

My Career Choice: Ioanna Katsarou - Artistic Director, Eclipses Group Theater - Woman Around Town



We need heroes now more than ever. Ioanna Katsarou, artistic director of Eclipses Group Theater, has conceived and is directing a play certain to spark conversations. The upcoming world premiere of *Hercules: In Search of a Hero* will run until February 10 at the Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand Street, as part of the @Abrons Series program.

Ioanna is a founding member of Aktis Aeliou Theater, awarded Best Regional Theater in Greece by the Greek Critics Association. But she is making her mark in the U.S., too. She's a member of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab 2017. Her selected acting credits include *Clytemnestra* (Classic Stage Company), *Cassandra and Queen Atossa* (La MaMa and St. Ambroise Festival Montreal) and *Phaedra* (European Delphi Festival). Ioanna has performed in more than 25 productions and directed more than 15 plays, including *Farewell*, which was named Best Poetic Monologue at the 2018 United Solo Festival.

Hercules: In Search of a Hero is a new theater piece combining excerpts from Euripides' plays *Hercules* and *Alcestis*, along with original material, to explore the meaning of heroism in our time. Hercules is a man of violence and death: he is heroic by killing. Alcestis stands out for an act of self-sacrifice: she is heroic by dying. Using poetic language and images, the play challenges the conventional, masculine notion of heroism and contemplates a feminine alternative. You can view on YouTube the [Hercules: In Search of a Hero promo video trailer](#).

Eclipses Group Theater is a nonprofit theater company that serves as a cultural bridge between the United States and Greece. Using an exploratory, multidisciplinary approach, Eclipses presents Greek and non-Greek classical and modern plays in collaboration with artists of various ethnicities and cultures, developing an intercultural artistic dialogue. Eclipses has performed at Cherry Lane Theater, La MaMa, NYU, St-Ambroise Montreal Fringe Festival,

LaGuardia Performing Arts Center, Hellenic National Museum in Chicago and elsewhere.

Can you point to one event that triggered your interest in your career?

It was when I was 16. I was invited by my high school history teacher to watch a show she was performing in. Until that time, I had watched very little theater and had no interest in it. The play was Ionesco's *The Killing Game*, and it was a revelation for me. I was fascinated by the power of this art, and I promised myself that one day I would make theater.... And I've been making theater ever since.

What about this career choice did you find most appealing?

I find it very intriguing that theater combines almost all the arts together, literature (all forms), the visual arts, music, movement/dance, and of course the art of acting. And the most important piece for me is that at the center of the theater process is the living body of the actor.

What steps did you take to begin your education or training?

I knew I wanted to make theater, but I wasn't sure if I was capable of it. The crucial moment for me was my decision to take the entrance examination for the drama school of the National Theater of Northern Greece. I knew these exams are really demanding, and the training at the school is very intense. Out of 300 to 400 candidates, only 10 are accepted in the school each year. When I successfully entered the drama school, that gave me the confidence I needed, and my life changed completely from then on.



Along the way, were people encouraging or discouraging?

My family had some strong hesitations in the beginning (maybe they still so), but they never tried to stop me from doing what I wanted. Along the way, as my work progressed, the support became stronger from people around me, and that is very encouraging.

Did you ever doubt your decision and attempt a career change?

I never doubted my decision. I love doing theater, but sometimes in the past I have felt that I don't have the strength to continue. Sometimes the circumstances of doing theater are extremely difficult and may consume you and work against your creativity. It needs an enormous source of energy and inner strength to do theater professionally.

When did your career reach a tipping point?

I feel that my career has been built gradually. Step by step. I believe that now I'm at my tipping point. As a director, the play *Hercules: In Search of a Hero*, which currently runs at Abrons Arts Center, is the most challenging thing I've ever done. But there was also a very special moment for me as an actor. A moment that I'll never forget. It was my performance as *Phaedra* at the Delphi European Festival of Ancient Greek theater in the sacred ancient space of Delphi, and the award from the Greek Critics Association that my group at the time, Aktis Aeliou, won the same year.

Can you describe a challenge you had to overcome?

The biggest challenge for me was my decision to leave Greece and my theater group Aktis Aeliou behind to come to New York in 2011. I started my career in NY from scratch, without any connections within the theater community here. But very soon I started working with the Greek Cultural Center in Astoria for a while, and at the same time I founded, in collaboration with my friend and actor Dimitris Bozinis, Eclipses Group Theater NY. After that, many collaborations and productions followed, and I feel glad and grateful for what I have accomplished as an artist in New York so far.

What single skill has proven to be most useful?

The skill of communication and collaboration. I think that these two skills have helped me enormously in my career.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

I was a co-founder and leading member of Aktis Aeliou Art Theater, one of the most significant theater organizations in the city of Thessaloniki in Greece, and I'm also a founding member and currently the artistic director of Eclipses Group Theater NY, one of the most active Greek-American theater organizations, which has been working as a cultural bridge between Greece and the United States for the last eight years. I'm proud of my artistic contribution to both of these theater organizations.

Any advice for others entering your profession?

I don't usually like giving advice. The only thing I can say from my experience is that you need to really love what you do, have patience, devotion and a lot of courage and strength.

To learn more about Ioanna Katsarou and the Eclipses Group Theater New York, visit:

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