

MEMNON at the Getty Villa

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September 11, 2024



The Getty Villa Museum and the Classical Theatre of Harlem have teamed up to present the world premiere of MEMNON for the 18th annual Villa Outdoor Classical Theater production. And what a wonder it is to behold!

Written by Will Power in the style of an ancient Greek composition, its use of meter and language is extraordinary. But more than just a structural mimic, MEMNON has the breadth and modern relatability of what one might easily mistake as adapted archaic text. Had I not

known better, I wouldn't have been able to tell the difference. It's THAT outstanding.

The story of MEMNON is the tale of an Ethiopian king who brought an army to the Trojan's defense in their darkest hour against the Greeks. (Memnon, in Greek mythology, is the son of Tithonus [son of Laomedon, legendary king of Troy] and Eos [Dawn, also known as, Aurora]. King Priam is his uncle.) It's a story that has been overlooked for over a millennium. Apparently, because although he is a revered figure in classical mythology who inspired great works of literature and art, there is nevertheless not much directly written about him.

Memnon's story has rather been pieced together by Homeric and non-Homeric dactylic hexameter poems that relate the story of the Trojan war. (i.e. Aethiopsis, the Cypria, the Little Illiad, the Illiupersis and more). What this hero's journey provides is real data regarding mostly overlooked African contributions, and insight into the cultural and racial diversity of ancient societies. As King of Aetheopia, arriving with multiple tribes in tow, thousands upon thousands of men and arms, Memnon's is significant. And, Power's writing brings all this boldly to life without leaning on "history lesson" or modern-day political discourse.

The language of MEMNON is powerful. What most resonates with this ambitious piece is its simplicity and balance in both spoken word and action. What additionally distinguishes it, is an indelible comedy, in the dialogs of King Nestor, that rolls around inside the unfolding tragedy. But which never subverts it. And we also get a deeply emotional point of view from both heroes Memnon and Achilles, who express themselves as men. Not just enemy warriors of equal. Memnon's character is far more sensitive to his opponents and the outcomes of all the decisions he makes. His, is a slightly more, spiritually 5D viewpoint of the world around him.

Helen (Andrea Patterson), in this case, offers a different take on the legendary figure. Her personality is more akin to the woman (and half-sister) written about in the novel, "Clytemnestra" (by Costanza Casati). A strong yet fiercely misunderstood woman whose intelligence is utterly displaced in society because of her beauty. Here though, her wisdom is front and center. It is Helen who convinces Priam to call upon Memnon for help.

The rest of the production follows a more or less, expected trajectory. But by no means does that diminish anything that happens. Including the choreography which is very balanced and well-placed. Until, Eric Berryman arrives on the scene as Memnon. Berryman embodies the very ethos of the era, the story and the man.

Jesse J. Perez as Priam/Nestor is an intensely interesting personality on stage and in the presentation. Perez brings a very different aspect of his characters to light. One that includes far more conflict and human error than the sort of flat introspected idea of the historic kings.

Down to its very essence, though, MEMNON, is truly tragic. Not just as a key facet in the story of an ancient war. But of the man himself and what he brings to the table in Power's rendition of him. It is a painful and beautiful overview that offers expanded dimension to our understanding of people in that time.

VERY HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

MEMNON is directed by Carl Cofield, associate artistic director of the Classical Theatre of Harlem. It also features choreography by Tiffany Rea-Fisher, executive artistic director of EMERGE125. The set design is by Riw Rakkulchon, with costumes by Celeste Jennings, and lighting design by Brandon Baruch. Original composition and sound design are by David R. Molina. And projection design is by Yee Eun Nam.

The Memnon cast includes Eric Berryman in the title role of Memnon, Andrea Patterson as Helen, Jesse J. Perez as Priam/Nestor, Daniel Molina as Polydamas/Antilochus, Jesse Corbin as Achilles, and Katherine (Kat) Files, Jenna Kulacz, and Holly Hwang Belshaw as Chorus.

Performances of MEMNON will be held Thursdays through Saturdays, September 5–28, at 8pm. American Sign Language (ASL) interpreted performances will take place on September 19 and 26.

TICKETS & INFO

Thursday night performances are \$45. (\$40 for students and seniors), Friday night performances are \$50, and Saturday night performances are \$55. Student and senior discounts are available for Thursday night performances only. Ticket prices for the previews are \$30.

Tickets will be available online or by calling (310) 440-7300.

Photo credit © Craig Schwartz Photography: Eric Berryman as Memnon in foreground, and Holly Hwang Belshaw in background.

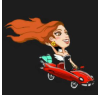
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