

SIDE #1: CYBELE

CYBELE

EVOË!

Welcome!

It is good to be with you here this evening.

Tonight we practice the Divine Worship of

Dionysus

Bacchus

Iacchus

The Twice-Born

Once to Semele and, after she was destroyed in a flash of lightening,

Born again

Out of his father Zeus' thigh

Raised by the Nymphs of Mount NYSa

DioNYSus

Bacchus

Iacchus

Eleutherios

The Liberator

The bringer of Wine and Ekstasis

EVOË!

When I say it, you shout it

EVOË!

[Audience response]

[Improv such as, Is that the best you can do? Or, Very nice! Or, Better than last night's! Or, We'll work on that!]

Do you want to join me here tonight

In experiencing this Divine Madness

This Ekstasis?

Do you want to dance

Till the drum of your feet beats holes in the floor

Till the thrum of your limbs shakes down the walls

Till the theatre, this sacred space,

Crumbles into dust

And nothing remains but a memory lodged in the infant brains of your grandchildren—

Do you want to do this with me?

For then and only then

Will the god appear

Dionysus!

SIDE #2: DIONYSUS

DIONYSUS

My people!

MY PEOPLE!

Can I get an EVOË?

Finally

I am here!

I have ARRIVED!

HELLO THEBES!

Dionysus in the HOUSE!

Dionysus in the OIKOS!

Child of Zeus

And of Semele

Grandchild of Cadmus

Midwifed by the lightning flash

God of

Well they gave me Theatre (HELLO) and Wine (I'll take it) and Fertility (You know...)

Can you see the house of my mother

Semele

Still smoldering?

My mother Semele

Punished by Hera

For being the object of Zeus' affection

Struck down

By the borrowed bolt of lightning, with me still writhing in her belly

Struck down

However unfairly

Yet honored in death by Cadmus

Who has made his daughter's home a sacred place

Though it was I who made the beautiful green ivy grow

Around the still-smoldering wreckage

My mother's sisters

Have refused to honor her

Or to respect me as a god

They say she lied about Zeus being my father

And for this lie he killed her

So

I have driven them frenzied from their homes

Up into the mountains and set them dancing

And now they live out on the rocks

With nothing but
Green cypress trees for walls
And the tall blue sky for a roof

And my cousin Pentheus (*spits*)
Pentheus (*spits*)
Sorry, one more time
Pentheus (*spits*)
Son of Agave, grandson of Cadmus, and the
Newly-made King of Thebes
Ignores me in his prayers
Doesn't give me the
Appropriate sacrifice, the
Sweet smelling smoke which comes
From thigh bones wrapped in fat and burnt
(Hey don't knock it 'til you've tried it)
And worst of all
Does not honor me as a god
And so THEBES!
Here I am
Here with my women
My Maenads, my mad ones
My Bacchae
Come my Bacchae
Beat your drums outside the palace gates
So that Pentheus and all inside will know
That I have come to
MAKE THEM PAY!

SIDE #3: TIRESIAS & CADMUS

TIRESIAS

Cadmus! O Cadmus!

CADMUS

I recognize that sweet voice. Aphrodite! Did you finally flee that awful Hephaestus and come for me? O release me from my solitary prison! End the great pang! And all my heart desireth now of fulfillment, fulfill! O darling, o—

Pokes his head out.

Ma Dia!

TIRESIAS

Sorry to disappoint.

CADMUS

Ah, well. After Aphrodite, you're the one I most wanted to see. I take it you've heard the singing in the streets?

TIRESIAS

I'm blind, not deaf, my friend. There isn't a man in Thebes who hasn't heard. You must be a proud grandfather.

CADMUS

I am proud. Also a little afraid.

TIRESIAS

As someone who has been tossed about by the gods one too many times, I understand your fear. They changed me into a woman, then back into a man. They blinded me, then gave me the second sight. (Which is not quite as good as the first sight, but it softens the blow.) If I have learned one thing, it is that we are always at their mercy. We think we are in control—driving the chariot, as it were—but everything we do is because of some god's passing fancy. Blessed is the man who consecrates his life to worship. Blessed is the man who gives himself up to the dance. For only he will thrive. For only he will survive.

