

## THE 324 | Greek Beats: The Hidden Rhythm Of Ancient Theater

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*Upon request and by prior arrangement, we will be available to meet with students up to half an hour before or after classes.*

### **Course Description**

This kinetic and interdisciplinary course explores the intersections of rhythm, movement, and language within the performative traditions of Greek culture. Drawing on selected texts from ancient Greek drama, participants will transform these literary materials into rhythmical scores and somatic practices, using them to investigate how space, time, and group dynamics can be shaped through embodied performance.

Central to the course is the exploration of the Chorus in ancient drama as a model for collective presence, perception and action. Through physical exercises and spatial experimentation, we will question the boundaries between individuality and ensemble, autonomy and unanimity. We will examine how meaning is conveyed through spatial formations—such as lines, circles, and semicircles—and how these differ in Tragedy and Comedy. What symbolic weight do these shapes carry, and how can they dramatize shared action and decision-making?

Complementing this inquiry, we will study traditional Greek music and dance, analyzing their rhythmic patterns, phrasing, and spatial logic to understand their influence on the moving body. By connecting ancient dramatic structures with folk performance practices, we will trace a cultural thread that unites rhythm, spoken word, and gesture across time.

The course will culminate in the collective creation of original material that combines movement, voice, and theatrical expression—bringing historical forms into dialogue with contemporary artistic inquiry.

### **Learning Goals**

- **Study and perform traditional Greek music and dance**, recognizing their rhythmic and spatial structures and their effect on bodily expression.
- **Draw connections between ancient Greek drama and Greek folk traditions**, identifying shared cultural, rhythmic, and performative elements.
- **Reflect critically on ensemble dynamics**, spatial relationships, and the balance between individual and collective action in performance-making.
- **Analyze and embody the function of the Chorus** in ancient drama, exploring its role in expressing collective voice, movement, and symbolic presence.
- **Translate literary content into somatic practice**, creating rhythmical and spatial scores that inform embodied performance.
- **Collaborate in the creation of original performance material**, integrating movement, voice, and theatrical expression rooted in historical and cultural research.

### **What Students Should Consider Before Choosing This Course**

- **Physical Engagement is Required**  
Expect to move, dance, and use your body actively in every class session—this is not a lecture-based course!
- **No Prior Performance Experience Needed**  
No need for background in theater, dance, or music—but it is essential to be open to learning through doing.
- **Active Class Participation is Essential**  
Presence, energy, and collaboration in class directly influence the students' progress and final grade.
- **The students will Perform Publicly**  
The course ends with a final group performance—be ready to contribute and be seen as part of an ensemble.
- **Creative and Reflective Writing is Part of the Work**  
Students will be asked to maintain a course diary that combines critical reflection and creative exploration; this is a major part of the final grade.
- **Thematic Content Can Be Emotionally Intense**  
Students must be prepared to engage with themes like death, trauma, and conflict, and contribute to a respectful classroom environment.

### **Working Method in the Classroom**

In this course, students will engage in two primary modes of work: **collective work** as a full class, and **small group work** for composition and creative development. Both modes are essential to the learning process and the creation of a final performance.

#### **Collective Work (Whole Class)**

- Learn and embody movement and vocal material introduced by the instructors.
- Explore themes, structures, and performance techniques drawn from ancient Greek drama.
- Participate in improvisation, ensemble exercises, and text-based explorations.
- Build a shared physical and creative language with the group.
- Reflect on and respond to others' contributions in a respectful and supportive environment.

#### • **Small Group Work (Creative Composition)**

- Collaborate in assigned or self-selected small groups.
- Use material developed in previous classes as the basis for creating short performance compositions.
- Develop, rehearse, and refine original group pieces throughout the semester.
- Present group work for peer and instructor feedback.
- Contribute your ideas and effort equally while respecting the creative input of others.

Both types of work are vital to your growth in this course. Your ability to engage fully, support your peers, and take responsibility for your creative process will directly impact your development and your role in the final performance.

### **Important Note!**

Material created during class—whether through improvisation, movement sequences, text work, or ensemble explorations—may be revisited, developed, and refined throughout the semester. Students are expected to actively engage with past material, as it will serve as a foundation for the final performance project.

