

THE 324 | Greek Beats: The Hidden Rhythm of Ancient Theatre Spring 2025

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Course Description

This course offers a rhythmical and kinetic approach to Ancient Greek Drama through a contemporary lens. Behind everything lies rhythm and movement—a vivid code that keeps the world in motion. The course consists of 24 practical classes (divided into two sections) inspired by Ancient Drama, exploring the functions of rhythm and movement—and thereby Time and Space—within a group of individuals. Two instructors from the Athens Conservatoire will guide participants through simple steps to gradually connect with what we call “the present body.” This process will raise awareness not only of aspects of one’s physicality but also of concepts like togetherness, collaboration, tuning in, active participation, and more. The course is designed for everyone, regardless of skills or background in music, dance, or theater, who wishes to experience an alternative way of learning that can contribute to a deeper understanding of theoretical concepts applicable to other fields.

Course Approach

Part 1: Geometry in Body & Space

This kinetic course will focus on the use of space and the symbolic dimension of movement in the Chorus of ancient drama. Through physical practices, we will explore the relationships between group members, the boundaries of autonomy or free will, and the extent to which these are distinguishable within a unanimous ensemble. We will examine how collective decisions are made and how they are reflected in the bodies and geometry of space. What is the power of a straight line, the inclusivity of a semicircle, the secrecy of a circle? How do these forms differ between Tragedy and Comedy? Additionally, we will seek ways to dramatize movement and how to transition from more personal or imitative movement to one that carries symbolic power.

Part 2: Rhythmic and Ancient Theatre: The Hidden Dance of the Ancient Greek Metrical System

The second part of the course will invite students to an exploration of ancient Greek rhythmical patterns, appearing since the Homeric period as a holistic system where the metric followed rules more broadly applied to other medias: dance, music, architecture, mathematics, weaving etc. Selected samples extracted from the Greek classical literature (poetry, tragedy and comedy) will be proposed after being transformed into rhythmical scores so as to further translate them into somatic practices allowing us to structure Space, Time and group dynamic in a performative intention. The evidence of ancient Greek metric as being related to the Vedic poetry will offer the occasion to open our practice to the rhythmical aspect of Indian classical music and its counting system, extracting practical tools such as phonetic enunciation, cyclical structures, phrasing. The transversal approach of the workshop will give the opportunity to draw elements from traditional dances (both folk and classical), but will also invite to contextualize them, the goal being, starting from those elements, to create a kinetic matter that resonates with our contemporaneity, both at a collective and personal level.

Learning Objectives

- A solid introduction to ancient drama and its core principles.
- Development of skills related to kinesthetic practices.
- Enhancement of critical thinking through practical application.
- Skills in group dynamics: learning how to find one’s role within a group while contributing to its overall harmony and effectiveness.
- Improved attention, concentration, and decision-making abilities in the present moment (“here and now”).
- Increased awareness of the benefits of artistic practices as a means of developing skills applicable to various professional fields.
- Overall, this course provides an opportunity to acquire knowledge related to artistic practices while fostering personal development through constructive self-observation and the observation of others within a collective setting.

Course Requirements

Evaluation and Grading

Attendance and Participation 20%

(which includes: Enthusiasm/Openness, Comprehension)

Midterm quiz 15%

An assignment will be given to the students, requiring them to connect the experiential process of the course to their main field of study. 35%

Journal at the end of each session, noting keywords, thoughts, and ideas, from which a presentation will be developed at the end of the course. Each participant will free to choose the media of the presentation (essay, short lecture, video, drawings, etc.). 30 %

Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments

Check scoring rubrics on the course's moodle page

CYA Regulations and Accommodations

Attendance Policy

CYA regards attendance in class and on-site (in Athens or during field study trips) as essential. Absences are recorded and have consequences.

ePolicy on Original Work

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

Use of Laptops

In-class or onsite use of laptops and other devices is permitted if this facilitates course-related activities such as note-taking, looking up references, etc. Laptop or other device privileges will be suspended if devices are not used for class-related work.

Class Schedule

Part 1

1. Group relationships and Dynamics

Exploring the relations among the members of a group, through practical exercises which enhance the awareness, the coordination, the synchronization and the feeling of trust within the group

2. Time

Playing with time and its different qualities. Getting in touch with basic rhythm patterns and musical meters

3. Dionysian vs Apollonian

A set of guided improvisations exploring the oppositions between the Dionysian and the Apollonian element in dance

4. Symbolic Gestures (Emmelia)

Learning how to silently narrate stories through hand gestures and how to transform simple, every-day movements of the hands and arms to highly charged symbolic actions

5. Parodos-Exodos

Searching ways of entering and exiting the theatrical stage

6. The Circle (and the semi-circle)

Moving within the unity of a circle, building rhythmical walking patterns that reflect the strong connection between Ancient Greek Drama and the traditional Greek dances (folk). Noting similarities and differences of the circle and the semi-circle

7. The Lines

Exploring the power, the immediacy and the firmness of straight lines and rectangular shapes in space

8. Guest instructor from the drama school

9. Roles of the chorus in famous tragedies

Investigating how the unique characteristics of a specific social group can reflect on the performers' body and movement

10. Martha Graham's relation to ancient Greek tragedy

Video projection of Martha Graham's selected works and discussion, preferably after attending a Graham's technique class at the Athens

Conservatoire

11. Tragedy vs Comedy

Time to laugh, mock and tease...

In search of the freedom and the grotesque qualities of the Athenian Comedy

12. Closure

Assignment's presentation, discussion and feedback

Part 2

13. Introduction

Preparing our individual and our collective body. Energizing the space using voice practices, gestures, movement and rhythm.

Introduction in Orchestis – Transcribing spoken word into rhythmic score and movement.

14. Homeric Hexameter and traditional Greek Dances.

Introduction of the repetitive movements performed in circle and in unison

Creating our own movement score

15. Dionysian and Apollonian

Creating a kinetic proposal and exploring through the same material the qualities of each style and its meanings

16. The birth of tragedy.

Dual nature with Dionysian and Apollonian elements.

Comparative study of rhythmic characteristics (text excerpts and musical translation).

Delve deeper in spoken verses of the choral parts.

17. Tragic Dramaturgy

Understanding and playing with the elements of the tragic dramaturgy.

Exploring and reconstructing space and time in the classic tragedy scheme: prologue, chorus, entry, episode, and exit.

18. Guest instructor from Drama School

19-20. The birth of comedy.

Exploring the kinetic and rhythmic language of comedy through excerpts of classical texts.

Playing with the elements of comedy and reconstructing them within the scenic time and space.

21-22. Dance in Greek antiquity

Exploring dance genres (Pyrrhic dances, satyr dances, procession dances etc) in prehistoric and ancient cultures of Greece.

Following their traces to the modern times, finding connections with folk dances (Cretan dances, Pontic dances of the Black Sea) reconstructing them and creating new material in the same contexts

23-24. Closing, Presentation, Discussion

N.B.: The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and to keep up to date with current research.

COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The dictionary of Hindustani classical music, Bimalakanta Roychaudhuri, 2017

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