

Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*

performed by Yannis Simonides



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MEMPHIS[®]

April 15-16, 2010
University Center Theatre

Plato's *The Apology of Socrates*

English translation by Yannis Simonides and Loukas Skipitaris

A presentation of the Greek Theatre of New York.

Actor: Yannis Simonides

Director: Loukas Skipitaris

Costume Designer: Theoni Vahliotis Aldredge

Percussionist: Caryn Heilman

SPONSORS

This performance is made possible by a Tennessee Board of Regents Access and Diversity Grant and a grant from the American Philosophical Association. Thursday morning's presentation serves as the culminating event for students involved in Philosophical Horizons, an outreach program of the University of Memphis Department of Philosophy. We are pleased that the participants from Booker T. Washington High School are able to join us for this performance.

GREEK THEATRE OF NEW YORK

The Greek Theatre of New York was founded in 1979, and it has since served Greek and English speaking audiences with acclaimed productions, nationally and internationally. The company has sought to approach the classical, medieval and contemporary Hellenic repertory with discipline, delight and occasional irreverence.

GTNY has always been mindful of nurturing talent in all fields of the performing arts. Over the years it has become known for its festivals of new plays, its solo and ensemble performances, its children theatre tours and its imaginative staging of Greek oratorios. Ellen Stewart of LaMama has praised it as one of her brightest children, and Melina Mercouri supported it as one of the most accomplished theatres of the Greek Diaspora.

Information on the Greek Theatre of New York is available at www.ellinikotheatro.org and info@ellinikotheatro.org.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

The *Apology* premiered in New York in 2003 and has since been performed to great acclaim at the United Nations, the Athens Agora, the NBC *Today* Show, and in theatres, festivals, schools, universities and libraries across the US, Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, and the UK (where it recently completed a tour of Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh Universities). In the last three years it has been presented at the European Cultural Center at Delphi, in Athens under the Akropolis, in Thessaloniki, Patras, Crete and various festivals in the Aegean, in Greek and in English, as well as in Dubai and in Montevideo where it played to 2000 students from across Uruguay, in Greek and Spanish. Recently it enjoyed successful performances in Montreal, Vancouver, Luxembourg, and at the University of Strasbourg – in Greek and French. Tours in the U.S., Greece, Spain, Germany, Poland, Turkey and Russia are scheduled for 2010-11, and a limited Off Broadway run is contemplated, along with a publication of the performance text, in Ancient Greek and in English.

The Apology of Socrates is a delightful and quite humorous dramatization of the famous phi-

losopher's defense while on trial for his life in Athens, ancient Greece. In the *Apology*, reported to us by Socrates' student, Plato, the wise man of Athens firmly defends himself – rather than apologizing in the contemporary sense – against politically motivated accusations of not believing in the gods of the state, and of corrupting the Athenian youth. Based on Socrates' beliefs, goodness depends mainly on the quality of our understanding of what to care about, and how to behave in our lives. The main principles of the Socratic discourse have had a significant influence on philosophy, politics, sociology and ethics in the Western World.

The *Apology* professes to be a record of the actual speech that Socrates delivered in his own defense at the trial (399 BC). This makes the question of its historical accuracy more acute than in the rest of the Platonic dialogues in which the conversations themselves are mostly fictional and the question of accuracy is concerned only with how far the theories that Socrates is represented as expressing were those of the historical Socrates. Here, however, we are dealing with a speech that Socrates made as a matter of history.

How far is Plato's account accurate? We should always remember that the ancients did not expect historical accuracy in the way we do. On the other hand, Plato makes it clear that he was present at the trial. Moreover, if, as is generally believed, the *Apology* was written not long after the event, many Athenians would remember the actual speech, and it would be a poor way to vindicate the Master, which is the obvious intent, to put a completely different speech into his mouth. Some liberties could no doubt be allowed, but the main arguments and the general tone of the defense must surely be faithful to the original. The beauty of language and style is certainly Plato's, but the serene spiritual and moral beauty of character belongs to Socrates. It is a powerful combination.

