

BACKSTAGE

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THE TROJAN WOMEN

at GTC Burbank

The ancient Greek tragedies are a unique genre. The drama is high, and subtlety is an invention of the future. But Euripides wasn't detailing the convivial stories of women who play bridge or inhabit a hair salon. His script, featuring the aftermath of the Trojan wars, lays bare the human toll of warfare, and it is not pretty. Death is a given. The accompanying brutality and duplicity are damning evidence of mankind's baser instincts.

Director Alberto Isaac does great service by instilling in his cast a sense of commitment to this ageless piece's messages. Despite the script's relentlessly elevated stakes and sometimes archaic liturgical techniques, Isaac avoids the melodramatic. Never more noticeable is this dedication to the moment than in Emily Kuroda's moving performance as Hecuba, the dethroned widow of Troy's former king. Supported by a female chorus of seven, Kuroda anchors the show as Hecuba witnesses her daughter Cassandra's breakdown, the murder of her infant grandson, and her city's cataclysmic destruction.

Excellent supporting turns include Feodor Chin's reluctant Greek enforcer, Talthybius; Elaine Kao's mentally shattered Cassandra; and Janet Song's heartbreakingly futile efforts as Hecuba's daughter-in-law, Andromache, to save her child from being thrown to his death from the city's highest wall. And though comic relief might seem unseemly, director Isaac allows for just a whiff of updated social commentary. Kelvin Han Yee opens the show as the god Poseidon, whose traditionally expository speech brings us up to speed. Yee reappears later as the Greek conqueror Menelaus, bearing more than a passing resemblance in manner and delivery to George W. Bush or maybe William Shatner. His indecisiveness as to the fate of Helen, the instigator of all this horror, played with disarming coquettishness by Patricia Ayame Thomson, is a textbook example of political self-aggrandizement.

Cynthia Obsenares' costuming effectively encompasses time-honored robes and modern-day military wear. Christopher M. Singleton's otherwise capable lighting falls prey to the venue's confines, leaving the upper reaches of Mina Kinukawa's raked stage dark at times. Dennis Yen provides excellently balanced sound elements and original musical compositions as buttresses for this gripping production.

Presented by Lodestone Theatre Ensemble
at GTC Burbank, 1111-B W. Olive Ave.,
Burbank. Fri.-Sat. 8 p.m., Sun. 2 p.m.
Aug. 4-26. (323) 993-7245.
www.lodestonetheatre.org.

Reviewed by Dink O'Neal