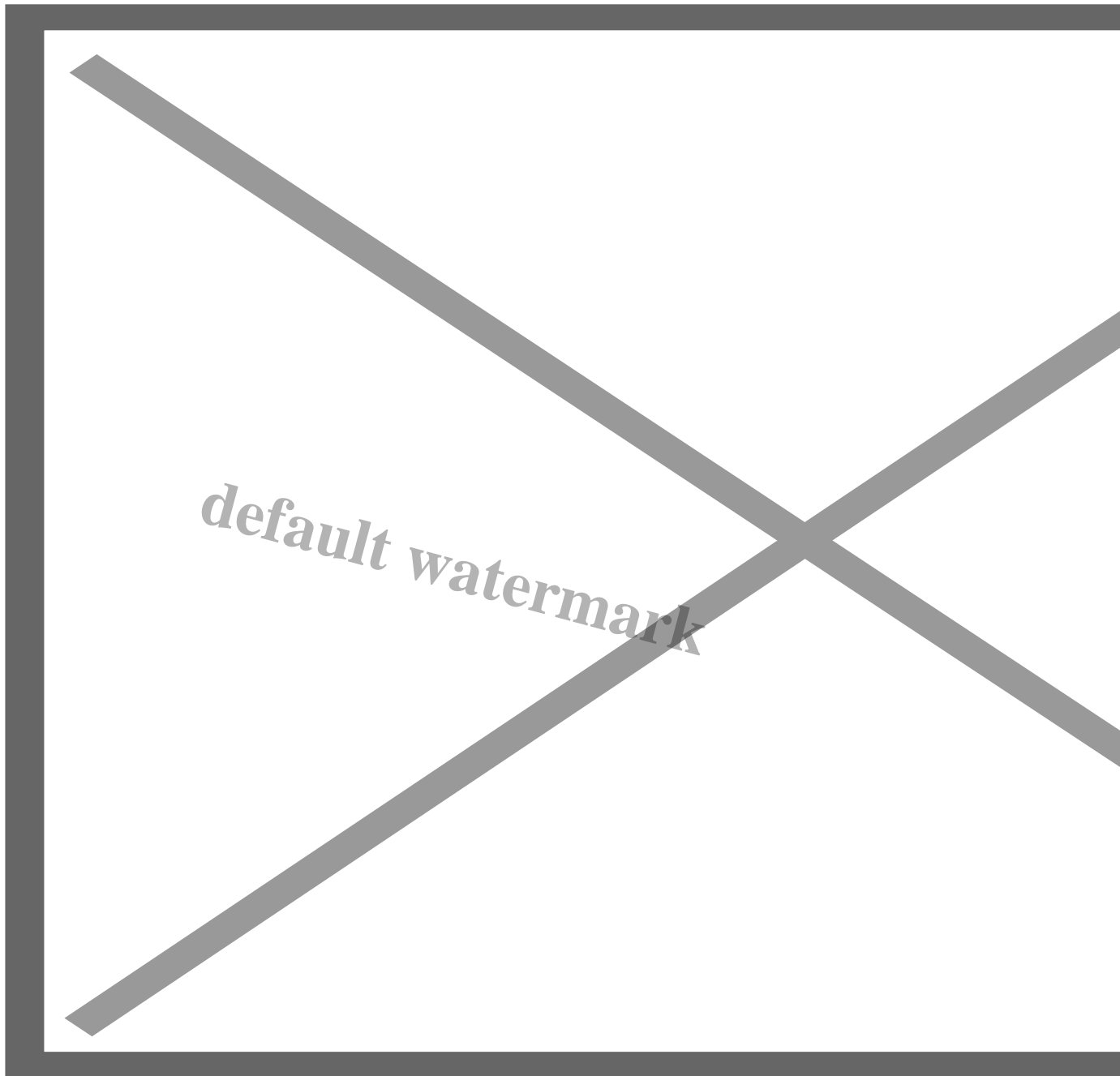
Jayrod P. Garrett's portrayal of Agamemnon commands attention, capturing the gravitas of the fallen king. Garrett's ability to evoke both the nobility and moral ambiguity of Agamemnon's character adds layers to the production. His interactions with other characters, particularly during moments of conflict, are charged with dramatic tension.