REVIEWS

"An exciting, daring performance that brings Socrates to vivid life. Yannis Simonides, directed by Loukas Skipitaris, allows the audience to experience the immortal gadfly in all his dimensions – restless, humorous, brilliant and fascinating."

Odyssey Magazine

"Yannis Simonides gives a penetrating performance and brings history to life, making the immortal words of Plato as relevant today as they were when he first wrote them. Director Loukas Skipitaris' novel concept of Plato's *The Apology of Socrates* is spellbinding from the opening scene."

The National Herald

"A superhuman effort on the part of the actor in a splendid coordination of text, movement and speech."

Luxembourg Kultur

"Yannis Simonides thrilled the audience with a captivating performance of Socrates, earning several rounds of applause while bringing arguably the most revered philosopher in history to life with contemporary yet poetic language."

The Hellenic Times

"One uniquely obsessed and multi-talented actor has set himself the decidedly idiosyncratic mission of proving the transcendent dramatic power not of any play or playwright but rather of an ancient philosopher."

American Theatre

YANNIS SIMONIDES (*Actor*)

Born in Constantinople and raised in Athens, Yannis Simonides is a Yale Drama School trained actor/writer and Emmy-winning documentary producer. He has served as professor and chair of the NYU Tisch School of the Arts Drama Department, as executive producer of Greek Orthodox Telecommunications and as the executive director of Hellenic Public Radio - COSMOS FM in New York. He is the founder and director of Elliniko Theatro (Greek Theatre of New York) and of Mythic Media International, a performing arts lab. His performance work, past and ongoing, includes plays by Euripides, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Brecht, Korres, Kambanellis and others, along with solo and ensemble pieces culled from the writings of C.P. Cavafy, General Makriyannis, Nikolai Gogol and others. He has received the support of the National Endowment for the Arts, The Greek Ministries of Culture and Foreign Affairs, The A. S. Onassis, I. Kostopoulos, S. Niarchos, M. Tsakos and A.G. Leventis Foundations, Time Warner and the Mobil Foundation. He co-produced Mikis Theodorakis' 75th Birthday Celebration at Lincoln

Center with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra and has been associated with the Annual Festival of Greek Music and Dance at Symphony Space in New York City, presented by the World Music Institute. He narrated the PBS television specials *Axion Esti*, *Visions of Greece* and *Return to the Homeland*. He recently composed and directed *SMYRNE*, a docudrama on the 1922 Asia Minor Catastrophe. Since 2004 he has performed the *Apology*, in Greek and in English, at theatres, festivals, universities and communities in the USA, Greece, and around the world. A founding member of The Readers of Homer, he has staged marathon audience-participation readings/celebrations of the Iliad and Odyssey in Chios and Delos in Greece, at the Library of Alexandria, the Dahesh Museum of New York, in Troy Turkey, in Malta and Sicily, in Greek, Arabic, English, Spanish, Chinese, Dutch, Russian and Swahili, and is scheduled to bring the ROH to Montevideo, Sydney, Los Angeles, Paris, Hiroshima, the Dodecanese, and again to Alexandria and New York. He was honored by the city of Athens as Ambassador of Hellenism for his lifelong service to Greek Arts and Letters worldwide.

LOUKAS SKIPITARIS (*Director*)

Loukas N. Skipitaris came to the United States after brief studies in medicine and political science at Thessaloniki's Aristotelian University. He studied acting with some of New York's leading teachers and earned a Masters in stage directing at Queens College (CUNY). He made his Broadway acting debut in *Ilya Darling* with Melina Merkouri, and subsequently appeared in the original Broadway production of *Zorba*, directed by Harold Prince. He has acted Off-Broadway, in national tours, and in addition to his featured role in the prime-time TV series *The Andros Targets* he has had running roles in *As the World Turns*, *The Guiding Light*, and *One Life to Live*. He recently appeared on *The Late Show with David Letterman*. His directing credits in the United States and Greece include productions of Greek classics and plays by Anton Chekhov, Tennessee Williams, George Bernard Shaw, Neil Simon, Ira Levin, and others. At Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall he directed the world premiere of the oratorio *Erotokritos* for the Greek Theatre of New York, and as the producer-director of the LA-MA Summer Musical Theater he staged the musicals

