



Steamed Parent Irks Spouse

The Classical Theatre of Harlem's *Medea* has a site-specific quality that adapter-director Alfred Preisser certainly intends. Here's a woman abandoned by her husband and left to raise two children on her own. Not, according to statistics, an unusual Harlem scenario. To underscore his socially conscious purpose, Preisser has the errant Jason confront Medea by snarling, "I don't need you, bitch!" The outburst elicits one of the numerous "oooohs" heard during the terse and invigorating 70-minute treatment. Preisser also doesn't want anyone to overlook the play's significance in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. In the dialogue, which he has based in part on Jean Anouilh and Rex Warner translations, he carefully throws in a remark about "the choice between civility and barbarism."

Medea, in which an argument for infanticide is presented and then acted upon, may be the dramatic work that most illustrates the saying "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." Preisser presses Euripides' point home. Every element he introduces underlines the rage. The music by Kelvyn Bell and David "Red" Harrington moans ceaselessly. When Medea wants to observe Jason grieving on learning his sons are dead, she perches ominously on set designer Anne Lomel's perilous scaffolding. The women of the agitated chorus, their faces painted, repeatedly stamp their bare feet to express anger. Arthur French's Kreon, in whose kingdom the action unfolds, is regally inflamed at his foreign daughter-in-law's insubordination. Lawrence Winslow, strapping and graceful as a mountain lion, delivers Jason's lines with a pampered male's arrogance. As Medea, April Thompson wears a red dress (Kimberly Glennon's design) and plays with white heat. She makes Medea's resolve something that could cause gods to tremble. —**David Finkle**