

Helen of Troy: Decoding a myth

By MARY SINANIDIS



Emilia Ypsilanti and Nikos Nikas

HELEN of Troy: Daughter of Zeus. The most beautiful woman of all time. Men claimed her, abducted her, fought a war over her, blamed her. Whether she was to blame or not, is a question which has been debated by many throughout the centuries. There are those who assert that she was a consenting party and others who believe that she only yielded to force. Though both sides blamed her for the war, no one could punish her. She was saved by her beauty.

The different portrayals of Helen, the many sides of beauty and the ancient Greek spirit are all brought to life at the **Melina Mercouri Theatre (Theatro Vrahon)** tonight by the **Argo** theatre company's performance of *In the Name of Helen*. "We show this mythical woman in her various phases, as she moves through different events and show the different expressions of her personality," says actress **Emilia Ypsilanti**, who will interpret the role of Helen.

"Ancient women in myths cannot be viewed as real women with actual personalities. They are ideas and symbols," says Ypsilanti, adding that Helen is a symbol

of ancient Greece, rather than a symbol of beauty. "The myth is still alive for Greeks who can relate to this admiration of beauty," she says. "After all, as Elytis said, each age has its own Troy."

"Furthermore, different versions of the myth also show how Greeks travelled to other areas," says Ypsilanti, referring to the story that Hera fashioned a cloud to look exactly like Helen, while the real Helen was carried off to Egypt. "The myth takes us from Europe and Asia to Egypt, show-

ing how the Greek influence travelled as Greeks shared their knowledge, but also learnt from other cultures."

Apart from being an object of desire, Helen has also been an inspiration for many ancient and contemporary Greek writers. Though many European writers have been influenced by the myth, Greek writers were chosen as the basis for this production for the sake of flow and continuity. The performance relies on excerpts from works by Homer, Aeschylus,

Euripides, Kazantzakis, Sikelianos, Elytis, Ritsos, Sinopoulos and others who each have their own idea of Helen.

The simple lines of the costumes and the stage setting closely resemble ancient Greek ones. There's a circular stage and a small canal on one side of the stage. The purpose of this addition was to show the importance of water to the ancients, as well as to make references to what water symbolises.

Apart from Ypsilanti, the cast includes **Rigas Axelos**, **Panayiota Vlandi**, **Nikos Nikas**, **Konstandina Papanastasiou**, **Vassilis Risvas** and **Nikos Sarropoulos**.

Emilia Yeroulanou's Argo Theatre Company was created with the aim to promote Greek culture. Last year's successful staging of *Paraloges* gave audiences around Greece a look into many traditional poems and songs which had been lost. Tonight's staging, directed by **Vassilis Anastasiou**, looks as though it will be a success too.

Begins at 9pm tonight. Tickets, priced at 2,000 drachmas, are available at the door. There will be a show at Lykavittos on August 2.

The Melina Mercouri Theatre (Theatro Vrahon) is in Vironas, under the "big rock." Tel 766-4740.