

THE GAZETTE

Molora: Greek tragedy transformed and audience transfixed

BY PAT DONNELLY,
GAZETTE CULTURE CRITIC JANUARY 24, 2009



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Dorothy Ann Gould, as the murderous Clytemnestra, testifies before the South African-style Greek chorus in a rehearsal of Yael Farber's play *Molora* at Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts. Photograph by: Pierre Obendrauf.

Molora has arrived. And theatrical magic is afoot in the Cinquième Salle of Place des Arts. This Greek tragedy transformed by auteur director Yael Farber into a South African ritual for the 21st century is simply one of the best productions this critic has ever seen, anywhere.

Such solemnity. *Molora* (it means ashes in Sesotho) feels like a communal incantation informed by the wars and wisdom of the ages.

Such passion. The performers throw themselves into their roles as if their lives depended on each line, each gesture. Such simplicity. All is to a purpose, nothing wasted.

Such gravitas. The South African village chorus sows the ceremonial tone and continues to up the ante as the (Xhosa language) voice of conscience throughout, each chant, gesture or musical intervention (by mouth harp, calabash-bow or milking drum) is invested with meaning, serving the story. And what a compelling, durable story, handed down to us through the ages with the help of Homer, Euripides, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and any number of interlocutors in between. (The Aeschylus trilogy known as *The Oresteia* is most familiar, along with *Elektra*, by Euripides.)

In Farber's hands the ancient Greek myth of the fall of the House of Atreus has become an African quilt of many sources, including the Old Testament and William Shakespeare. (*Elektra* delivers an altered version of the "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech from *The Merchant of Venice*.)

At the same time, Farber has pared it down to the dysfunctional family essentials, within a South African