

Review

'The Bacchae'—Impressive, Stunning

The University of Texas drama department, which has frequently staged Greek theater with notable success, moves back into the genre this week with a new staging of Euripides' "The Bacchae."

This latest production, which went on view Wednesday night in Hogg Auditorium, is brought off with the department's customary skill and polish, and in this regard, "The Bacchae" takes its place alongside such other stylish UT examples of Greek tragedy as "Orestes," "Oedipus Rex" and Hecuba."

It is, however, a less exciting piece of theater, somehow.

The tale of the god Dionysus exacting his vengeance over the young nobleman who would blaspheme him has been sharply translated by Dr. William Arrowsmith, the University classics professor who seems to have a special knack for translating Greek plays into the idiom of today's theater without losing either their form or vitality.

But the tragedy of the piece is played out in a rather rigid, static fashion characterized by monologue-like speeches and lengthy passages from the chorus, which, no matter how they may catch the ear of the spectator, do little to stir his theatrical emotions.

Still, director James Moll has staged the play deftly and handsomely, catching the mounting flow of the tragedy and moving it steadily toward the climax which comes with undeniably stunning impact.

Strikingly embellished by Clayton Karkosh's spare set, Paul Reinhardt's fine costumes and David Nancarrow's effective lighting, which can subtly suggest the changing moods of the play, the production also

benefits from Dr. Lothar Klein's original incidental music and Shirlee Dodge's choreography for the chorus.

And certainly not the least of the assets about "The Bacchae" are some impressive performances by Laird Williamson, the drama department's newest faculty member, as Dionysus, Rick Hamilton as the ill-fated

Pentheus, Barbara Lacey as the possessed mother who destroys him, and by virtually every other principal member of the cast, in fact.

Two hours long and played without intermission, "The Bacchae" easily succeeds in holding the audience's interest, but for local theatergoers with only a passing interest in Greek drama, the production is likely to be regarded more as a classy exercise than as an electrifying theater experience.

—JOHN BUSTIN