



Mike Messer

Lawrence Winslow, center, plays Jason in the Classical Theater of Harlem's production of the Euripides classic "Medea."

THEATER REVIEW

Clueless Jason Meets His Fate

By NEIL GENZLINGER

"Medea" is not exactly his play, but let's begin with a word of appreciation for Lawrence Winslow, whose portrayal of Jason in the Classical Theater of Harlem's jolting version of Euripides' masterpiece provides something not often associated with the grisly tale: humor.

Mr. Winslow pitches Jason not as callous or vicious, but as ever so slightly clueless, and the contrast with Medea's radical feminism makes for some deliciously comic moments in the midst of the grim goings-on. Not that this adaptation by Alfred Preisser (who also directs) is some kind of slapstick. The humor is subtle, and the tale over all is as nasty as it ever was. The rendition of Jason, though, adds considerable accessibility; this "Medea" feels like a recent snapshot of the moment when the old boys' club first collided with Gloria Steinem.

April Yvette Thompson is scary and believable as Medea, whose fury

Medea

Classical Theater of Harlem

at being left by Jason for a younger woman turns homicidal. She and Mr. Winslow are back from the theater's staging of the same production in 2002; the celebrity cast change is Earle Hyman, a familiar face from "The Cosby Show." He portrays Kreon, the king whose daughter Jason is to marry, and he, too, has his moment of cluelessness — just long enough to agree to let Medea delay her banishment by one day.

It is, of course, a day in which she will murder him, his daughter and her own two children. Mr. Preisser's inventive staging, with the audience close at hand on two sides of a square playing area, makes an already ominous story doubly so. Viewers are likely to feel they are flies on the Corinthian walls, and a bit in jeopardy themselves. A tough-looking chorus of five young women chant ("Men make promises and lie") and thump the floor, ratcheting up the tension, and K. J. Hardy bathes it all in some daring lighting. It's over in slightly more than an hour, but you stagger out feeling as if you've been through a daylong course of shock therapy.

"Medea" continues through Oct. 23 at the Classical Theater of Harlem, Harlem School of the Arts, 645 St. Nicholas Avenue, Harlem; (212) 868-4444.