

March 3, 2008
Media Contact: Genevieve Antaky
510/482-3553, gantaky@comcast.net
Humanities West: 415/391-9700
www.humanitieswest.org
City Box Office: 415/392-4400, www.cityboxoffice.com

HUMANITIES WEST PRESENTS
Athens in its Golden Age: The Time of Pericles
An Interdisciplinary Program Exploring History to Celebrate the Mind and the Arts
May 2 - 3, 2008
Herbst Theatre, San Francisco

Humanities West, a Bay Area non-profit, will present *Athens in its Golden Age: The Time of Pericles* on Friday, May 2, from 8 to 10:15 pm and Saturday, May 3, from 10 am to 4 pm, at Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco.

Tickets for *Athens in its Golden Age: The Time of Pericles* are priced as follows: Single tickets for Friday are \$40 orchestra/grand tier and \$25 balcony; tickets for Saturday are \$60 orchestra/grand tier and \$35 balcony; single tickets for both days of the program are \$90 orchestra/grand tier and \$50 balcony. Student/Teacher tickets either day \$20. Tickets are available through City Box Office at 415/392-4400 or online at www.cityboxoffice.com.

During the Fifth Century BCE, citizens of the tiny city-state of Athens achieved extraordinary levels of accomplishment in art, architecture, philosophy and theatre. Amid political turmoil at home and constant threats from abroad, Athenians established a working democracy. Humanities West brings together a team of respected scholars and noted authors to present an in-depth look at the significant contributions of Periclean Athens and its influence on the development of human civilization, which continues to infuse the arts and shape our sense of democratic values.

On Friday night **Josiah Ober**, holder of the Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis Professorship in honor of Constantine Mitsotakis at Stanford University, will discuss how the design of democratic institutions helped to make Pericles' idealistic portrait of the democracy into a lived reality. **Mark Griffith**, Kilo Distinguished Professor of Classical Language and Literature and Professor of Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies at UC Berkeley, will follow with a presentation on staging the past and confronting the present in Athenian theatre, showing how its themes continue to resonate with modern audiences.

On Saturday morning **Margaret Miles**, Professor of Art History, Classics, and Visual Studies at UC Irvine, will discuss the Akropolis of Athens and its impact. **Kurt Raaflaub**, David Herlihy University Professor, and Professor of Classics & History and Chair of the Program in Ancient Studies at Brown University, will speak on the tensions and contradictions inherent in Athens's politics of war, empire and freedom, still so meaningful in our own time. In the afternoon, **George Hammond**, a San Francisco attorney and author, will perform as Pythagoras in "Pythagoras Discovers Philosophy," describing the intellectual enthusiasm for new ideas, which led to Athens's cultural success. **Erich Gruen**, Emeritus Professor of the Graduate School - Wood Professor at UC Berkeley, will complete the series with a discussion of the clash of cultures between Athens and Persia – living in democracy and freedom versus living contentedly under despotism. For more information visit www.humanitieswest.org.

PROGRAM

Moderator, **Erich Gruen** (Emeritus Professor of the Graduate School-Wood Professor, University of California Berkeley)

FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2008, 8:00 pm to 10:15 pm.

Keynote Address: DEMOCRACY, INNOVATION, AND LEARNING

Josiah Ober - *Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis Professor in honor of Constantine Mitsotakis and Professor of Political Science and Classics, Stanford University*

Beginning with the Funeral Oration of Pericles in Thucydides, in which Pericles gives what seems at first glance to be an almost absurdly idealistic portrait of the democracy and the democratic citizen, Professor Ober will discuss how the design of democratic institutions helped to make that ideal into a lived reality - and thus to make Athens into the startlingly wealthy, powerful, and culturally forward-looking community that it was.

Lecture & Performance: STAGING THE PAST, CONFRONTING THE PRESENT IN ATHENIAN THEATER

Mark Griffith - *Klio Distinguished Professor of Classical Languages and Literature; and Professor of Classics and of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies, University of California Berkeley*

The tragedies performed annually in the Theater of Dionysus were based on myths and characters of an earlier time--the era of the Trojan War and the Seven against Thebes. Playwrights adapted these stories so that they raised fresh issues of immediate and contemporary relevance to the Athenians sitting in the Theater: conflicts between family loyalty and political duty, the fragility of civilized values in the face of war and imperial conquest, and the psychological costs of the disenfranchisement and subordination of women. Since many of these issues are still with us, these plays continue to resonate with extraordinary power and immediacy among modern audiences. Professor Griffith will explore the exciting--and still troubling--dynamics of this unrivalled period of Western theater through illustrations of the original conditions and style of performance actually practiced in Periclean Athens, as well as with selected film-clips of scenes from modern productions of three of the most famous of these tragedies: *The Oresteia*, *Antigone*, and *The Trojan Women*.

