

LEGIT REVIEWS

The Greeks**(Back Alley Theater;
93 seats; \$15 top)**

If the three Euripides plays, "Helen," "Orestes" and "Iphigenia In Taurus," played as tv sitcoms, are indicative of the trilogy covering the Trojan wars and the aftermath being presented at Back Alley Theater, one wonders if return for the other two three-parters is worth it.

Originally produced by the Royal Shakespeare Company, the John Barton and Kenneth Cavendar adaptation from Cavendar's original translation, the epic cycle also received productions at Williamstown, Hartford Stage Co. and Seattle's A. Contemporary Theater.

Distillation of the legends and myths of Greece as chronicled by Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus and Homer, might be okay if texts of those writers had just been pared and the bones with a little bit of the meat had been retained.

But to present them in 1986 idiom and attitudes, result is like amateurs being given free reign to say, do and ad lib all they feel like. Third part starts, for instance, with Arlene Golonka, as Helen, sunning herself on a simulated fur covered rock as blithely as is she were lying in her backyard pool area somewhere in the Valley.

Her Bronx dialect makes it all too clear that something out of the way is afoot. And when her hubby, Menelaus (played by James Higgins), returns from the great wars, she treats it as if he had just gone to the deli to get a pack of cigarettes.

Miss him? Oh, yeah. Remain faithful to him? Sure, but she doesn't really understand why. You never can trust the gods, or your dreams. So, just in case, she waited for him.

If humanizing the gods and myths is purpose of this marathon, one would think that Helen would be

totally beside herself with her man home. But no, it's just another day on the shore of the Aegean.

And Sharonlee McLean plays Electra as a petulant child. She and Orestes (Alden Millikan) have just killed their mother, Clytemnestra, and she's put out at the gods for setting them up as patsies.

Iphigenia (essayed by Lynn Lowry), who was slain in the first evening, miraculously shows up in Taurus as a captive and Orestes, haunted by the Furies for his part in the killing of Clytemnestra, and his buddy, Pylades (Alex Statler) turn up there in their flight.

There's a silly recognition scene between Iphigenia and Orestes (brother and sister, remember?) and she plots their escape to return home. Of course, the gods and goddesses have to comment on everything that's happened and Athene, played by Judyann Elder, explains it all away to a happy ending.

Such a task as this epic cycle must have a close-knit ensemble to make it work and even then it's likely to be community-theater time. Unless it's a body parody of the classics (like, say, "A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum"), it's likely to turn out to be a mish-mash.

And that's what Allan Miller, director, has let this particular trio of plays become. A mish-mash with a huge cast, most of whom go off in different directions at random.

Clifton R. Welch provides a bleak set of simulated rocks and Greg R. McCullough lights it starkly. Costumes are by Armand-Coutu, Terri H. Emilio and Ruth E. Carter, and they show that many, if not more, styles and periods. Original score by David Kates would better suit a vid-blurb for flashlight batteries.

If this production is typical of the entire cycle, the whole thing must leave a lot to be desired. *Edwa.*