Playing HECUBA

In Trojan Barbie By: Christine Evans
By: Shelby Gilliam
Directed and Advised By: Rick Jones

What is Trojan Barbie and Who is Hecuba?

Trojan Barbie is a contemporary play based on an ancient Greek play called Trojan Women by Euripides about the fall of the city of Troy. In Trojan Barbie, Troy has been destroyed and the Queen of Troy, Hecuba and her daughters are left in a women's work camp amidst their destroyed city. Hecuba and most of the women in the camp are suffering from severe PTSD. Her entire family, excluding her two daughters, has been killed, most of whom she saw die. In the play, Hecuba must endure having one of her daughters pried away from her to an unimaginable fate, and her other daughter executed. Despite her extremely weak emotional and physical state, Hecuba is the pinnacle of strength in the play. Despite all of the very extreme grief and terror this woman has experienced she keeps coming out of it with her head high like the Queen she is, leading the other women with her enduring spirit. Hecuba is absolutely determined to be a survivor. She serves as the advocate for the Trojan Women, the spokeswoman for the oppressed. She represents standing firmly against the affects of war, sexual abuse, physical abuse, corruption of power, most of all, the destruction of family; all of these are themes that both Christine Evans and Euripides had in common. So, interestingly, Hecuba also serves as the major communicator of the playwright to the audience for both time periods.

Preparing

This role was especially challenging to approach because there is so much rich history within the context and the characters. However, I found once I did a lot of research on both plays and really got to know these women, their story stirs something deep within. The play wakes up that inner female warrior, survivor, that outlasting and enduring strength that has gotten buried in our 21st century lifestyle.

Wearing the Soul

Playing this role was an incredibly difficult. Hecuba is different from me in many ways. She is significantly older than I am, she’s from a much different world than I am used to, she’s a mother, and she has a lifetime of experiences and wisdom that I just don’t have. The process was emotionally exhausting, but rewarding. Actors must be especially careful to not hurt themselves emotionally. Going through the extreme grief that this woman experienced night after night at rehearsals every day began to take its toll on me emotionally. Wearing the soul of Hecuba was beginning to wear on the soul of Shelby. I had to remind myself why I do what I do. I learned that it's not about me. I learned that, like Hecuba, I am just the messenger that the playwright uses to tell the story to the audience, and what an incredible story to share! Suddenly, instead of letting the character's turmoil depress me, I became extremely proud to play Hecuba and share this incredible character with the modern audience. This made the experience a very special one for me. In another one of Euripides' plays, Medea, there's a line that goes: “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” And I believe it. More than anything, working on this character empowered me as a young female. The women in this play are an example to modern women that we are so much stronger than we think… or than the world influences us to think.