Powerful 'Oresteia': larger-than-life epic

by Jim Teel
Lariat editor

Baylor Theater apparently decided to pull out all the stops for its production of "The Oresteia."

In the first place, the Theater One stage was expanded to accommodate some of the extras. Add to this a 13-foot-high statue of Athena, three choruses, masks and flowing costumes for 60 characters, torches, a royal chariot and two magnificent Greek gods.

The result is... big. And maybe just a bit different from the average Baylor production.

The production distinguishes itself by using exaggerated techniques. Masks cover the characters' faces, creating an unexpected anonymity among the characters. This anonymity discourages much identification of the cast, but a few individuals do stand out.

Stephanie Hardy as Clytemnestra has returned after her lead role in "The House of Bernarda Alba" with an equally powerful, though somewhat similar, performance.

Agamemnon, played by Paul Duke, provides the most colorful characterization. His appearance lends the first touch of humanity to a larger-than-life epic.

Connie Gravette, as is his habit, turned the stage into a platform of brilliant continuity and smooth motion. Nothing could mask his distinctive voice and movement in the role of Orestes.

By far the strongest element of the play is the chorus—a different one for each part of the Greek trilogy. Though the first appearance of a chorus came across as somewhat dilute, the group eventually produced a coherent and amazingly musical performance.

Special effects will constantly surprise the audience: the dizzying height of the set, dry ice smoke covering the stage and the brilliant costumes of the gods. Director Patricia Cook has attempted to surpass her groundbreaking performance of last year's "The Way of the World," and if everything works right she may succeed.

Don't expect a Eugene O'Neill or even a Tennessee Williams script. The language is tedious and somewhat difficult. But it isn't often a Greek play is brought to the modern stage with such attention to detail.

And if nothing else, the experience will give the audience something to talk about over coffee at Denny's.