SATURDAY, MAY 3, 2008. 10:00 am to 12:00 noon and 1:30 pm to 4:00 pm

Lecture: THE AKROPOLIS OF ATHENS AND ITS IMPACT

Margaret Miles - *Professor of Art History, Classics, and Visual Studies, UC Irvine*

In the whole sweep of western architectural history, surely the fifth century BCE stands out as the period upon which much else depends: when the buildings of the fifth century did not stand as exemplars, they were iconic of what was to be overturned or superseded. Although its roles have been shifting and various, and occasionally forgotten, the architecture of the fifth century still requires a response from current architects. Already by the time of the Roman Empire, the Parthenon and Erechtheum in Athens represented a long-past “golden age” and their styles were emulated in Rome as a hallmark of a new golden age. The refinements of architectural ornament and the sculptural decoration on the temples also inspired much later generations and set new standards in the early modern period. The Parthenon and its sculpture (even in its current location in the British Museum) continue as primary symbols of the achievements of Athens in the Periclean era.

Lecture: WAR IS THE FATHER OF ALL: THE POLITICS OF WAR, EMPIRE, AND FREEDOM IN DEMOCRATIC ATHENS

Kurt A. Raaflaub - *David Herlihy University Professor, Professor of Classics and History and Chair of Ancient Studies, Brown University*

Fifth-century Athens is often thought of as a “Golden Age” of greatness in culture and humanism, characterized by the Parthenon, Phidias’ sculptures, Sophocles’ tragedies, Aristophanes’ comedies, Herodotus’ *Histories*, and the emergence of Socrates’ philosophy. If we can trust the historian Thucydides, the contemporaries defined “greatness” by stunning victories in war, unprecedented imperial power, and unmatched liberty, all achieved by citizens uniquely committed, on the basis of a powerful civic ideology, to their community’s continuing military and political domination. Yet twenty-five years after Pericles’ death, starved and exhausted, Athens lost the Peloponnesian War and was almost destroyed. Professor Raaflaub will discuss the tensions and contradictions, so meaningful to our own time, inherent in Athens’ politics of war, empire, and freedom, their connection with democracy, and the reasons of Athens’ meteoric rise and fall in the fifth century BCE.

12 noon – 1:30 pm Break for Lunch. Herbst Theatre closed 12:00 to 1:00.

1:30 pm Performance: PYTHAGORAS DISCOVERS PHILOSOPHY

George Hammond - *San Francisco attorney and author*

The intellectual influence of Pythagoras on Periclean Athens, and on modern culture, is hard to exaggerate. Known to Humanities West audiences for his presentations on Mark Twain and Plato, this time Hammond dramatizes Pythagoras’s return home to Greece in 550 B.C. after years of educational travel in Babylon and Egypt.

Lecture: GREECE AND PERSIA: A CLASH OF CULTURES?

Erich Gruen - *Emeritus Professor of the Graduate School–Wood Professor, UC Berkeley*

The war between Greece and Persia in the early fifth century BCE has generally been interpreted as representing a mighty watershed in Hellenic history, a pivotal turning point in the self-perception of the Greeks by contrast with the great enemy. The outcome of the war (a Greek victory) provoked the “Orientalizing” of the Persian in Greek eyes, so it is said, a means to distinguish those who lived in freedom and democracy from the despised Iranians who lived contentedly under despotism, scorned liberty and preferred servility to rationality and self-determination. The lecture will explore the validity of this interpretation through two major fifth-century texts, Aeschylus’ powerful play, “The Persians,” and Herodotus’ great history of the war itself.

Panel Discussion

Moderator **Erich Gruen** will lead a panel discussion with questions from the audience.

Founded in 1983, Humanities West, a Bay Area non-profit, is dedicated to “exploring history to celebrate the mind and the arts.” Designed to entertain and educate diverse audiences, these programs offer a lively combination of wide-ranging lectures and performances that encompass the fine arts, social history, music, politics, and philosophy of the arts. This program is supported in part by the Consul General of Greece in San Francisco; Grants for the Arts/ San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund; George Marcus; Institute of European Studies and the Office of Resources for International Area Studies (ORIAS), UC Berkeley; Stanford Humanities Center, Stanford University; and Archeological Institute of America San Francisco Society; with cooperation from the following institutions: American Decorative Arts Forum of the De Young Museum; Annunciation Cathedral; Docents Council, Fine Arts Museums San Francisco; Fromm Institute for Lifelong Learning; Leonardo da Vinci Society; Mechanics’ Institute; San Francisco Classical Voice; San Francisco State University Humanities Department; and Theatre Bay Area.

CALENDAR LISTING: EVENT/LECTURES/ARTS & CULTURE

WHAT: *Athens in its Golden Age: The Time of Pericles*

Humanities West presents a two-day program of lectures, discussions, and theatrical presentations celebrating the significant contributions of 5th-century Athens to art, architecture, philosophy, and theatre. Presenters include Josiah Ober (Stanford University), Mark Griffith (UC Berkeley), Margaret Miles (UC Irvine), Kurt A. Raaflaub (Brown University), George Hammond, and Erich Gruen (UC Berkeley).

WHEN: 8 to 10:15 pm, Friday, May 2, 2008
10 am to noon and 1:30 to 4 pm, Saturday, May 3, 2008

WHERE: Herbst Theatre
401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

TICKETS: \$20- \$90
Tickets are available through City Box Office at
415/392-4400 or online at www.cityboxoffice.com
Group tickets: info@humanitieswest.org

PUBLIC INFO: 415/391-9700 or www.humanitieswest.org

####