

What is chorus? /'kôrəs/

A group of people assembled to sing together.

OR

A large organized group of singers. One that performs together with an orchestra or opera company.

OR

A Chorus is produced when several musicians are playing simultaneously, but inevitably with small changes in the amplitudes and timings between each individual sound.

In music the word "chorus" has three meanings: a group of performers, music for a group of singers and the part of a song that is repeated after a verse.

Explanation of chorus:

The Chorus is a group of actors that together speak, sing, and dance in one body. The Chorus is part ritual part thematic device that play a much larger role in Greek Tragedy than in the other genres. A classic Greek chorus consisted of a number of identically dressed men who served as observers and commentators during the course of a play. They fulfilled several vital functions which helped influence the development of Greek drama.

A Greek chorus could number as many as 50 people, but Sophocles set its number at 15. There were originally 12 chorus members all male but Sophocles added 3 more to make it 15. One of the primary functions of the chorus is to provide atmosphere and, in some ways, underscore the tragic action. When the hero is treading upon major conflict or leading us into the rising action of the plot, the chorus, in a way, is heralders of inevitable disaster and instill a sense of fear or suspense in the audience. In some ways the Chorus can represent the audience's ideal response to the play. Chorus, and its chants and songs, helped the audience better connect with the character, revealing the essence of the tragedy. Greek choruses served to provide the viewers with plot exposition, essentially acting as narrators for many parts of the drama.

What are the functions of chorus in *Oedipus Rex*?

- 1) To entertain the audience.
- 2) To enhance the workings of the plot.
- 3) To explain the characters and events.

Detail about chorus:

Like most all ancient Greek tragedians, Sophocles divides his choral odes into strophe and antistrophe. Both sections had the same number of lines and metrical pattern. In Greek, strophe means "turn," and antistrophe means "turn back." This makes sense when you consider the fact that, during the strophe choruses danced from right to left and during the antistrophe they did the opposite. Sophocles may have split them into two groups, so that it was as if one part of the Chorus was conversing with the other. Perhaps the dualities created by strophe and antistrophe, represent the endless, irresolvable debates for which Greek tragedy is famous.

Specifically, the chorus in a Greek play is made up of dancers and singers. These dancers and singers represent a chorus of Theban elders. As dancers and singers, they signal the end of one episode or scene and the beginning of another. That signaled interlude between episodes or scenes is called the stasimon.

Contribution of chorus to *Oedipus Rex*:

The contribution of the Chorus in *Oedipus Rex* is considerable. They link the play with common humanity. In some sense they are often in the position of the ideal spectator. They fill in the gaps in the action when no other character is there on the stage. They add to it the element of melody which must have been one of the attractions of Greek tragedy. They provide an appropriate shift between the titanic, heroic figure of Oedipus and the mass of common humanity represented by the two shepherds in *Oedipus Res*. The tragedy of Oedipus and its relevance to common life is very well stressed by the Chorus in its exit ode or exode.

The Chorus takes part in the dialogues also. When Oedipus consults them about ending the plague in the city, they express disappointment that the oracle had not guided them about the identity of Laius' murderer. They also tell him what they know about the murder of their previous king and its circumstances. When Creon, learning that the king has accused him of treason, comes on the stage he talks to the Chorus, who tell him that the king's accusation was

probably made in the heat of anger. Creon asked if the king looked absolutely serious while making the charge and they rightly say that it is not for them to look into the eyes of his master when he speaks. When Oedipus has almost passed a sentence upon Creon, Jocasta arrives on the scene and first talks to the Chorus. They request her to settle the difference between the two men. They are worried when they see Jocasta going into the palace in a very dejected mood, and they give expression to their apprehension. Oedipus asks them about the shepherd who gave the infant to the Corinthian, they answer that his queen would be able to answer the question better. They sympathize with Oedipus when they see him after he has blinded himself. It is clear, thus, that the Chorus never takes a direct hand in the action. It does not consist only of spectators but influences the action in various subtle ways.

Chorus with reference to *OEDIPUS REX*:

Sophocles also uses the Chorus at the beginning of the play to help tell the audience the given circumstances of the play. We hear all about the terrible havoc that the plague is wreaking on Thebes. By describing the devastation in such gruesome detail, Sophocles raises the stakes for his protagonist, Oedipus. The people of Thebes are in serious trouble; Oedipus has to figure out who killed Laius fast, or he won't have any subjects left to rule.

Unlike his contemporary Euripides, Sophocles was known to integrate his choruses into the action of the play. In *Oedipus the King* we see the Chorus constantly advising Oedipus to keep his cool. Most of the time in ancient tragedies choruses do a lot of lamenting of terrible events, but do little to stop them. Amazingly, though, the Chorus in *Oedipus the King* manages to convince Oedipus not to banish or execute Creon. Just imagine how much worse Oedipus would have felt if he'd killed his uncle/brother-in-law on top of his other atrocities.

The Chorus in *Oedipus the King* goes through a distinct character arc. They begin by being supportive of Oedipus, believing, based on his past successes, that he's the right man to fix their woes. As Oedipus's behavior becomes more erratic, they become uncertain and question his motives. The fact Oedipus doesn't start lopping off heads at this point is pretty good evidence that he's not a tyrant. In the end, the Chorus is on Oedipus's side again and laments his horrific fate.

During their interludes, the dancers and singers move and sing through their parts. But that does not mean that chorus members lack regular, non-singing parts. In fact, the chorus has a designated choir leader who additionally has spoken interactions with other characters in the play. Through the sung parts of the entire chorus and the spoken parts of the chorus leader, the chorus carries out an additional responsibility to the reading and viewing audience. They

comment on characters and situations as these characters appear and as these situations develop in the play.

Conclusion:

The functions of the Chorus are very well performed in *Oedipus Rex*. In the very first ode the Chorus depicts the horror of the plague and expresses an apprehension about the message from the oracle of Delphi. Other odes comment on the action that has taken place after the last ode and build an atmosphere appropriate to that stage of the play. It plays the role of a peace-maker between the king and Creon and succeeds in getting the king's pardon for the latter. After the exit of Teiresias it comments on the terrible predictions which Teiresias has made but shows determination to support the king. Its most significant response is when Oedipus and Jocasta have expressed irreverent thoughts against the oracles. At many other times also they reflect the dominant mood and help to deepen it. When Oedipus imagines that he is the son of the goodness of luck, the Chorus, immediately sing that their master, Oedipus, might be the son of Apollo. So all in all, chorus has an important role in drama and it has importance like soul in body.