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Trojan Women (after Euripides)

"The Trojan Women" is essential viewing for anyone interested in the conversation between timeless texts and modern theatrical practice.

By BOB VERINI

Euripides' "The Trojan Women" is commonly accepted as the world's single most eloquent antiwar statement. It's also widely regarded as eventless and plotless, and usually played as one long cry of woe. For this year's Getty Villa Greek showcase, helmer Anne Bogart and her acclaimed SITI Company have unearthed the vital, immediate drama within this classic. The result is essential viewing for anyone interested in the conversation between timeless texts and modern theatrical practice.

The masterstroke - so simple, yet so difficult to pull off - was to invest traditionally static figures with purpose and drive. On a virtually bare stage, Bogart keeps the characters in constant motion and in constant view as they challenge the gods and resist their predetermined fates.

SITI's celebrated precision of physicality dovetails with character in the once-mighty Queen Hecuba (Ellen Lauren), lying prostrate before her defeated city. Each new catastrophe - the loss of kingdom, daughters, grandson and freedom in succession - lays her low, but she keeps rising from the canvas to fight again, a testament to the indomitability of the human spirit.

Characters so often portrayed in unvarying grief are rendered active and engaged. The maddened seeress Cassandra (Akiko Aizawa) dashes ecstatically about to celebrate the horrors she knows are coming for the victorious Greeks. Andromache (Makela Spielman) becomes a living Pieta as she invests her entire being in cloaking her doomed infant son.

And the infamous Helen (Katherine Crockett) glides along for all the world like a Real Housewife of Sparta, devilishly trying to persuade the cuckolded Menelaus (J. Ed Araiza) to forgive her her trespasses. (Her clash with an infuriated, vengeful Hecuba takes on all the ambiguity and suspense of a classic courtroom confrontation.)

Even the usual chorus of weeping women is replaced by a single court factotum, a eunuch-priest (Barney O'Hanlon) tireless in Hecuba's service. His snatches of Oriental dance, accompanied by Christian Frederickson's seductive sampling of world music on violin and synthesizer, carry a perfumed reminder of the exotic Troy that was.

Jocelyn Clarke's adaptation "After Euripides" makes up in clarity and passion what it lacks in

lyricism, so much the better in these dynamic circumstances. In his most audacious tactic, he brings the wily politician Odysseus (Gian-Murray Gianino) onto the scene. No particular poetry is added, but there's something satisfying about a first-hand encounter with the dapper Donald Rumsfeld figure who masterminded the Greek "surge" and its triumphant outcome.

The follies of war are inescapable over the course of a painful 100 minutes, but to the very end Bogart rejects despair. As Hecuba and her eunuch raise their feet to walk to the Greek ships, a blackout cuts them off in mid-stride. Despite everything, they will keep moving forward.

The moment makes you gasp, as the principals in one of the world's greatest myths join with the tramps of "Waiting for Godot" to affirm: "We can't go on. Let's go on."

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