Oklahoma!, *Carousel*, *Of Thee I Sing*, and *West Side Story*, among others. Mr. Skipitaris's latest directorial assignments, the comedies *Smile Please*, *O Mamakias*, *Gambros gia tin Vasoula* and *The Miser* and *Friday the 13th* were recently presented by Theatron in Long Island City, NY. He is the founder and director of The Acting Place, a professional training workshop, as well as the founding and artistic director of Theatron, Inc., a non-profit Greek American performing arts center in NYC.

THEONI V. ALDREDGE (*Costume Design*)

With over 150 stage productions, numerous ballets and several films to her credit, Theoni V. Aldredge ranks as one of the most prolific and successful costume designers of the late 20th century. Born and raised in Greece, Aldredge was inspired to become a costumer after seeing the film version of *Caesar and Cleopatra* in 1946. Moving to the US, she trained at the Goodman Theatre School where she made her debut with 1950's *The Distaff Side*. In 1953, she married actor Tom Aldredge and the couple settled in NYC. After debuting in films with *Girl of the Night*, Aldredge began her

long association as one of the resident designers at Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival with the 1961 production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Over the next three decades at the NYSF she crafted appropriate clothing for many Shakespearean productions, as well as the landmark musicals *Hair* and *A Chorus Line*. With over 100 Broadway shows to her credit, Ms. Aldredge was inducted into the Theatre Hall of Fame in 1986. Her credits include *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *A Chorus Line*, *Three Penny Opera*, *Annie* (Tony Award), *Barnum* (Tony Award), *42nd Street*, *Dream Girls*, *La Cage Aux Folles* (Tony Award), and *Gypsy*. Ms. Aldredge's film credits include *The First Wives Club*, *Addams Family Values*, *Moonstruck*, *Network*, *The Rose* and *The Great Gatsby*, for which she received The Academy Award and the British Society of Film and Television Arts Award. She is the recipient of the New York City Liberty Medal and was honored with the Costume Guild Career Achievement Award. In addition, the Theatre Development Fund has presented her with the Irene Sharaff Lifetime Achievement Award for her work in Theatre, Film and Television.

CARYN HEILMAN (*Percussionist*)

Caryn Heilman is a percussionist, vocalist and dancer with the World Music of Nana ensemble, which blends musical elements from around the world. Specializing in frame drums, she plays the daf, a Sufi drum from Kurdistan, and the tar. She can be heard on Nana Simopoulos's CD *Daughters of the Sun* (#1 on NAV world and new age radio charts). Her rhythmic roots began with tap dancing at the age of five, and she had a ten year career as a modern dancer with the Paul Taylor Dance Company. She has founded her own dance company, LiquidBody and her most recent commission can be viewed at http://turbulence.org/works/touching_gravity. She is co-founder of Topia Arts Center, a green arts and education center in development in the Northern Berkshires and co-owner of Topia Inn, a green bed and breakfast in the charming New England town of Adams, MA. She just completed a Dance and Technology MFA at the University of California at Irvine.

Philosophical Horizons

A Qualitatively Different Educational Experience



Philosophical Horizons introduces the history and practice of philosophy to Memphis children. The program aims to reach out especially to the socio-economically disadvantaged and to those schools that are the least likely to have the resources to implement Philosophy for Children into their curriculum.

“It’s made me a better person.”

2009 Philosophical Horizons participant

Why Philosophy? Philosophy deals with fundamental issues regarding the nature of human beings and the meaning of life. Philosophy teaches one to think and write well and, to the extent that it does, it prepares students for any career or discipline that they might choose to pursue.

For more information, please visit:

www.memphis.edu/philosophy/philhorizons.php