

# 'Helen' strikes balance of comedy, tragedy



STAGE REVIEW

## Drama takes a 'what if' approach to Trojan legend

By Pat Reavy

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**"HELEN," CLASSIC GREEK THEATRE FESTIVAL, Sunday, University of Utah (outdoors), also Saturday and Sunday (581-7100 or www.kingtb.com). Running time: one hour (no intermission)**

"The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" by Homer are two of the most famous pieces of literature on the Trojan War.

Homer tells the story of how Helen, daughter of Zeus and queen of Sparta, was kidnapped by Paris and taken back to Troy. When Helen's husband, Menelaus, found out what happened, he launched an all-out attack on Troy, thus starting the 10-year Trojan War.

But what if Helen was never kidnapped? At least, what if the *real* Helen was never kidnapped, but rather

a "fake" Helen was abducted? And what if the real Helen actually spent the Trojan War plus another seven years in Egypt waiting for Menelaus to rescue her?

According to the ancient Greek playwright Euripides' account of the Trojan War, that's exactly what happened.

This month, the University of Utah Theatre Department is presenting Euripides' "Helen" for its 37th Annual Classical Greek Theatre Festival.

After defeating Troy, rescuing the fake Helen and being trapped at sea for seven years trying to get home, Menelaus shipwrecks in Egypt where he finds his real wife and discovers the entire war was for naught.

"We fought for a shadow... died for a shadow," he and the other Greeks exclaim.



UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Lauren Elyse Bradley as Helen.

The trick now is for Menelaus to escape from Egypt with Helen before he is discovered and killed by the Pharaoh, King Theoclymenus, who thinks he is about to marry Helen.

In the tradition of classic

Greek Theatre, the U.'s production begins bright and early at 9 a.m. in a small outdoor setting. Unlike traditional Greek plays, however, the cast is not all men. For those who dread Greek theater, fearing the dialogue will be (pardon the pun) too Greek for them, the U. has adapted a more contemporary script that makes the story easy to follow. There are also enough humorous parts in the play that the audience — even students who are attending only because their professors forced them — should find it was worth rolling out of bed early.

Lauren Elyse Bradley is

good as the legendary beauty Helen. Patrick Harris (Menelaus) and John Terry (Theoclymenus) deliver the play's strongest performances by hitting the right balance of comedy and serious acting (comedy and tragedy, if you will) albeit with very contemporary acting styles as opposed to what we believe ancient Greek theater would be like.

The costumes for this production, designed by Brenda Van der Wiel, are fabulous.

● **ON TOUR:** In addition to the U. campus productions,

"Helen" will also be performed Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. in Weber State University's Austad Auditorium (\$5.50-\$8.50). Free preshow lecture at 6:30 p.m. in the Garison Choral Room. Also Saturday at 3 p.m. in the Jewett Amphitheater at Westminster College (\$6-\$12, tickets at 832-2457), lecture at 2:30 p.m., and Monday, 5 p.m., in Brigham Young University's de Jong Concert Hall (\$7-\$10, 378-4322), lecture at 4 p.m.

*Sensitivity rating: Family friendly. No offensive material.*

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