



ART WORKS.

Art Works Podcast: Bryan Doerries
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Elizabeth Marvel and Bill Camp in Theater of War. Photo by Howard Korn

This week's podcast pulls back the curtain on Theater of War. Its artistic director and founder, Bryan Doerries, is a classicist and translator, who was convinced that the Greek tragedies still had the power to move contemporary audiences, particularly veterans and service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. When, in 2006, he read about the physical and psychological issues besetting veterans, he saw in their stories parallels to Sophocles' military tragedies. Mindful that Sophocles was a general as well as a playwright, Doerries and other scholars have thought that he wrote the military plays with veterans in mind as a way to help them heal during a period of almost unending war. Doerries believed passionately that these tragedies would both speak to the experiences of today's military personnel and provide an avenue for them to share their own stories. The result of this vision is Theater of War, which has now traveled across the United States and around the world presenting readings of two works by Sophocles to service members, veterans, and their families. *Philoctetes* focuses on the anguish of an injured soldier abandoned by his own men, while the play *Ajax* tells the story of a brave and decorated ancient Greek warrior who at the end of nine years of non-stop battle with Troy, comes home, loses his mind, and ultimately kills himself.

Theater of War is a bare-bones production: The actors, while enormously accomplished and emotionally committed to the material, dress in their own clothes and sit at a table with scripts in hand. However powerful the readings, the heart of the evening is an audience-centered town hall discussion generated from the issues raised by the plays. The response of the service members and their families to these texts written 2,500 years ago has more than justified Doerries' passionate conviction in their continuing power to illuminate and to heal.