Written by Mike Schulz
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As the organization's annual Greek dramas always do, Genesius Guild's presentation of *Electra* begins with a processional. During this preamble, the cast members, accompanied by a majestic anthem, slowly make their way across the Lincoln Park stage, and those who'll be wearing the traditional headpieces of the period carry them at waist level, giving us an early peek at Ellen Dixon's costumes, Earl Strupp's masks, and, for the last time before the curtain call, the performers' faces. (Only the play's choral figures remain unmasked throughout the production.) It's a lovely touch, as reassuringly familiar as Genesius Guild's nightly T-shirt giveaway and the shrieking from the children playing on the neighboring swing sets.

But the processional for *Electra* was also different from most, as halfway through the cross from stage left to stage right, several actors made an unexpected U-turn, breaking the single-file formation and creating *another* processional, one leading back to the stage-left entranceway. This was a slight break from custom, but not an insignificant one, because it turned out that director Peggy Hanske's 75-minute one-act would frequently go in directions that you didn't anticipate. And nothing about the performance might surprise you more than just how much *fun* you'll likely have at it.

As with last summer's *Medea*, also directed by Hanske, the soliloquies and dialogue in this adaptation of a classical Greek text have been modernized just enough to sound conversational; it's a production in which the chorus' leader (an excellent Kate Farence) can briefly stifle the lamentations of Electra (Andrea Braddy) with a curt "Control yourself!", and Electra can disparage her mother, Clytemnestra (Susan Perrin-Sallak), with a viciously understated "Callow *bitch*." (The show's program doesn't provide information on who did the updating, but considering it's a Genesius Guild offering, I have my suspicions.) This subtle modernizing, though, neither impedes nor diminishes the poetry. What it *does* do is provide *Electra* with a

universality that audiences can latch onto regardless of their acquaintance with Sophocles' work; the actions may be taking place thousands of years ago, but the tensions are most definitely of-the-moment.

And that's where the fun stems from, because unlike many stage interpretations of this tale, Genesius Guild's *Electra* isn't designed to be an anguished meditation on fate and individual responsibility so much as a down-and-dirty take on *Mommie Dearest*. In togas. The textual alterations might be subtle, but barring the silent reactions of the women in the chorus (all 10 of whom appear impressively connected to the material), there's absolutely nothing subtle about *Electra*'s portrayals - they're grandly hyperbolic, and given their context here, this feels exactly right.

I didn't recognize the name Andrea Braddy from any other area stage productions I've attended, so I'll admit to a bit of a double-take during the performer's eventual curtain call, because I couldn't believe that such intimidating vocal power had been generated by such a young actress, and one with such a sweetheart of a smile. (She appears to be in her early 20s, *tops*.) The role of Electra is incredibly demanding - an hour of agony, heartbreak, and blistering anger, followed by five minutes of unfettered happiness - and Braddy pulls it off with sensational force and commitment; her passions are so vibrant that you could swear the immobile features on her headpiece are shifting right along with her emotions.

Yet the actress is also shrewd enough to play her tirades for dark comedy when situations merit it - the trick with Electra is to not allow the character to come off as a pill - and Braddy is deeply, brutally funny when coercing her simple-minded sister, Chrysothemis (Anna Tunnicliff), or delivering an insulting two-fer with her reference to Aesisthus (Scott Tunnicliff) as "the man who

pleasures my mother ... should I *call* that thing my mother." It's positively first-rate work, and my only request for future Braddy performances is that she be allowed to give them *sans* mask; anyone with this much talent deserves to be *seen* .

Matching her in outsize grandeur is Perrin-Sallak, with her exquisitely gravelly low tones, whose ferocious malice is never more entertaining than when responding to word of the passing of Orestes (James J. Loula) with a thrillingly heartless, "He was alive because I *gave* him life!" Anna Tunnicliff provides welcome light comedy and several unexpected laughs, making Chrysothemis a classical-Greek twitterbrain. (She replies to Electra's suffering by whining, "I suffer, *too* ... ," sounding for all the world like someone who hasn't suffered a day in her life.) And as the elderly keeper who brings news of Orestes' (fabricated) death in a chariot race, Edmund Dean is in spectacular voice, giving his lines weight, urgency, and momentum; he's a wonderfully robust stage presence. (Dean benefits enormously from his mask, as this young actor probably wouldn't have been cast as an old man *without* one, and that would've been to the production's detriment.)

Biting, nasty, and wholly engaging, Genesius Guild's *Electra* provides Greek drama with the juicy sting of your favorite nighttime soap, and Saturday's presentation earned bonus points for being remarkably free of external irritants, excepting a three-minute Lincoln Park firecracker onslaught that briefly made the on-stage goings-on unintelligible. A small price to pay, though, for a show with plenty of its *own* fireworks.

For more information, visit (http://www.genesius.org).