

The Bacchae:

Body, Rebellion, and Collective Liberation

Production Concept & Project Overview

emBODY Project Theatre · Spring 2027

Project Lead: Corinne M. Mason

Methodological Frame: The emBODY Performance Method

95 Washington Street, Canton, MA · embodyprojecttheatre.com

1. Project Overview

The Bacchae: Body, Rebellion, and Collective Liberation is a Spring 2027 theatre production created by emBODY Project Theatre under the direction of Corinne M. Mason. Working from Euripides' The Bacchae in the public domain, the production stages a physical theatre reimagining of the myth inside a composite feminist world — a production aesthetic and dramaturgical frame drawn from the history and visual language of embodied feminist direct action, drawing specifically from W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, 1968) and Las Tesis, the Chilean intersectional feminist theatre collective whose work "Un Violador en Tu Camino" became a global phenomenon in 2019.

This production is the second of emBODY's Year One season productions and is designed to be experienced in direct conversation with the fall production of As You Like It. Where As You Like It investigates individual queer and cultural liberation — what the body reveals when social constraints are suspended — The Bacchae investigates what happens when those liberated bodies find each other and practice together. It is the season's second movement: from personal liberation to collective surrender, and the revelation and cost that collective practice produces.

The Bacchae is not a myth about one king's destruction. It is a myth about what happens when women and femmes build a collective embodied practice, refuse to stop, and discover what that refusal unleashes.

2. Artistic Frame & Rationale

Euripides' The Bacchae is the oldest surviving theatrical record of women's collective embodied practice being surveilled, pathologized, and violently suppressed by institutional authority. Dionysus returns to Thebes to reclaim what the city has denied: the right of bodies to practice, gather, and move together outside the terms set by Pentheus's rule. The Bacchae — a community of women who have followed Dionysus into collective ecstatic practice on the mountain — represent everything Pentheus's body culture forbids: abandon, surrender, collective identity, and movement that answers to something deeper than law.

This production places that ancient dynamic in direct conversation with two specific traditions of feminist collective embodied action:

W.I.T.C.H. (1968)

Founded on Halloween 1968 in New York City, W.I.T.C.H. — Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell — was a loose collective of socialist feminists who used guerrilla theatre, theatrical "zaps," and the reclaimed figure of the witch to hex Wall Street, disrupt bridal fairs, and protest beauty pageants. Their practice was explicitly allied with Black liberation, the anti-war movement, and the student movement. No one owned the name. Anyone could start a chapter. The witch was not a costume — she was a political body in collective action. W.I.T.C.H. gives this production its visual language: black, ceremonial, confrontational, theatrical, and ungovernable.

Las Tesis (2019 — present)

Las Tesis is a Chilean intersectional feminist theatre collective — explicitly trans-inclusive and grounded in decolonial feminist theory — whose performance "Un Violador en Tu Camino" (A Rapist in Your Path) was performed in 2019 in Valparaíso and spread globally within weeks, performed in over 200 cities across six continents, translated into more than 50 languages. The performance is a collective choreographic score — bodies moving together in public space, making sound together, reclaiming streets that have never fully belonged to women. The collective's analysis is explicitly intersectional: patriarchy, capitalism, state violence, and bodily oppression are understood as inseparable systems. Las Tesis gives this production its intersectional feminist framework and its model of collective physical practice as political act.

This production does not claim either movement. It draws from the through-line both represent: women and femmes using collective embodied practice as an act of refusal, reclamation, and radical presence. The Bacchae is their ancient ancestor.

The production holds the following questions at its center:

- What does individual body culture do when it is overwhelmed by collective physical intensity?
- What is the relationship between surrender and authentic ensemble identity?
- What does Pentheus's body culture of control look like in the body, and what happens to it when it finally breaks?
- What is the cost of collective liberation when the movement cannot hold its own contradictions?

3. Research Question

Season Question:

The relationship between body culture and identity in ensemble performance, using the method to investigate how cultural conditioning shapes the performing self — and what becomes possible when that conditioning is disrupted, surrendered, or transformed.

Production Question:

The relationship between body culture and surrender in ensemble performance, using the method to investigate how collective physical intensity overwhelms cultural conditioning and transforms ensemble identity.

Season Arc:

As You Like It asks: what does the body reveal when individual constraints are suspended? The Bacchae asks: what happens when those liberated bodies practice together at full intensity? The season moves from personal liberation to collective surrender — two answers to the same research question about what body culture does when it is no longer required to comply.

4. The emBODY Method & Approach

The production is grounded in the emBODY Performance Method, a performance and training framework developed by Corinne M. Mason, centering three core principles:

Freedom to Choose

The Bacchae's practice is freedom chosen under duress — freedom insisted upon in the face of everything Pentheus represents. The Freedom circuit drives the ensemble's development of the Bacchic collective body: what does the body do when it is finally allowed to move without compliance? What does the body know about collective liberation that individual conditioning has suppressed? The production investigates how that freedom is generated physically, how it escalates, and how it becomes something no single performer controls.

