

the greeks reach a modern audience



by Mayte Gomez

"Sing, O Goddess, the anger of Achilles son of Pel-

eus, that brought countless ills upon the Achaeans." Thus begins Homer's *The Iliad*, a fable of the mythological war between Greeks and Trojans, a "worthless" war which left the mark of hatred and death for generations to come.

The Greeks — a 10-play cycle adapted for modern audiences by British playwrights John Barton and Kenneth Cavander — is a compilation of plays by Euripides, Aeschylus and Sophocles that deal with the Trojan War and its aftermath.

In Toronto, York's fine arts graduate programme and the Equity Showcase Theatre have united their efforts and resources to produce *The Greeks* for the Canadian Stage Company. David Rotenberg, artistic director of the graduate programme, and York professor Tom Diamond, direct seven and three of the plays respectively. The cast consists of professional actors from Equity as well as graduate and undergraduate York actors.

Despite the possible audience prejudice towards ancient plays — especially in a seven hour format — *The Greeks* manages to speak to the 1990s world in an efficient way. The first half of the play, "The Cursed," portrays the events of the Trojan War and its

outcome. The second part, "The Blessed," shows Greece seven years later, as people are trying to deal with the curse of the war and the endless chain of murder and hatred that was created.

From the perspective of the modern world, we understand the first half of the show as our past which began in Greece; a past responsible for much of the injustice and powerlessness of the present. Both Greece and Troy are run by feeble-minded, cruel men who play with the lives of their people, deciding on the future of their countries through personal threats and alliances. The parallel with our world is so painfully obvious it needs no explanation.

In the second part, we see the youth inherit such a system and rebel, in a vacuum, for they do not understand what they are victims of. They realize there is hope despite the dreadful past, however their anger sometimes becomes powerlessness.

The characters in *The Greeks* are close to us in their enraged youthfulness and profound despair. Electra is a passionate youth who wears torn blue jeans and needs drugs to calm her anger. The chorus is composed of women who, with their modern costumes and behaviour, repres-

ent the oppressed people in the world. Barry Flatman intelligently portrays a heartless Agamemnon, almost funny in his cruelty.

The York graduate actors are very sensitive in their roles, sometimes funny, sometimes sweet and always powerful. Especially remarkable are Bruce Pitkin, Abbey Zozt, Carolyn Guillet and Dennis Kuss in their portrayals of Manelaus, Andromache, Clytemnestra and Orestes respectively. From the undergraduate actors, Tamara Bernier is innocent in her portrayal of Iphigenia who is about to be sacrificed by Agamemnon, her own father, and mature in portraying the same woman 17 years later.

The two directors, although different in style, have managed to keep coherence between the two parts. Rotenberg presents a past world with a futurist perspective, for the wrongs of the past might very well be those of the future. Diamond presents the youthful men and women of today in a painful, emotional surrounding very close to post-modernism. As the characters of the second half say, people need an answer — and we could add — they must be answered before it is too late.

The greatest achievement of *The Greeks* is that it offers a "real-

ization of hope," as we venture in this world full of injustices that, despite our struggle, we barely understand.



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