

Arts & Features

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

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Theatre UNCA debuts 'Trojan Women' as outdoor play

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Unlike the indoor plays Theatre UNCA usually performs, "Trojan Women" is set to debut in a more traditional manner on the lawn in front of Carol Belk Theatre.

"The reason why we're doing it outside is to get a little closer to the way it would have been done in the traditional period. So, we're doing it with masks, historical-like costumes and somewhat traditional set wise," director Rob Berls said.

Berls, now in his fifth year as an associate professor of drama at UNC Asheville, said he realizes there will be unprecedented challenges for his actors.

"This is something our students haven't run into yet. So, it's a very good educational experience. With outdoor theater, a lot of times you don't have amplification, mics or anything like that. So this is another unique opportunity for our students to get a little bit more involved," he said.

Stacy Hines, one of six chorus members in the play, also considers the outdoor set a unique learning experience.

"By moving outside, it makes us more able to learn as theater students what it means to not get familiar with one space," she said.

Berls said allowing free admission and an outside performance makes the play more accessible to students and members of the community.

Katherine Palm, who plays the part of Cassandra, said she believes performing the play outdoors adds symbolism to the production.

"We're starting at six o'clock, and usually plays here start at eight o'clock, which is when the sun goes down, so it's like the sun is going down on Troy," the UNCA freshman said.

Berls said holding the play outside also adds a degree of eco-consciousness to the production.

"Very little light will be used. This will lower the production cost, using



Megan Dombroski- Staff Photographer

A Theatre UNCA actress rehearses for "Trojan Women" the week before the outdoor play opens in front of Carol Belk Theatre.

less electricity. The stage that is outside, on the mini quad, is disassembled each night so it will not kill the grass it's sitting on. Some theaters just leave the sucker set, and then you have this dead spot forever," he said.

Berls said an important aspect of the play is the story told by the women who are survivors of the Trojan War.

"It's incredibly important to make that known. I would call it an anti-war piece, but really what I would call it is a thought-provoking piece.

To go look, when you start a war, you have all this stuff that happens afterward. It's very fitting for our time," he said.

Hines said she feels the chorus is important because they are the characters who face the aftermath of the war.

"It's important that the audience identifies with the chorus and not Menelaus, the sacker of Troy, because it kind of gives you that behind-the-scenes look at what happens to the people we fight in wars. We never re-

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– Stacy Hines,

chorus member in Theatre UNCA's "Trojan Women"

ally see the dirty mess that we don't have to clean up," the senior drama student said.

Berls said he wanted to take the focus off Hecuba, the main woman telling the story, because she tends to whine about her life too much in the play.

"We are trying to make it more along the lines of how the playwright intended, as in, 'Look at this, these are the survivors of war. They are the true casualties of war. The dead people don't have to worry about it,'" he said.

"It's also interesting to see another side of it. I feel like 'The Iliad' started off all about the men, Hector and Achilles, but this is all about how their wives have to suffer after they die," Palm said.

Berls said Andromache, played by Katherine Lancaster, has to make a difficult decision in the play. She faces the choice of letting her son fight and not gaining entrance to the afterlife or not intervening.

"It's very important to the student body, freshman to senior, because we all make choices every day that are not as powerful as this. We have options though," he said.

Theatre UNCA's "Trojan Women" runs April 21 to 25 at 6 p.m. Free admission.