

The Living Room Theatre, North Bennington, VT
Her Name Means Memory by Randolyn Zinn;
based on Euripides' "Trojan Women."
Directed by Randolyn Zinn. Reviewed by J. Peter Bergman.

"Cassandra is a vexation not a vixen."

A new edition of any classic Greek play is always welcome. In the case of Randolyn Zinn's version of Euripides' "The Trojan Women" a new edition is most welcome. Her use of language is exquisite! In the swimming pool at the Park-McCullough Mansion in North Bennington, Vermont The Living Room Theatre's production is most welcome.



Monique Vukovic as Andromache, Anne Bates as Hecuba,
Oliver Wadsworth as Herald; Photo: Allen McCullough

wives of their husbands' slaughterers. Cassandra, daughter of Hecuba, the widowed Queen of Troy, sees herself as the Trojan version of the Greek's Trojan Horse, her intent on the destruction of her destroyers is overwhelming. That her plans cannot succeed is beside the point. She intends to have her revenge.

Valeri Mudek plays Cassandra, the avenging princess whose prophecies will not be taken seriously by Agamemnon. She is wonderful in the role, a perfect "vexation" but clearly not a "vixen" or temptress for her captor. In Zinn's play she speaks of the future but not in a way that makes her a

There have been more than two dozen adaptations/translations of this play over the centuries, some in prose and some in verse, but Zinn's work is both, giving the audience more opportunities to understand the characters, the incidents and the eventual outcome for the women of Troy, left to their own devices after their defeat by the Spartan Greeks. Poetic sensibility is essential to the play, but rhyming verses are not. These are women suffering the heartbreak of loss, the devastation of futures as servants, concubines and



Valeri Mudek as Helen;
Photo: Allen McCullough

star attraction. She is a prominent member of the ensemble of women but not the leading actress. She is taken away to a waiting commander, never to return. Mudek does come back to the stage later in the play in the role of Helen of Troy, the ostensible cause of the war, wooed away from her husband Menelaus by Hecuba's son Paris. Mudek's Helen is a sweet woman, misunderstood by everyone including herself. She is maligned by Hecuba and the other women but stands up mightily to them in Zinn's wonderful language. "*I am the innocent victim of an insecure young man*" she tells her husband and her lover's mother in language so plain and so modern it continues the author's intention of making this play immediately accessible to the audience of today.

The entire cast of this show are Equity members (except for two) and the professionalism of the company is superb. Ten characters are played by nine people, seven women and two men. Hecuba is played by Anne Bates, a strong, dynamic actress with a fabulous voice and perfect diction. She is devastating in the role, a queen among queens who cannot be restrained or refrained from speaking truth, honest and painful. Bates is regal in movement

and speech. She is a perfect choice for this lengthy and difficult role. When Andromache, Monique Vukovic, widow of Hector, is forced to give up her infant son, Bates' Hecuba takes over the situation and helps the young wife overcome her anger, anxiety and fear. Vukovic does this scene extremely well and ultimately gives a very moving performance.

Menelaus is played by Allen McCullough who gives the man a troubled urgency. He is ready to kill his treacherous wife, Helen, but is won over by her innocent explanations. McCullough makes deciding her fate into a one-act play inside the larger piece and he does it with a mastery that might elude a lesser actor. Among the other players is Xingrong Chen whose Corra is the most emotional of the woman. Her playing is so sincere that she is a moving force in the play expressing her fears and dreams



Xingrong Chen;
Photo: Allen McCullough

with a simplicity that is very engaging.

Susannah McLeod plays Lenci very well and Janis Young is wonderful as Xenia, the personal confidante and counselor to Hecuba. Eliza Hill takes the role of Galyna. Oliver Wadsworth plays the seemingly unimportant role of Herald, but by the time the play ends his role has grown to represent the humanity of the play. He obeys orders. That is the Herald's job. But he quietly and inadvertently expresses his disgust at the restrictions of his work and the limitations of his honest sympathy. Next to Hecuba and Helen and Andromache this is the most effective role and performance in this play.

Costumes for this play were created by designer Cynthia Flynt whose designs are classic and yet contemporary. These women, who reflect on themes we still hear about today, are dressed in a way that tells the audience that though the play may refer to bygone days, the words are still a reflection of today's morals and mores.

It is rare, these days, to see a classic Greek tragedy on our regional stages. They are usually best left to college productions rather than professional ones. Randolyn Zinn has transformed that normalcy into professional work and the result is mesmerizing and emotionally satisfying. This deserves a long, successful run and I hope, weather permitting, it gets what it deserves.

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Her Name Means Memory plays at the Park-McCollough mansion in North Bennington, VT through August 6. For information and tickets go to their website at: <http://www.lrtvt.org>.