

## War Brides: "Trojan Women," at the Village Theatre through May 31

Written by Mike Schulz  
Sunday, 24 May 2009 16:04

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The Prenzie Players' presentation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, adapted by Richard Lattimore, runs just over an hour, and I can't imagine who would want it to last longer than that. There's so much anguish and grief on display, and the material appears so deeply felt by director Jill Sullivan-Bennin's cast, that the production leaves you not just haunted, but shaken; it's questionable whether either the actors or the audience could endure

*two*

hours of such extreme emotional states.

Yet for a piece that offers no lightheartedness or intentional humor, and almost no tonal reprieve from its characters' suffering, this take on Euripides' classic is an altogether exhilarating piece of theatre. Fiercely acted and fearlessly staged, the Prenzies' *Trojan Women* (sans the "The") is frequently painful, yet it's that

*good*

type of pain that you only find in the arts - the type that wakes you up with a nearly electric charge and clears the cobwebs from your head. By Saturday's curtain call, I was ready for the experience to be over, but also so jazzed that I felt I could talk about it until the sun came up.

Euripides' drama, roundly thought to be the greatest anti-war meditation ever written, achieves its effects through simplicity. Detailing the horrific plight of the abducted and enslaved women of Troy, *The Trojan Women* features no real plot to speak of, and almost no subtext, yet its elemental power is so strong that the play doesn't need either. This impassioned lament for the victims of war has a devastating purity and economy, and despite the scenic design (by the director and Cait Bodenbender) that suggests Guantanamo Bay, the Prenzies honor their material by playing it with a universal truthfulness that hits you like a sucker punch to the gut.

Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the glorious, emotionally overwhelming portrayal of Dee Canfield, who digs so thoroughly into Queen Hecuba's rage and despair that she seems to represent the very *soul* of Greek tragedy. With her richly expressive voice and sublime interpretive skills, Canfield creates a splendidly tormented Hecuba, yet the actress exudes so much performance joy that you don't suffer along with her character; amidst the misery, Canfield conveys the unmitigated delight a performer takes in mastering a tricky role. (It's only May, and it's already been a remarkable stage year for Canfield, who was also sensational - given less taxing duties - in Playcrafters' *The Mousetrap* and the Green Room's *Steel*)

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*Magnolias*

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Beyond Hecuba, the empathetic messenger Talthybius (Scot Gehret, in a marvelously heartfelt Prenzie debut), and *Trojan Women's* chorus - the first-rate ensemble of Nichole Adkins, Kim Gackle, Kylie Jansen, Alaina Pascarella, Beth Woolley, and Becky Wren - the other major characters are designed to provide maximum impact in a minimal amount of stage time, and their actors do so with outstanding conviction.



The lovely Amy Ferrar radiates exquisite maternal ache as the tragically resigned Andromache, and John Turner and Anne Javaherian fill their godly roles of Poseidon and Athena with decidedly humanistic feeling. Jeremy Mahr, ever focused, is an impressively commanding Melelaus, while (*Reader* employee) Stephanie Burrough delivers Helen's explanation of her treachery with wickedly understated guile; without resorting to any kind of obviousness, the slyly skillful Burrough fashions a ravishing figure who's ugly to the core.

As for Stephanie Moeller's Cassandra, driven mad by agony and the cruelty of the gods, she's utterly spellbinding, as vocally and physically fervent as you could possibly want. With each new Prenzie show, Moeller's talents seem to increase exponentially, and you leave *Trojan Women* t hinking there's no classical ingénue role she couldn't knock out of the park. (I'd *kill*

to see her take on Ophelia and/or Cordelia. Preferably "and.")

Over the course of 60-plus minutes, Sullivan-Bennin stages an incredible variety of memorable sequences and images: Cassandra's dance, illuminated by firelight and accompanied by percussive beats and low-pitched hums; Andromache embracing her young son (the beautifully grave Samuel Javaherian) for the last time; the wailing chorus involuntarily surging forward at the threat of his execution. And that wondrous technician Jennifer Kingry outdoes herself with her lighting designs here. The blazing white downlight on Cassandra's contortions was intensely effective, but the effects that demonstrated the burning of Troy were damned near miraculous.

The Prenzie Players' *Trojan Women* is a true stunner, although I do have a gripe with the

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ad-libbed interjections thrown in during Helen's makeshift trial; the chorus' collective anger is understandable, but their need to individually vocalize that anger by shouting "No!" and "Yeah!" and, on Saturday, "*Fuck yeah!*" is less so. Prenzies audiences are likely used to the group's employment of modern references within period storytelling, but there are times when this technique is fitting and times when it isn't, and within the dramatically precise scope of *The Trojan Women*, it simply isn't. All it does is pull you out of the moment (and inspire a few unfortunate giggles), and in a show as magnificent as this one, you don't want to be pulled out even for a *second*.

For more information, visit [PrenziePlayers.com](http://PrenziePlayers.com).