

STAGEsceneLA

STEVEN STANLEY'S STAGESCENELA.COM: SPOTLIGHTING THE BEST IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA THEATER

ABBAMEMNON

STAGEsceneLA
WOW!

The zanies who call themselves The Troubies have taken the oldest—and in this reviewer's humble opinion deadly-dullest—theatrical genre, Greek Tragedy, added their own trademark blend of wacky jokes, inspired adlibs (impromptu or scripted, you be the judge), snappy choreography, and best of all the songs of “one of the most commercially successful acts in the history of pop music” (Wikipedia) to come up with ABBAMEMNON, and if the results aren't as all-around brilliant as their best, the Troubies' latest is still the most entertaining Greek tragedy this reviewer has ever seen—or may ever see again.

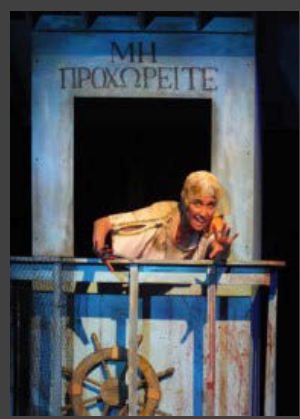


That's not to say that you will necessarily find ABBAMEMNON any easier to follow than *Agamemnon*, and quite a few of Aeschylus' “long, ponderous speeches” (I'm quoting my own review of the Getty Villa's *Prometheus Bound*) remain intact, though fortunately for Troubies fans, their first 2014 offering features all of the hilarious aforementioned Troubadour Theater Company trademarks—and with one ABBA classic after another, this may be the most hit-filled Troubies show ever.

Even the preshow announcements are delivered in song, “Take A Chance On Me” rewritten to offer ABBAvice to locate the nearest exit, turn off electronic devices, and most importantly to pee right now ... or wait the show's intermissionless eighty minutes until everyone onstage is dead.

Of course it wouldn't be a Troubies show be without “You're So Late,” sung to the tune of Carly Simon's “You're So Vain,” after which it's on with the tragedy.

Here's this reviewer's play-by-play:



As was true with Agamemnon back in 458 BC, the first character we meet in ABBAMEMNON is The Watchman (Beth Kennedy), only this time round he's not watching and waiting from atop the roof of Agamemnon's palace in Argos but from inside a lifeguard station at Malibu beach, thereby allowing the Troubies to reference local hotspots like Point Dune, Temescal, and Gladstones 4 Fish, overpriced as always.

Then it's time to sing along to "ABBAMEMNON ... Now that you've arrived ... I guess ... that we can begin" (vocalized to the tune of "Mamma Mia"), and isn't it convenient that the title of the Troubies' latest just happens to fit the titular beats of that ABBA hit turned Broadway megasmash?

Our faithful Watchman soon fills us in on the first of ABBAMEMNON's multiple back stories, and they are indeed multiple, beginning with King Abbamemnon's ten years of war-related absence, a decade during which our faithful Watchman has been (what else?) watching ... along with "waiting the woe that broods upon the home" ... and slurping up cans of Mountain Dew. (Kudos to sound designer Robert Arturo Ramirez for just one of his clever effects.)

A flashback, the first of quite a few (apparently the Greeks loved their flashbacks), takes us back to the "good old days" (to the tune of "Dancing Queen") of King Abbamemnon and his Queen Clytemnestra. (Quoth the Watchman, "You think the Kardashians are bad!")



Naturally there's a Greek chorus (humungously puppet-headed this time), who flash us back again, this time using shadow puppets to instruct us of the causes of the Trojan War (something about a pair of eagles devouring the entrails of an unfortunate hare) including a reference to a certain 1978 Faye Dunaway thriller that, as our host Matt Walker pointed out, only about three in the audience (including this reviewer) got. (Netflix Eyes Of Laura Mars and you'll get it too.)

Clytemnestra (Monica Schneider) then arrives with news that the Trojan War has ended ("Waterloo") ... and it only took ten years!

"S.O.S." recalls "those happy days, they seem so hard to find," spiced with a reminder of another "Happy Days" ("Sunday, Monday, Happy Days"), particularly appropriate at Kathleen and Garry Marshall's Falcon Theatre.



Harold the Herald (Joseph Keane) then arrives—unfortunately speared all the way through—with news (and plenty of inspeared physical comedy) that Abbamemnon is about to arrive. (“What they went through was almost as bad as a Carnival Cruise,” he informs us before at long last expiring.)

“Voulez Vous” introduces (what else?) another flashback, this time with swords drawn in battle and blood covering faces and limbs “And that’s how it went down.”

