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While waiting for Sunday night's performance of Euripides' *Andromache* to begin, I contemplated the ways in which Genesius Guild is a Quad Cities treasure. Not that it's necessarily *greater* than any other local group, but it's definitely unique; performing in the open-air setting of Lincoln Park, Genesius Guild provides a theatrical experience unmatched in the area. In the case of *Andromache*, the play's genre is also exclusive to Genesius Guild, as the organization the only local theatre group regularly performing Greek tragedy.

The treasure that is Genesius Guild could all too easily tarnish, however, were the group's productions not equally special. And *Andromache* shines brightly.

The play begins at end of the Trojan War, when Andromache (Janell Just) - now the widow of Trojan hero Hector - is a slave in the house of Achilles' son, Neoptolemus, for whom she bears a child. When Neoptolemus marries Hermione (Andrea Braddy), daughter of Menelaus (Bryan Woods) and Helen, Andromache's life takes a turn for the worse, as she's subjected to Hermione's vicious tongue-lashings and absurd accusations (such as employing Oriental witchcraft to make Hermione infertile).

Fearing for their lives, Andromache hides herself and her son, Molossus (David Willaert). Yet when he is eventually found and threatened by Menelaus, Andromache offers her life in exchange for her son's - only to discover, after Menelaus agrees, that she has been tricked, and now *both* are condemned to die.

Directed by Don Wooten, Genesius Guild's *Andromache* is (arguably) most notable for its costumes, created by Ellen Dixon. The noble characters are decked out in bright, metallic colors, perfectly matched to each character's mask, which were designed by the Reverend George Wuellner. Almost glowing in their vibrant hues, the clothing catches the lights well, and easily captures the audience's attention. (Or, at least, captured
mine
.)

Earl Strupp's stage design, meanwhile, is simple, but with an air of sophistication. Five flats, each painted with a single tree, flank the stage, while pillars and a symbol of the sea goddess Thetis - mimicking ancient Greek pottery - sit on a riser to one side to represent Thetis' temple. The trees and symbol are painted with such precision that their effect, which is both classy and classical in nature, transcends their modest size.

There's nothing modest, however, about Braddy's performance. Despite having her face hidden behind a mask, Braddy manages to convey Hermione's haughty personality through pointed inflection and grand gestures. Hermione is by no means a likable character, but Braddy's wicked bitchiness in the role is captivating and quite humorous, and I was never more delighted with *Andromache* than when Braddy was speaking. Her Hermione is a woman I loved to hate.

Woods commands the stage equally well, though with less humor than Braddy (which may be attributed more to his lines than his abilities as an actor). With a voice that easily carries through the night air, he suits the performance space quite nicely.

Pat Flaherty, though, offers more nuance than any other actor on stage. In his role as Neoptolemus' grandfather, Peleus, his emotional repertoire is rich, calling for anger, sorrow, condescension, and pity all within one monologue - and without the use of his face to convey

them - and it's a testament to Flaherty's vocal control that he's able to act around (or rather *through*) the limitations of a mask.

Taking in a classic Greek tragedy may not seem like the perfect summer evening for all Quad Citians. But that's unfortunate, because the experience of outdoor theatre is an exceptional one, particularly when you're treated to the pageantry of color - in apparel and performance - that is *Andromache*.

For more information, visit Genesius.org .

Thom White covers entertainment news for WQAD Quad Cities News 8.