

Latest encounter The Trojan Woman

Cacoyannis - his movies are about Greece

By JOHN OUGHTON

Michael Cacoyannis, a respected stage and film director, is probably best known to Canadians for his movie version of Zorba The Greek. A Greek expatriate, Cacoyannis has a great love for classical Greek drama. He has made a movie adaptation of Euripides' Electra and staged "The Trojan Women" in three different productions. His most recent dramatic work was an off-Broadway version of "Iphigenia in Aulis" which starred Irene Papas.

Cacoyannis was recently in Toronto to promote his newest movie, an adaptation of The Trojan Women which stars the formidable quartet of Katherine Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave, Irene Papas and Genevieve Bujold. A review of the Trojan Women will appear soon in Excalibur; the movie opens Dec. 24 in Toronto.

Arriving right on time for the university newspapers' press conference with Cacoyannis, I soon found myself in the somewhat uncomfortable position of being the only university reviewer to show up. Six reporters had originally been expected, so I had prepared about ten minutes' worth of questions. The somewhat disjointed character of the excerpts from my conversation with Cacoyannis which follow can thus be attributed to my nervousness.

Cacoyannis is a small, fiftyish man with strong, dark features who plays absently with a string of prayer beads as he talks. He listens politely to questions, regardless of their relative inanity and answers quickly and concisely. However, there is a certain weariness in his eyes and voice, a weariness resulting from too many brief stays in hotels like the Park Plaza,

repeating things for reporters who don't consider Euripides good copy.

Excalibur: Are you now allowed to visit Greece?

Cacoyannis: Yes, but under the present regime I do not wish to. I am in a self-imposed exile.

Excalibur: You were quoted in some press release as saying that "Living today, Euripides would be a great screenwriter." What is there about Euripides which seems cinematic to you?

Cacoyannis: He is a political writer and thus seeks the widest possible audience. The way he constructs the dynamics of a scene and then closes in on one person is very intimate — like a close-up. This is where cinema can legitimately do more than theatre. Also, with Euripides, the silences are as important as the words...there is no philosophizing as in Shakespeare.

Excalibur: In adapting The Trojan Women into a screenplay, how much did you alter the original script?

Cacoyannis: I began with Edith Hamilton's excellent translation. One has to believe in the reality of the original work...yet give it the breathing that you need for a film — to open it up and achieve that dimension of reality. My version of The Trojan Women is less faithful than Olivier's Hamlet was to Hamlet, although I believe it is just as faithful in spirit...I cut more freely than did Orson Welles in his movie of Othello. In the end, the movie has to stand on its own feet.

Excalibur: How long did it take to shoot the movie?

Cacoyannis: The filming was completed in eight weeks, which is fast by anyone's standards.

Excalibur: You have directed both plays and movies. Do you find



Hecuba (Katharine Hepburn) comforts her daughter-in-law Andromache (Vanessa Redgrave) as they face their individual fates in The Trojan Women, a Michael Cacoyannis film.

The Josef Shaffel production was directed and written by Cacoyannis who co-produced with Anis Nohra and is based on the play by Euripides.

that you have to change your technique as a director when shifting from one medium to another?

Cacoyannis: The essence is the same because you always go for truth, and the truth is the same. However, the settings demand a different sense of projection. There are obvious differences in that voice levels and entrances are much more critical in the theatre...the camera exposes in sincerity much more than than in theatre. In theatre, an actor can lose the sense of what he is saying because he has to project it.

Excalibur: What are your next projects going to be?

Cacoyannis: I am staging an opera in New York during January for the Juillard School which is very good for young people. The opera is La Boheme and it will have a very young cast. Then, I will be doing Aristophanes, the first women's lib play, which is Lysistrata. It is very vulgar...the women withhold sex from their men until they are ready to cry "peace at any price."

Excalibur: The press release said that you hope to complete an Euripidean triptych by filming Orestes and Iphigenia in Aulis. Is this still a desire of yours?

Cacoyannis: Well, Iphigenia in Aulis, certainly. But Orestes is a much more psychological play.

Excalibur: Your filming of Kazantakis' Zorba The Greek was very well received. Do any of Kazantakis' other works strike you as good movie material?

Cacoyannis: The only other one that interests me cinematically is Freedom of Death.

Excalibur: Have you always had an interest in both drama and film?

Cacoyannis: Yes. I was always interested in movies. I grew up in a small Greek town where there were often movies shown...but I loved theatre equally. We lived next to an open-air cinema where I saw my first movie before the age of three...I believe it was The Man in The Iron Mask. It terrified me.

Excalibur: The first movie I ever saw was Hiawatha which was terrifying to me then.

Cacoyannis: The King Vidor version?

Excalibur: I forget. Incidentally, the cast for The Trojan Women included Bujold, Papas, Redgrave and Hepburn. Did you find any conflicts of culture or personality with four such famous actresses?

Cacoyannis: Papas was Greek already and this difference was valuable. With the others, people exaggerate the differences too much. These are three intelligent

and experienced actresses who speak an absolutely common language. What gives them unity is not a matter of nationality. However, I did correct their accents. For instance, Genevieve was saying Mother, stressing the last syllable. So I told her, "Don't say Mother, say Mother."

Excalibur: When did you first become interested in working with Bujold?

Cacoyannis: It was her first film, La Guerre Est Finie, which showed me her wonderful quality. I have known Genevieve and her husband Paul Almond as friends for some time. She would be a perfect Juliet since she is temperamental, yet has a steely willpower...unlike the traditional conception of Juliet.

Excalibur: You have been quoted as saying about The Trojan Women that what the play says is as important now as it was when it was written. I feel about militarism and war the same way Euripides did, but no one has expressed it quite as concisely and beautifully as he did." Certainly your movie version is a powerful condemnation of war. What do you think of people who actively protest against such wars as the conflict in Vietnam?

Cacoyannis: Yes. I think people should go against war — if they feel morally strong about it.



Irene Papas plays Helen opposite Patrick Magee who plays Menelaus, her husband.

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