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Theatre class ready to perform classical Greek play after visiting its home

In a little more than three weeks this summer, 14 Oakland University students immersed themselves in the culture and history of Greece, the birthplace of western theatre.

What they brought back with them was not only a new set of skills and an appreciation for other places in the world – they brought back a play that ancient Greeks would say was influenced by the oracle itself.

The Music, Theatre and Dance students who took the journey to the Greek island of Hydra will be performing the classical play “Iphigenia at Aulis” from Sept. 11-13 at Oakland University’s Varner Studio Theatre.

Director and adaptor Karen Sheridan, co-founder of the Classical Theatre Study in Greece program and professor of Theatre, was one of three faculty members who accompanied the students in June to the picturesque location where they studied and performed.

Sheridan said the study abroad journey is a “life-changer from the first day. For students, it’s a perfect time in your life to go away and be influenced by something new. It makes you feel like anything is possible.”

The days were packed, said Sheridan. Students stayed in various guest rooms in the town of Vlychos. The course was hosted by the Hydrama Theatre and Arts Centre, home of director and educator Corinna Seeds.

A typical day would include classes from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., lunch and resting time after that, then rehearsals in the evenings, followed by a late dinner. Afterwards, students would be allowed to explore the island.

The four-credit course included studies in classical theatre, history of theatre, Greek culture, acting, mask production, choral movement and much more. But the main goal was to rehearse and perform “Iphigenia”.

Musical theatre major Margaret Hinckley said it wasn’t until she got to Greece that she learned the true importance of theatre.

“Theatre has always been important to me, but I was unaware of how it affected history,” said Hinckley, who lives off-campus in Pontiac. “Aside from its educational qualities, theatre was and still can be a source of catharsis. Because of its immense healing quality, people who worked in theatre – actors, playwrights,



others – were treated with a lot of respect.”

At the end of the class’ stay on Hydra, they performed the play for free at the island’s amphitheatre for locals and international tourists, explained Sheridan. “We kind of sang for our supper. We became a part of the town’s fabric as opposed to just being tourists.”

The group also visited several historic places in Greece during the last week of the study abroad class, including the Parthenon on the Athenian Acropolis, the Ancient Theatre of Argos, Mycenae, Corinth, Delphi and others.

Studying classical theatre in Greece is important precisely because of the history of the culture, said Sheridan.

“When Greeks were creating Western theatre, they were bringing all of the citizenry into one space to hear about these messy situations, this drama. They were creating ethics and getting the audience to think about what they would do in that situation,” Sheridan explained.

“It was a communal event. Students are doing what actors have done throughout history – presenting ideas to a group by telling great stories. And they perform as their ancient counterparts did – in open-air theatres in Greece.

“When you’re performing in an amphitheatre, it really makes you feel present in the space. You feel this ancient civilization around you.”

After its production of “Iphigenia” at Varner Hall, the class will also bring the play to the students at Detroit Country Day School in the school’s Seligman Performing Arts Center.



For more information about the study abroad trip to Greece, visit oakland.edu/ie/ou-programs/greece/. To get a full schedule for productions by Oakland’s Department of Music, Theatre and Dance, go to oakland.edu/mtd.