Tiresias dangles the spare outfit to Cadmus, who accepts and begins to change.

CADMUS

Well said, my friend. It is almost as if you are reading the future now, in the golden dust coming down from the mountains, stirred up by the hooves of the wild beasts who dance there.

TIRESIAS

Perhaps I am.

CADMUS

Where shall we do our dancing?

TIRESIAS

In the mountains with the wild beasts, of course!

CADMUS

Shall I call for my chariot?

TIRESIAS

I think we should walk. It shows respect.

CADMUS

You are right, of course, in this as in all things. Are we the only Thebans ready to dance for Dionysus?

TIRESIAS

The women are already dancing. But we are the only men. The rest are blind; only we can see.

CADMUS

As usual, my friend. Here, take my hand.

TIRESIAS

Hold tight.

CADMUS

Wait. Pentheus is coming, looking dangerous as a hungry lion. Let's delay for a moment and hear what he has to say.

SIDE #4: DIONYSUS & BACCHAE

DIONYSUS
Bacchae!

BACCHAE
Dionysus!

DIONYSUS
Bacchae!

BACCHAE
Dionysus!

CYBELE
Bromius, Lord of Cries!

MA
O Roaring One!

NANNA
O Roaring One!

DIONYSUS
Call upon the river! Call upon the mountains! Call upon the great earthquakes to come and level these palace walls! EVOË!

BACCHAE
EVOË!

The accumulating sound of rushing rivers, quaking mountains, and shattering walls.

DIONYSUS
Thank you, my Maenads

BARRA
See the palace windows caving in, like Tiresias' eyes

DAMARIS
He is pulling it down from within!

PHOEBE
See how the inside glows

CHLOE

He is burning it too!

BRISEIS

Look at the long-smoldering embers of Semele's home

KALLIXEINE

The flames are rising higher than the tree-tops

BACCHAE

Dionysus

Bacchus

Iacchus

Eleutherios

The Liberator

The bringer of Wine and Ekstasis

EVOË!

They prostrate themselves as the palace comes crashing down. Then the smoke dissipates, the sounds die away, and Dionysus appears.

DIONYSUS

My women, what made you drop to the ground, was it fear?

CYBELE

Desperation and sorrow, for our lives have no purpose if you are gone.

DIONYSUS

Did you despair when I was taken away?

CYBELE

What else was there but despair.

CHLOE

How did you escape?

DIONYSUS

I saved myself, easily and without effort. I made myself one man, and then a hundred, surrounding Pentheus so that he didn't know which way to turn. He stabbed at the bright air, thinking it was me, trying to kill the light. He was so caught up in this wild pursuit that he barely noticed when you, my beautiful Bacchae, brought the palace crashing down around him.

SIDE #5: DIONYSUS & PENTHEUS

DIONYSUS

If I were you, I'd offer up a sacrifice, and not a slaughter.

PENTHEUS

Your god will have the sacrifice he deserves: the blood of his women, slipping down the sides of Cithaeron!

DIONYSUS

All the citizens of Thebes will suffer for your hubris, yet no one as much as you.

PENTHEUS

Can you believe this man? In prison or out, he will not stay silent.

DIONYSUS

Let me inquire if, before you destroy the women in the mountains, you might be interested in seeing them go about their mysteries?

PENTHEUS

Well... It would be terrible, of course, to see them mad and drunk, but...

DIONYSUS

But you would like to see it nonetheless?

PENTHEUS

If I could see them discreetly, hidden amongst the pines, then perhaps?

DIONYSUS

They will know you are there and hunt you down. The only way...but perhaps you wouldn't...

PENTHEUS

Yes, what?

DIONYSUS

...is to disguise yourself as one of them.

PENTHEUS

Dress as a woman?

DIONYSUS

If you appear as you are they will kill you immediately.

PENTHEUS

Yes...

DIONYSUS

I will shroud you in such a clever disguise that no one will recognize you, not even your own mother.

He stretches out a hand and a chorus member places a Bacchant's outfit into it.

PENTHEUS

In a woman's dress, though? I am ashamed.