### **Evaluation and Grading Percentages**

**15% - 1<sup>st</sup> Assignment - on the topic of the "Chorus"**

**15% - 2<sup>nd</sup> Assignment - on the topic of Dionysian and Apollonian elements**

**15% - Midterm exam - A written exam which will take place in classroom on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**35% - Course Diary**

Students are required to keep an individual class diary throughout the semester, to be completed outside of class time. After *each and every session*, you are expected to reflect on the material covered—both the movement practices and the aspects of ancient Greek drama—and document your personal responses. This is not a summary, but a space for critical reflection: What stood out to you? What challenged you? Did anything resonate with your personal experiences or academic background?

An important part of this assignment is drawing connections between the course content and your major field of study. Each entry should consider whether and how the material might relate to your primary discipline—whether through performance, theory, culture, expression, or other thematic links.

Your diary may include text, sketches, diagrams, or other creative formats, but it should be organized, dated, and show consistent engagement across the semester. It will be submitted at the end of the course and assessed based on regularity, depth of reflection, originality, and ability to relate class experiences to broader academic or personal contexts.

Your **class diary** will also play a key role in the developmental process of the given material. You are encouraged to use it to document your own creative choices, track the evolution of specific ideas or scenes, and reflect on how early material grows or shifts over time. Demonstrating this through-line—how your work deepens and connects across the weeks—will strengthen both your diary and your contribution to the final performance.

**20% - Final Performance** – This course will culminate in a **final collective performance** which will be the final exam, taking place on December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2025 and it will be built on a cumulative creative process. The final performance will not be built from scratch at the end of the semester, but will emerge gradually from ideas, scenes, and physical tasks explored in earlier sessions. For this reason, continuity, regular attendance, and personal investment in the ongoing process are essential.

### **Midterm grade**

**Mid-term grades will be calculated based on:**

- Overall academic performance in the first half of the semester.
- The first two assignments.
- The mid term exam grade.
- Attendance and active participation will also be evaluated.

**Evaluation Criteria - Course Assignments**

**Policy on Assignments and Make-up Work**

Details about assignments and exams will be given in advance. We will accept no late assignments or make-up exams unless discussed with me in advance. If you are unable to come to class, please let us know beforehand. Illness or other such compelling reasons which result in absences should be reported immediately to the Student Affairs Office, via the form available in the Student Portal.

**Trigger Warning & Respectful Class Environment**

Please be aware that some of the material we will be working with in this course—particularly in relation to ancient Greek drama—may include themes such as violence, death, trauma, gender dynamics, and emotional conflict. While these themes are part of the historical and cultural context of the works, they can be emotionally intense or triggering for some individuals. If at any point you feel overwhelmed or need to step away, please feel free to do so and reach out afterward if you would like to discuss accommodations or support.

In our movement and performance-based sessions, there may also be emotionally vulnerable moments, as well as moments of humor, improvisation, and creative risk. These experiences are a valuable and natural part of collaborative artistic work. As such, it is essential that we treat each other with **mutual respect, empathy, and confidentiality**. Everyone's participation and expression must be supported in a nonjudgmental space.

Respecting the process—both your own and your classmates'—is a fundamental ground rule of this course.

**Disrespectful behavior, ridicule, or any breach of this trust will not be tolerated.**

**Use of Laptops**

The **use of laptops/tablets/mobile phones is not permitted during class**. Students are required to take notes by hand. Laptops may only be used for note-taking only by students whose academic accommodations require so.

**Taking notes by hand** is encouraged throughout the course and will be positively considered as part of your overall evaluation. So, **please bring your notebooks** to every session.

\*This course is taught by two instructors who will lead sessions individually. However, in some sessions, both instructors may be present to provide enhanced guidance and collaborative support.