Sonia Martiza Inoa-Rosado Maughan's Clytemnestra is resolute and commanding, exuding strength and determination in her portrayal.

Madisen Hone as Cassandra brings intensity, effectively conveying Cassandra's tragic fate as a seer who is condemned to never be believed.

Noah Schiffman's portrayal of Apollo is a standout moment in the production. With a charismatic presence, Schiffman embodies Apollo's divine power and charm while infusing the character with a sense of complexity. His performance strikes a balance between the god's authority and his more human traits, making Apollo both formidable and relatable. Schiffman's confident delivery and poised physicality bring a dynamic energy to the stage, and his interactions with the other characters are charged with both grace and intensity. His portrayal adds a layer of divine intervention to the narrative, enhancing the larger themes of fate and justice in the play.

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Betty Kalunga and Jase Perkins

When **Betty Kalunga** enters the stage as Electra, the mood of the play shifts, and after a somewhat rough start, the show completely transforms. Kalunga’s emotional depth and skill as an actress are immediately apparent. Her portrayal of Electra brings a raw, vulnerable energy to the production, especially during her grief over her father’s death. Kalunga connects with the audience on a deeply emotional level, her tears for Agamemnon’s loss leaving a lasting impact. Her performance brings a fresh and accessible lens to a role that is traditionally hard for audiences to relate to, and she is undoubtedly one of the standout performers of the evening.

Elliott Payne’s dual role as the Herald and Hermes was striking, with each character bringing a distinct energy to the stage. As the Herald, Payne conveyed the weight of news, often with a sense of

formality and authority that added gravity to his announcements. As Hermes, however, Payne displayed a lighter, more fluid energy, embracing the role of messenger and mediator between gods and mortals with charm and wit.

Ian Fulwider as Pylades provides a calm demeanor and unwavering commitment to Orestes create a strong bond between the two characters, embodying the deep friendship and moral support that defines Pylades's role.

Arabella Martin as the Prophetess, carries the weight of prophecy, offering glimpses into the tragic fate awaiting the characters. Her physicality and vocal delivery bring an eerie quality to her role.

The Furies (Myranda Lloyd, Katherine Larson, and Karina Barnes) and Athena (Olivia Solomone), Photo Credit: Doug Carter

A special shoutout to the Furies (**Myranda Lloyd, Katherine Larson, and Karina Barnes**) whose haunting presence adds significantly to the production. Their portrayal of these vengeful spirits is nothing short of mesmerizing, as they embody the unyielding power of retribution and the weight of ancient justice. The physicality and intensity they bring to the stage elevate the atmosphere, and their eerie chants and movements add a chilling dimension to the drama. The Furies's performance truly embodies the raw, unstoppable force of vengeance, creating an unforgettable moment in the production. Their energy is essential to the tension that pulses through the play, making their scenes some of the most captivating of the evening.

Critique and Final Thoughts

While the adaptation successfully made *The Oresteia* more digestible for modern audiences, it did so at the cost of some of the trilogy's depth. The moral and philosophical debates that Aeschylus intricately weaves into the fabric of the play were present but not as deeply explored as they could have been. Additionally, some of the performances, while strong, leaned towards a contemporary style that occasionally felt at odds with the grandeur of Greek tragedy.

The Furies were by far the most compelling aspect of this production for me. However, I felt that the production as a whole was too much to take in during a single sitting. I would love to see it scaled down to focus solely on the middle section's *Choephoroi (Libation Bearers)* ending just as the Furies are introduced, before they speak.