Presence to Listen

The Bacchae are not individuals who happen to be in the same space. They are a collective body that listens and responds as one organism. Presence — the capacity to receive and respond in real time — is the foundational ensemble skill this production builds from. The collective choreographic scores developed through the Las Tesis influence demand this quality specifically: the body in precise collective action with other bodies, making meaning together that no single body could make alone. Pentheus's

refusal of Presence — his inability to listen to anything outside his own authority — is staged as a physical as well as a political failure.

Authenticity to Act

The Bacchae's collective practice is the most authentic action in the play. The production invites each ensemble member to locate the Bacchic body through their own embodied histories with collective belonging, feminist practice, and the specific body culture of refusal. Movement and text scores are built from real sensation and ensemble-generated material. The distinction between performed rebellion and genuine collective physical intensity is the production's central research question and its central artistic challenge.

5. Production Concept & Aesthetic

The production is set in a composite feminist world — no single historical period, no specific named movement, but a world built from the visual and physical language of embodied feminist rebellion across time. The aesthetic is punk in its confrontational energy, ceremonial in its collective ritual, and raw in its insistence that the body in collective action is the most dangerous political instrument there is.

The Bacchae are a collective of women and femmes whose practice has been surveilled, pathologized, and targeted by institutional authority. Pentheus is composite patriarchal power — recognizable in the body culture of law, capital, religion, and the state simultaneously, not tied to one. Dionysus is not a costumed deity but a principle already present in the room, in the ensemble's own practice, in the collective body when it surrenders to something larger than individual conditioning.

The Visual Language of Rebellion

Drawing from W.I.T.C.H.'s aesthetic vocabulary, the Bacchae's world is black, theatrical, and ungovernable. Bodies in collective formation. Ceremonial objects repurposed as protest. Chanting that becomes physical score. The witch as political body — not costume, not metaphor, but a specific history of women's collective practice being persecuted for exactly that collectivity. The visual contrast with Pentheus's world is stark: his world is institutional, controlled, color-drained. The Bacchae carry their own light.

Collective Choreographic Scores

Drawing from Las Tesis's model of collective feminist action, the choral sequences are developed as full ensemble choreographic scores — bodies moving in precise collective formation, making sound together, reclaiming the performance space as political territory. The scores are not decorative. They are the argument. The Bacchae's power is not in individual virtuosity but in what happens when bodies align in collective physical practice. These scores are developed through the ensemble's own research process, not imported from outside.

The Body as Political Instrument

The body in this production is explicitly a political instrument throughout. The Bacchae use their bodies to resist, to practice, to reclaim space, to refuse compliance. Pentheus uses his body to surveil, contain, and perform institutional authority. The production asks the ensemble to investigate both sides of that dynamic through the method — not as character choices but as body culture research. What does a body that has fully internalized institutional authority feel like from the inside? What does a body in collective feminist rebellion feel like from the inside? The difference between them is the production's central physical argument.

Pentheus's Body Culture Arc

Pentheus's body tells the story before he speaks. Controlled initiation, surveillance posture, weight held back, gesture that stops before it completes — the physical language of a body that has fully internalized its own conditioning and built an identity around enforcing it on others. His arc — including his desire to spy on the Bacchae and his dressing as a woman — is staged as a body culture breakdown in real time: the moment when the performing self can no longer hold against what the body actually wants. In this production that breakdown is specifically legible as a body conditioned by patriarchal authority encountering the one thing it cannot control.

The Sparagmos as Collective Score

The sparagmos — the dismemberment of Pentheus — is developed as a full collective ensemble physical score built slowly over the rehearsal period with full consent protocols and rigorous care. It is not illustrative violence. It is the ensemble's collective body acting as a single force at the peak of collective intensity. In the context of this production's feminist framing, the sparagmos also carries the weight of what liberation movements do to themselves: the moment when collective intensity turns inward, when the thing that was power becomes destruction. The production does not flinch from that cost.

Sound as Physical Score

Sound is not added in tech. It is developed through the ensemble's physical practice from the first rehearsal. Voice, breath, rhythm, and collective chant are physical scores generated through the same circuits as the movement. The sound the ensemble makes is the sound of what their bodies are doing. This is directly informed by both the chanting practice of W.I.T.C.H. and the collective vocal score of Las Tesis's work — in both, the collective voice is the instrument of collective power.

A Framing Device

The production opens with the ensemble visible as themselves — women and femmes entering a collective practice. The audience understands from the first moment that what they are watching is both The Bacchae and a live embodied inquiry into body culture, collective surrender, and the cost and power of feminist collective action. Dionysus enters not as a costumed figure but as something the ensemble's own collective practice generates when it reaches sufficient intensity.

Aesthetic: Black, Confrontational, Collective

The visual world is built through bodies, light, and collective action rather than built scenography. Pentheus's institutional world is constructed through body culture alone — spatial hierarchy, controlled movement, the specific physical language of patriarchal authority. The Bacchae's world is black, raw, and collectively generated. Minimal costuming that signals collective identity rather than individual character. Objects that carry the weight of both ceremonial practice and direct action. Light that shifts from institutional fluorescence to something older and less controllable. The set is the ensemble's bodies in collective formation. Nothing else is needed.