**SYLLABUS**

Sessi on #	Topic / Readings / Assignments Due /
1	<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri &amp; Eleni Kastanioti</i> ) Initial meeting of the group with both professors, including an overview of the course and a discussion of expectations. Establishment of ground rules.
2	<b><u>GROUP RELATIONSHIPS &amp; DYNAMICS</u></b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> ) Exploring the relations among the members of a moving group through practical exercises which enhance awareness, coordination, synchronization and the feeling of trust within a group.
3	<b><u>FROM THE ANCIENT CHORUS TO COMMUNITY DANCES</u></b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> ) This first session introduces the foundational idea of the course: the continuity between ancient Greek drama and traditional Greek culture, with a focus on the role of collective movement and rhythm. We will trace the historical emergence of tragedy from ritual and communal performance, and explore how its core elements — chorus, rhythm, space, and voice — live on in the communal circle dances of Greek tradition. Students will engage with both historical material and embodied practice, setting the stage for the experiential dramaturgical journey ahead.
4	<b><u>TIME</u></b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> ) Playing physically with time and its different qualities. Getting in touch with note values, basic rhythmic patterns and musical meters.
5	<b><u>INTRODUCTION TO GREEK DANCE TRADITIONS</u></b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> ) An overview of Greek folk dance as a cultural and historical phenomenon. Students will explore regional differences, basic steps, and the social and geographical context of traditional dances. Includes practice of foundational movements.
6	<b><u>DIONYSIAN VS APOLLONIAN</u></b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> ) Discussion about the Dionysian and the Apollonian elements in art, examples through music and videos and a set of guided physical improvisations exploring the oppositions between the Dionysian and the Apollonian element in dance.
7	<b><u>THE LANGUAGE OF RHYTHM IN GREEK TRADITIONAL RHYTHMOLOGY</u></b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> ) Introduction to the rhythmic structures and time signatures commonly found in Greek traditional music (e.g., 2/4, 7/8, 9/8). We will learn to recognize and internalize rhythmic patterns through clapping, movement, and percussion exercises and improvisation. We will also explore the ancient Greek <i>prosody</i> and its metrical structures (e.g., iambic,

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	trochaic, dactylic meters). Comparison with traditional Greek rhythms to highlight continuity and transformation. Includes spoken and movement-based exercises using ancient texts.
8	<b>TRANSFORMING MOVEMENT INTO EXPRESSION- EXPLORING THE CORE ELEMENTS OF PERFORMANCE</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )
	Using the kinetic and rhythmic material developed in previous sessions, students will begin to explore core elements of performance: presence, spatial intention, timing, dynamics, and audience relationship. Emphasis on refining existing movement through performative awareness.
9	<b>SYMBOLIC GESTURES</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	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.
10	<b>WATCHING A STAGED VERSION OF AN ANCIENT DRAMA (RECORDED)</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )
	In this session, students will watch a staged version of an ancient Greek drama, with a focus on the use of rhythm, movement, and the chorus. The viewing will be followed by group discussion and analysis, drawing connections to the rhythmic structures, choreographic patterns, and performative tools explored in previous sessions. Emphasis will be placed on how ancient material is reinterpreted through contemporary staging.
11	<b>ROLES OF THE CHORUS IN FAMOUS TRAGEDIES</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	Investigating through the lens of ancient tragedy how the unique characteristics of a specific social group can reflect on the performers' body and movement. At this point, alongside the classes and presented material, we begin to focus on specific ancient plays, with the goal of creating a performance to be presented at the end of the semester. In the upcoming sessions, following the delivery of the agreed-upon material, we will start combining scenes developed in each meeting, aiming at the integration of a final performance.
12	<b>MID-TERM EXAMS</b>
13	<b>TRAGEDY VS COMEDY</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	Time to laugh, mock and tease... In search of the freedom and the grotesque qualities of movement in the Athenian Comedy.
14	<b>EXPLORING ANCIENT COMEDY THROUGH PHYSICALITY</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )
	Building on our exploration of the comic spirit in Athenian theatre, this session invites students to engage physically and vocally with selected excerpts from an ancient comedy. *The excerpts will be provided in advance and students are expected to complete the reading prior to the session to maximize active participation and creative exploration.
15	<b>ROLES OF THE CHORUS IN ANCIENT COMEDIES</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	Investigating through the lens of ancient comedy how the unique characteristics of a specific social group can reflect on the performers' body and movement.
16	<b>EMBODIED EXPLORATION OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF ANCIENT GREEK DRAMA</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )
	In this session, students will explore the fundamental structural elements of ancient Greek tragedy — including parodos, episode, stasimon, and exodos — through physical, vocal, and spatial practice. Rather than studying these components only theoretically, students will engage with them experientially, using rhythm, movement, and ensemble work to embody the dramaturgical "architecture" of classical performance through the lens of a selected tragedy, that will be used as a framework to experience and identify these forms in action. * The selected texts will be provided in advance and students are expected to complete the reading prior to the session.
17	<b>PARODOS – EXODOS</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	A look at the architecture of ancient Greek theaters, an understanding of the structure of ancient plays, and an exploration of physical ways to enter and exit the theatrical stage.
18	<b>CREATING THROUGH THE CLASSICS</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )
	In this session, students will collaborate to compose a new theatrical piece using excerpts and elements from the ancient plays studied throughout the course. Drawing on their embodied experience of rhythm, chorus, character, and dramaturgy, they will experiment with reimagining classical text and movement into an original ensemble work. Emphasis will be on creative adaptation, playful experimentation, and collective storytelling.
19	<b>THE CIRCLE (and the semi-circle)</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	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.
20	<b>WEAVING PERSONAL STORIES AND THE CLASSICS</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )
	In this session, students will work in small groups to deepen their creative work by weaving their personal stories with themes and rhythms from the ancient plays studied. Using improvisation as a tool, they will explore how individual experiences can enrich and transform classical material, creating a dynamic interplay between the personal and the timeless.
21	<b>THE LINES</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> )
	Exploring the power, the immediacy and the firmness of straight lines and rectangular shapes in body and space.
22	<b>INTEGRATION AND REFINEMENT</b> ( <i>Eleni Kastanioti</i> )