DIONYSUS

There is no cause. You are a great warrior, and will yet be so. Just let me slip this off, and this, and give you these to wear. Aren't they soft? So smooth against your skin, not rough like what you're used to. Soft whispers of silk. And here, your hair falling gently about your face. Doesn't that feel nice?

SIDE #6: AGAVE / CADMUS

AGAVE

(Holding a head, which she believes to be a lion's head.)

Father! Beam with pride, for you have raised the bravest daughters in all the land. And of all of us, I am the most brave, leaving the hearth and the loom, running barefoot through forests and over mountains and felling lions with my bare hands. See? *(She holds out the head to Cadmus.)* Here, take it in your hands. Share the glory of my kill.

CADMUS

Yes my daughter, you have given the god the greatest sacrifice.

AGAVE

Ugh! Old age makes men so mopey. Let me talk with Pentheus. Surely this act will convince him of Dionysus' greatness. Where is he? Someone call him here so he can witness his mother's good fortune. Pentheus? PENTHEUS!

CADMUS

My daughter, turn your eyes for a moment toward the sky.

AGAVE

Why should I?

Agave looks up uncertainly.

CADMUS

What do you notice?

AGAVE

It is so bright, and so clear.

CADMUS

And what do you feel inside now?

AGAVE

Things are...coming to a stillness.

CADMUS

Good, good.

AGAVE

I don't remember what we were talking about.

CADMUS

Whose house did you enter on your wedding day?

AGAVE

I entered the house of Echion, who grew from the dragon's teeth into a great warrior and helped you found the City of Thebes.

CADMUS

And the name of the child born to you and Echion?

AGAVE

Pentheus. My perfect boy.

CADMUS

And whose head do you hold in your hands?

AGAVE

A lion's. I think... They said...

CADMUS

Look again, just a quick glance.

She does not want to, but she looks.

AGAVE

No, it's not a lion's head... It's... Pentheus!

She opens her mouth and at first, maybe, is unable to make a sound, echoing the beginning; but eventually finds a harrowing keen.

Why do I have his head in my arms?

CADMUS

The truth is too hard to tell.

SIDE #7: HEKTOR/ALEXIAS

HEKTOR

It is dawn, the red sun peeking over the tip of Mount Cithaeron. We're climbing the hill with our cattle when we come upon three bands of sleeping women—led by your mother Agave, and your aunts Autonoe and Ino—nestled amongst the oak leaves, limbs dug down deep in soft soil, practically part of the earth itself. Suddenly the cattle low and Agave wakes, jumps up and cries for her Bacchantes to shake sleep from limbs. They rise, stretch, dress, young and old together, fastening fawnskins with snakes that lick their cheeks. They dash thyrsi against rocks, and out flows streams of clear mountain water, jets of heady wine, and sweetest drippings of honey. (Had you been there, had you seen these things, you would be begging Dionysus for forgiveness, for there was no madness in the mountains.) We eat our bread in growing morning light and talk of what we've seen. A young man declares that we should capture Agave and bring her home to you. We creep through trees and hide amongst bushes and see the women summon Bromius Lord of Cries with wild movements and big free sounds. I have never seen anyone move like that, so alive. I feel...embarrassed. Agave dances past. I jump out to capture her, but she hears the crunch of twigs and cries, "Women! We are being hunted! Follow me and use your wands as weapons!" We turn and run fast as lightening, knowing our lives depend on it; and when they cannot catch us, they turn instead upon our livestock, rending, tearing apart full grown cows, ribs, haunches, and hooves flung everywhere, blood stained chunks of bovine flesh dripping from pines. Still this is not enough to slake their fury. They pillage villages at the foot of the mountain, Hysiae and Erythrae. They snatch children from homes and throw them upon shoulders, where they stick like magic. They carry fire in their hair which does not burn them. Outraged villagers throw spears which turn back upon themselves, ripping open flesh which spurts fountains of blood. The Bacchae turn and run back to green woods, run and the world runs with them, limbs like spears in flight. They wash their hands of thick blood and snakes lick cheeks clean. (Had you been there, had you seen these things, you would beg Dionysus for forgiveness. He is great in so many ways, terrible and great. He brought wine to Thebes. And without wine there is no Aphrodite, and without Love, no pleasure at all.)