

Mother of a tragedy

MEDEA

Venue: Roundhouse Theatre, Kelvin Grove until June 20 Reviewed: June 4 Reviewer: Baz McAlister

WITH a cast of three and performed in the round, La Boite's reimagining of Medea dials the intensity of this bitter Greek tragedy up to 11.

Stripping Euripides' 2400-year-old original back to bare bones, it centres on the titular barbarian sorceress (Christen O'Leary) after her travels with her lover, the hero Jason (Damian Cassidy), captain of the Argo and retriever of the Golden Fleece.

The play opens as Medea and



TEETH BARED: Helen Christinson and Christen O'Leary.

Jason, on the run after sowing chaos on their grand adventure, are exiled in Corinth.

Jason, as a man and a Greek

citizen, is considered higher on the rungs of society than Medea, a woman and a foreigner.

Still, his position at the court



of King Creon is shaky, so behind Medea's back he agrees to marry the king's daughter, Glauce in the hope he can one day blend his two families and improve their lives.

For all his square-jawed heroism, he doesn't know all that much about women, clearly.

Medea reacts exactly as you'd expect, faced with the news her husband has nonchalantly traded her in for a new model – her initial grief hardens to murderous resolve. She sacrificed everything to be with Jason, betrayed her family and fled her home and now she has nothing. So she hatches a plan of revenge.

Suzie Miller's adaptation of Euripides' work is straightforward, dynamic and unobvious.

As a furious O'Leary breaks the fourth wall in her initial fit of anger, exhorting the women of Corinth to stand up and tell the patriarchy that enough is enough, the adaptation's overtly feminist take on the myth is revealed – but upping the ante so much unfortunately robs Cassidy's Jason of credibility. It seems incongruous to present us with such a pathetic,

emasculated version of the Argonaut, so far from the hero and equal who fought beside Medea to claim the Golden Fleece that we are left to wonder what she ever saw in him.

Writing the character of Glauce into one short but ripping scene is a bold master stroke, though – Helen Christinson deftly plays the young princess as a cool, bitchy and aloof Game of Thrones-esque manipulator, rather than the offstage ingenue suggested in Euripides' original. All of this plays out on a wonderful set designed by Sarah Winter.

O'Leary's powerhouse performance is the beating, bleeding heart of this play and director Todd MacDonald wrings every drop of emotion out of her over the course of what seems a very short 80 or so minutes, as she hefts the show on her tiny shoulders and makes it soar.

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