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	Bringing together the elements explored throughout the course—classical texts, rhythmic movement, improvisation, and personal storytelling—towards a final collective work. The focus will be on polishing ensemble dynamics, deepening dramaturgical coherence, and preparing for a final presentation.
23	<b>LAST CLASS</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri</i> ) Review of the key points of the course, resolution of any remaining questions, general rehearsal of the performance, and corrections.
24	<b>Final Performance</b> ( <i>Iris Fousteri &amp; Eleni Kastanioti</i> ) Delivery of diaries, discussion and feedback.

## **COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Required reading:**

The Structure of Greek Tragedy: An Overview, [kosmosociety.org/the-structure-of-greek#tragedy-an-overview/](http://kosmosociety.org/the-structure-of-greek#tragedy-an-overview/) Richard Schechner (2008). Performance theory, 3rd ed. London, UK: Routledge

Euripides. *Medea*. Translated by Rex Warner. In *Euripides I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955.

Euripides. *The Trojan Women*. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. In *Euripides III*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Aristophanes. *The Birds*. Translated by William Arrowsmith. In *Three Comedies: The Birds, The Clouds, The Wasps*, edited by William Arrowsmith and Douglass Parker, [Ann Arbor]: University of Michigan Press, 1969.

Aristophanes. *The Frogs*. Translated by Richmond Lattimore. In *Four Comedies*, translated by Douglass Parker and Richmond Lattimore. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969.

### **Optional reading:**

The therapeutic function of dance in ancient drama, Mousouraki M., Goulinaris D., Albanidis

E., International Journal of Latest Research in Humanities and Social Science (IJRHSS), Volume 05-Issue 12, 2022 //PP.305-311//

The Concept of Therapy in Ancient Greek Texts & Dance Practices, Lazou A., Annals of Bioethics & Clinical Applications, 2021

The Rhythm of the God's Voice. The Suggestion of Divine Presence through Prosody, Ronald Blankenborg Radboud, Nijmegen university, 2020

The Rhythmic Idea and The Musical Representation of Time, Indionei Carneiro Rodrigues, Goldsmith College University of London, 2019 -<http://danceofthemuses.info>

Rethinking rhythm in language and music: Can duration prime rhythm in metrical speech?, Züheyra Tokaç, BOĞAZIÇI Bogaziçi University, 2019

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Birth of Tragedy*. (transl. Walter Kaufmann, Vintage, 1967)