Another flashback (by now I’ve lost count of how many) offers up Abbamemnon’s muscular brother Menelaus (Jason Turner) and references to Captain Phillips and Malaysian Airlines Flight 370, the latter because—too soon or not—“We’re raising awareness.”

After all this buildup, it’s about time for Abbamemnon (Walker) to make his long-awaited arrival by chariot with plenty of “Money Money Money” in his coffers and a tip of the hat to Cabaret, because as we all know, “Money Makes The World Go Round.”



Accompanying Abbamemnon as his glamorous prisoner is Trojan princess Cassandra (Katherine Donahoe) who brings with her not only sex appeal, but a bit of trivia. (Did you know that Hollywood’s red carpet started back in the days of Aeschylus when Cassandra commanded her slave women to roll out some purple fabric for the King to walk on?)

(Conveniently, ABBA just happen to have amongst their *oeuvre* a song titled “Cassandra,” a fact hitherto known only to the most diehard ABBA fan, and now to audiences at the Falcon.)

In yet another flashback (all right, already, you Greeks!), Cassandra recalls the gruesome murder of the children of Abbamemnon’s uncle Thyestes (Rob Nagle), who got fed his own tiny tots by his brother Atreus (Walker again) to the tune of “Watch Out.” (What? You’ve never heard that one? Neither, I believe, had I.)



You might also might not recognize "I'm A Marionette," but the 1977 track does give choreographer Molly Alvarez one of several chances to strut her imaginative stuff and Schneider to give one of the most memorable Troubies performances ever as she slaughters the entire cast while belting out that obscure ABBA tune in Xena the Warrior Princess mode.

Finally, as ABBAMEMNON approaches its grand finale, we get to meet Abbamemnon and Clytemnestra's deceased daughter Iphigenia (Darrin Revitz), whose performance of "I Have A Dream" (retitled "I Fell Asleep") gives a clever tip of the hat to Season Nine of Dallas, the original series. (Bobby? In the shower?)

Perhaps more than any other Troubies spoof, the darker-than-usual ABBAMEMNON offers its cast members the chance to strut their dramatic stuff, and with actors the caliber of Nagle and Walker, the latter of whom also directs with trademark gusto, classical theater lovers are in for a treat.

There is, not surprisingly, not a weak link in the entire triple-threat Troubies cast.



Donahoe sizzles as Cassandra, Kennedy wows as the Watchman, Taylor delights as Menelaus, and Nagle's Chorus Leader and Walker's Abbamemnon generate multiple laughs as well.

Troubies mainstays Revitz and Keane get their best Troubies showcases to date as Iphigenia and Harold, the former's vocals and the latter's comedic chops and dance prowess shown off to particularly memorable effect here.

As Aegisthus, son of Thyestes, Rick Battalla is his usual irrepressible self, though ABBAMEMNON could benefit from even more of his unique brand of shtick, and an absent Lisa Valenzuela's special brand of brilliance is missed this time round.

Still, there is ample talent on the Falcon Theatre stage, with Jen De Minco and Suzanne Jolie Narbonne as Ladies in Waiting Pandora and Penelope, Tyler King as Soldier and Boatswain, Mike Sulprizio as Calchas, a prophet, and Patrick Toth as a Watchman all doing tiptop work. (Donahoe, Keane, Narbonne, and Toth also get to double as kids and Sulprizio, Toth, and Turner as soldiers.)



Musical director Eric Heinly conducts ABBAMEMNON's stellar onstage band on drums, joined by Kevin McCourt on keyboards, Linda Taylor on guitar, Dana Decker on bass, and Ginger Murphy/Jon Krovoza on cello.

Jeremy Pivnick lights Morgan Rusler's functional set with accustomed panache and Sharon McGunigle's costumes are, as always, deliciously ingenious treats. Special design mention is due this time round to Global Effects, Inc.'s prop design, Matt Scott's scenic and puppet design, and Zombie Joe's Underground Theatre Group's "blood special effects."

Corey Womack is stage manager and Mike Jespersen is technical director.

Aeschylus may prove a harder sell for the Troubies than Shakespeare, Hollywood, or Claymation have in past productions, but with Walker and company generating laugh after laugh and one ABBA hit after another giving the audience plenty to hum along to, ABBAMEMNON is likely to prove yet another SRO hit for L.A.'s most accomplished band of spoofsters.

Troubadour Theatre Company, Falcon Theatre, 4252 Riverside Drive, Burbank. Through July 13. Fridays at 8:00. Saturdays at 4:00 and 8:00. Sundays at 4:00 and 7:00.

Reservations: 818 955-8101

www.FalconTheatre.com

—Steven Stanley

June 13, 2014

Photos: Chelsea Sutton and Richard Johnson