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Trojan Women (After Euripides)

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Boston residents will not be hard pressed to draw parallels between the horrific images that emerged from the Boston Marathon bombings and those presented on stage in the SITI Company's production of **Trojan Women (After Euripides)**, now at Arts Emerson's Paramount Theatre through April 21.



A scene from "Trojan Woman (After Euripides)

The one-act play conveys in poetic language the agonies of war, which Bostonians can relate to, especially this week. Originally commissioned by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2011, the show has been touring nationally, adapted from the Greek text by Jocelyn Clark with a cast of nine under Anne Bogart's inspired direction. Despite the chaos and pain we have been collectively experiencing as we struggle to reclaim our streets, this is a production not to be missed.

The play begins with descriptions of how the Greeks used the Trojan horse as subterfuge to lay siege to the city of Troy, related to us by Poseidon (Brent Werzner), who says he emerged from the "wine dark sea" to tell this tale. He stands on the stark set and describes how Troy was violated, pillaged, and desecrated by the Greeks who have taken the citizens hostage, "to die as slaves." This sets the tone for all that follows: a heart-wrenching portrayal of loss of regal status and social standing, and the ensuing enslavement of the vanquished Trojan women, who emerge from the wings, apparitional, dressed in long, flowing white gowns.



A scene from "Trojan Woman (After Euripides)

A pit of soft pebbles is spread in a deep circle, center stage, depicting a strand of dark volcanic Mediterranean beach. The actors, most of whom are barefoot, trod noiselessly across these pebbles as if walking on scorched earth that no longer resembles their once resplendent home. They inherit a landscape ruined by bloody conflicts. We learn that unseen Greek ships will soon take them as captives to serve their masters.

The set is minimalist: a few chairs, a bench, and these are kept in storage at the rear of the stage.

Christian Frederickson, a violinist, lurks in the stark wing, stage left, and plays eerily on his electrified instrument. The lights, designed by Brian H. Scott, emphasize chiaroscuro and effectively cast shadows

against the back wall of the stage as darkness encircles the players and overtakes them.

The costumes, designed by Melissa Trn, emphasize the beauty and fragility of the Trojan women and give shape to their earth bound woes. The men - an envoy from the army (Leon Ingulsrud) and two others wear military garb, save one, Meanalus (J. Ed Araiza) who appears briefly near the end of the play dressed in a formal evening suit to call attention to his mocking domination over the women.

While the cast is individually and collectively remarkable, it is the performance by Ellen Lauren as Hecuba that is the most riveting. In scenes that unfold seamlessly she tells us repeatedly of her losses as a queen, a wife, and a mother, roles she lived robustly, roles she will never reclaim. She struggles with thoughts of death, knowing she will be herded off to a Greek ship as chattel, where

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A scene from "Trojan Women (After Euripides)

she will await "more sorrows to come." She sinks into the black pebbles, lying prone, a limb or a hand rising above the pebbles as they engulf her. She shares the tormented struggles of her mind as she urges herself, audibly, to stand, to regain strength. The lower part of her white robes is stained from the inky pebbles. Her upper torso reaches outward to embrace her fellow women as they wrestle with the overpowering presence of their captors. Yet the lower darkened band of fabric that has soiled her robes reminds us she and the others will only sink deeper as they push against the gravitas of their situation, as if mired in quicksand.

As Helen, Katherine Crockett also emerges as a performer of magnitude as she uses her statuesque beauty to try to charm Menelaus, her Greek captor, who is at once titillated and repulsed by her charms. Watch her as she paces the stage, her long blond hair as diaphanous as her robes, her long legs making their way through the mire of the black pebbles as if she walks above them on an airstream. She is ridiculed as a "whore," but it doesn't tarnish her vain attempt to gain favor, and she reveals, in a rhapsodic torrent of words that she can claim preferential treatment for herself. These are the dreams, we realize, since all the women are condemned to face their fate on this blackened shore.

Director Anne Bogart once commented in an interview a few years ago that she wanted to create theatre that "activates our souls."

This production accomplishes that. We leave the Paramount having been wrenched free of our despair, only to realize that it has not been excised, but, rather, it has found a place to live within us and we are stronger for having faced it.

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Trojan Women (After Euripides), created and performed by SITI Company, adapted by Jocelyn Clark, directed by Anne Bogart, is at Arts Emerson, Paramount Theatre, Boston, through April 21. For tickets, visit their website



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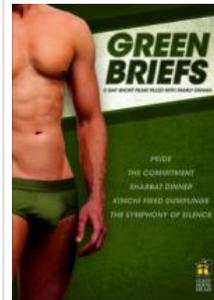


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