

VCA Drama – Company 2007

The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies

Australian premiere

Tuesday 29 May to Saturday 9 June

Written by H el ene Cixous ~ Translated by Bernadette Fort ~ Music by Elizabeth Drake ~ Directed by Kirsten von Bibra

A story of poisonous blood

The Perjured City is an epic and astonishing theatre work by H el ene Cixous, one of France's most revered and influential writers. Under the direction of Kirsten von Bibra, respected Melbourne theatre director and VCA Lecturer in Acting, it will be staged by the graduating company of actors at the Victorian College of the Arts in conjunction with 26 VCA Production students.

The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies invites you into the house of Cixous: a house of dreaming and memory. There unfolds the story of poisonous blood: a story based on a true event in the 1980's when doctors, from a blood transfusion centre in France, knowingly sold HIV contaminated blood to an unsuspecting public. Five thousand people were infected. Many died.

H el ene Cixous' *The Perjured City* provides sanctuary to the souls of these real-life victims. The play's primary location is a cemetery. The trial where the truth of Justice will be heard, takes place 'under the stars'. The 'Perjured' of the title plays with ambiguity, referring to either a lying city or a city which has been lied to.

The Perjured City is set in 1994 but also 'outside of time' and explores a plague, both medical and moral. Calling upon Ancient Greek, Shakespearian and biblical references, a profound aspect of the play is the awakening of the Furies, the Goddesses of Vengeance, who lead an outcry of indignation against human apathy or inaction.

The themes explored in *The Perjured City* are bound to resonate with Australian audiences, with the issue of 'human care' and the responsibility of health agencies, organisations and governments currently under the spotlight.

The Perjured City was written for and first performed by Th eatre du Soleil, the internationally renowned French company which presented the extraordinary *Le Dernier Caravans erail* at the 2005 Melbourne International Arts Festival. The inaugural English-language production of *The Perjured City* was staged in 1997 in the USA.

The score is by composer, Elizabeth Drake, AFI-award winner and recipient of a 2007 Green Room Award.

H el ene Cixous' *The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies* – the back story...

"H el ene Cixous' theatre has explored complex and painful moments of recent world history, focusing most particularly on the traumas of nations ... *The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies* (1994)... shifts the lens to Western society, more precisely, to France in the early 1990s, as it examines one of the most alarming examples of individual and collective failure to have occurred in our supposedly enlightened and humane democracies.

In 1988 the families of French haemophiliacs, three hundred of whom had already died of AIDS, brought charges against the director of (France's) National Centre for Blood Transfusion... for continuing knowingly to supply HIV-contaminated blood at a time (in 1985) when a heating procedure that inactivated the contaminating agent was available and already used in other countries.

The trial that ensued uncovered the complex network of personal, financial, and political interests which forms the historical fabric of Cixous' play."

Extract from the article by Bernadette Fort, *Theatre, History, Ethics: An Interview with H el ene Cixous on The Perjured City, or the Awakening of the Furies*

Season: Tuesday 29 May to Saturday 9 June
Times: Tuesdays to Fridays 6.30pm / Saturdays 5pm
The show is four hours in length, plus interval. Food and refreshments will be available to purchase.
Cost: \$20 / \$12
Bookings: 03 9685 9233 or drama-info@unimelb.edu.au
Venue: Space 28, VCA Drama, 28 Dodds Street, Southbank

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