To me, this moment delivers the most powerful message: those who choose to kill are always cursed. In the full production, Orestes ultimately escapes his fate too easily—everyone does. Casillas stated that his guiding question in adapting this tragedy was, *Who truly benefits from this system of justice?* Based on how his trilogy concludes, the answer seems to be: those with connections. But if the play were to end at the moment the Furies arrive, the message would shift—no one benefits. The curse of violence remains inescapable.

Nevertheless, the Classical Greek Theatre Festival remains an invaluable institution in keeping these ancient works alive. The commitment to making Greek theatre accessible and engaging is commendable, and this production of *The Oresteia* was a testament to the enduring power of Aeschylus's vision. With slight refinements in pacing, character depth, and choral coordination, future

adaptations could strike an even more compelling balance between brevity and thematic richness.

CAST

CLYTEMNESTRA Sonia Martiza Inoa-Rosado Maughan

AGAMEMNON, JUROR Jayrod P. Garrett

WATCHMAN, CHORUS, JUROR Richard Scharine

CHORUS, JUROR Varlo Davenport

CHORUS, CILISSA, JUROR Barbara Smith

CASSANDRA, CHORUS, JUROR Madisen Hone

AEGISTHUS, JUROR Todd Hamlett

HERALD, CHORUS, SOLDIER, HERMES Elliott Payne

CHORUS, ATHENA Olivia Solomone-Hala

CHORUS, SOLDIER, APOLLO Noah Schiffman

ELECTRA, JUROR Betty Kalunga

SOLDIER, ORESTES Jase Perkins

CHORUS, PYLADES, JUROR Ian Fulwider

ATTENDANT, CHORUS, FURY Myranda Lloyd

ATTENDANT, CHORUS, FURY Katherine Larson

ATTENDANT, CHORUS, FURY Karina Barnes

CHORUS, PROPHETESS, JUROR Arabella Martin

Acknowledgments

- **Theatre Program Co-Chairs:** Spencer Potter, Stephanie Stroud
- **Technical Director:** Spencer Brown
- **Costume Shop Manager:** Andrea Benson Davenport
- **Assistant Technical Director:** Griffin Irish
- **Graphic Designer:** Michael Yount
- **Master Electrician and Student Assistant Technical Director:** Maddie Keil
- **Performing Arts Office Manager:** Summer Spence
- **Performing Arts Patron Service and Outreach Manager:** Irene Loy
- **Marketing Assistant:** Chloe Mizantzidi
- **Build Crew:** Madison Hill, Maddie Kiel, Austin Ray

- **Costume Shop Technicians:** Sofia Nyquist, Katherine Larson, El Patterson, Trinity Medina
- **Scene Shop Technicians:** Madison Hill, Joshua Jacobsen, Maddie Keil, Austin Ray, Charlotte Gordon

Show Information

- **Dates:** February 28 – March 8, 2025
- **Showtimes:**
 - Thursdays: 7:30 PM
 - Fridays: 7:30 PM
 - Saturdays: 7:30 PM
- **Tickets:** \$5-15, tickets General Admission
- ***Free Admission*** for K-12 and local university students (with student ID)
- **Phone:** (801) 832-2457
- **Email:** performingarts@westminsteru.edu
- **Website:** <https://westminsteru.edu/tickets>
- **Contact:** classicalgreektheatreutah.com, 801-555-1234
- **Venue:** Dumke Student Theater, Emma Eccles Jones Conservatory
- Directions go to <https://westminsteru.edu/student-life/events-and-performances/performing-arts-events/performing-arts-visitor-information.html>
- **Run Time:** 90 minutes, no intermission

Accessibility Performances:

- For more details: Classical Greek Theatre Accessibility Info
 - <https://westminsteru.edu/student-life/events-and-performances/performing-arts-events/performing-arts-visitor-information.html>
 - Visit the **Classical Greek Theatre Festival Archive page here:** <https://vimeo.com/showcase/8792042>

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