6. Source Material & Adaptation Strategy

The production works from Euripides' The Bacchae in the public domain, drawing from multiple available translations to build a working text that serves the physical theatre frame and the research question. The adaptation strategy involves:

- Significant text reduction prioritizing the choral sequences, Dionysus's opening and closing arguments, and Pentheus's body culture arc

- Choral odes developed as full collective choreographic scores informed by the Las Tesis model of collective feminist action rather than classical choral recitation
- The sparagmos and its aftermath staged entirely through collective physical score with full consent protocols built into the rehearsal process
- The framing device as an opening that makes transparent the ensemble's own relationship to the research and to collective feminist practice
- Possible integration of ensemble-generated text addressing contemporary resonances with the policing of women's and femmes' collective bodies and practices

The result is not a classical revival. It is a physical theatre production that uses Euripides' text as a score, the myth as a research container, and the history of feminist collective action as its dramaturgical world.

7. Process & Rehearsal Structure

Phase 1: Orientation, Text Constellation, and Collective Body Building

- Introduction to the emBODY Method and shared rehearsal ethics
- Group exploration of the text and research into W.I.T.C.H. and Las Tesis as dramaturgical reference points
- Early development of the two body culture vocabularies: Pentheus's institutional control and the Bacchae's collective liberation
- Introduction of sound and breath as physical scores developed alongside movement from the beginning
- Establishment of consent protocols for the rehearsal process, with specific attention to the sparagmos sequence and high-intensity collective physical work

Phase 2: Score Development, Collective Practice, and Sparagmos Build

- Development of the choral odes as full collective choreographic scores
- Building Pentheus's body culture arc through the Authenticity circuit in reverse: suppression, surveillance, breakdown
- Slow, consent-forward development of the sparagmos sequence as a collective physical score with ongoing check-ins and full opt-out protocols
- Development of the collective sound world integrated into physical scores throughout
- Ongoing PaR documentation of ensemble findings on collective surrender and body culture

Phase 3: Rehearsal, Design Integration, and Performance

- Locking of production structure and full physical and vocal score
- Integration of lighting design that supports the institutional/collective body culture contrast through spatial and tonal distinction
- Technical rehearsals and public performances with optional facilitated talkbacks

8. Ensemble, Space, and Community Context

The Bacchae: Body, Rebellion, and Collective Liberation is built from the ensemble outward. The chorus is the production's primary artistic and research body. This is not a production with a featured principal and a supporting ensemble. The Bacchae are the production.

The intersectional feminist framing is not decorative. It shapes who the production actively seeks to cast, how the rehearsal room is held, what consent and care protocols govern the high-intensity work, and what the production is willing to be honest about in performance. Casting will be approached with intentionality around gender diversity and the fullness of feminist experience the ensemble brings into the room.

The production is rooted in collaboration between:

- A cast of performers and movers — centering women, femmes, and gender-expansive folx — whose lived experience with collective practice, feminist action, and body culture suppression informs the research from the inside
- A directing and dramaturgical team aligned with the emBODY Method's somatic, ethical, and intersectional commitments
- Designers and collaborators who value body-centered, resource-conscious, and politically intentional aesthetics

Rehearsal and performance at 95 Washington Street, Canton, MA situates the work in direct relationship with a local community. The production's conversation with As You Like It gives the spring season a sustained arc for audiences who attend both — and a complete, standalone experience for those who encounter The Bacchae first.

9. Timeline

Pre-Production

- Finalization of production schedule and performance window
- Casting of emBODY ensemble for The Bacchae with intentional intersectional feminist framing
- Auditions: January 28, 6–10PM · 95 Washington Street, Canton, MA

Rehearsal Period — February 1 through April 1

- Sundays 10AM–1PM
- Mondays and Thursdays 6–10PM

Technical Rehearsals — April 3 through 8, 6–10PM

- Integration of lighting and sound design
- Final physical and vocal score refinement

Performances

- April 9, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18
- Optional post-show talkbacks and documentation of process

10. Anticipated Impact

The Bacchae: Body, Rebellion, and Collective Liberation aims to:

- Offer a rigorous, intersectional feminist physical theatre reimagining of Euripides that places the ancient myth in direct conversation with contemporary traditions of embodied feminist collective action
- Complete the season research arc alongside *As You Like It*, producing a paired body of evidence about body culture and identity under conditions of individual liberation (*As You Like It*) and collective surrender (*The Bacchae*)
- Demonstrate how the emBODY Performance Method generates ensemble work in which collective physical practice is the primary artistic and research instrument
- Build an ensemble practice rooted in intersectional feminist values, with consent-forward protocols for high-intensity collective physical work that contribute permanently to the emBODY Method's body of practice
- Produce a touring-ready production requiring minimal built scenography that can travel to diverse venues as a complete, body-centered, politically urgent physical theatre work
- Contribute to the ongoing conversation between emBODY's practice and the broader field of feminist performance scholarship through PaR documentation, publication, and the company's growing method book

The production treats *The Bacchae* not only as a myth about one king's refusal and destruction, but as a witness to what women and femmes have always known: that collective embodied practice is one of the most powerful and most threatened forms of liberation there is. The ensemble does not perform that argument. They live it.