

## People You Should Know . . . Ioanna Katsarou



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**Ioanna Katsarou** (director, producer) is Eclipses' artistic director and founding member of Aktis Aeliou Theater, awarded Best Regional Theater in Greece by the Greek Critics Association. 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. Ambrose 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.

**When did you know that you wanted to be a director?**

I can't say there was a specific moment that made me want to become a director.

I started my career as an actor. I studied acting at the Drama School of the National Theater on Northern Greece, and after that I started working with my theater ensemble group: Aktis Aeliou Art Theater. When you work in an ensemble you are a part of a collective procedure. You feel that you are not just an actor following directions, but you are a co-creator. In our ensemble, we were constantly changing roles. In one production I could be the leading actor, and in the next I could be the director or producer etc. So, the passage from being an actor to becoming a director came smoothly, like a natural development in my theater career.

**Tell me about [HERCULES: IN SEARCH OF A HERO](https://www.egtny.com/) . What compelled you to create this piece? How do you feel rehearsals are going? What do you love most about the show?**

This project was inspired by and based on Euripides' plays *Alcestis* and *Hercules*. Although 95 percent of the text comes from these plays, this is a new piece, a synthesis of Euripides' poetry and ideas in a new context. What I find unique about Euripides is how he reconstructs the traditional myths in his plays in order to challenge and question his own society and reality. This act of challenging and questioning launched my own adventure with this project. Inspired by Euripides' innovative style, I found a strong inner connection between the two plays, parallel movements and ideas that are still topical.

Our play questions the masculine notion of heroism in our time and contemplates a feminine alternative. It challenges our stereotypes about what is really heroic—typically feats of strength, actions that are often violent. The play poses several questions. Is an act heroic if it involves violence? Are all the great heroes of history really as heroic as they are usually considered, or do their actions have a dark, possibly horrific side, as well? What is the place of women in this mythology of heroism? Do we need to create a different narrative or new mythologies of heroism?

These are crucial questions, especially now, when our society's strong patriarchal structures are being questioned, and the place of women is examined more closely than it has in a long time.

Western society's patriarchal structure promotes aggressive behavior of all kinds, including regular military conflict, and an economic and political cast system of patricians and plebeians. The heroes of ancient Greece were chiefly men of action, adventure and violence, and today's heroes—in sports, entertainment, business, politics, the police and the military—often feature these same qualities. Our play questions this masculine model, which promotes aggressive competition and the subjugation of foes, and contrasts it with the feminine values of creation and collaboration.

I'm very satisfied with the rehearsals and the collaboration with the cast and the entire creative team. We have worked hard and collectively as an ensemble to create a strong show. What I love most about the show is the people who worked to make it real, all these talented people who came and worked together as an ensemble for five months and shared their passion and their love for their craft. We are all excited for the shows at Abrons Arts Center, and we are looking forward to presenting our work to the audience.

### What kind of writing inspires you?

I love poetry in all forms. That's why I have a strong affection and love for classical theater—the Greeks and Shakespeare. But I also love contemporary writers who challenge the conventional theatrical norms or experiment in combining different theatrical styles in their plays.

### Who or what has been the biggest influence on your work as a director thus far?

I had the chance to have as my teachers in the National Theater of Northern Greece two great theater artists: the director Nikos Sakalidis, who was my mentor for many years, and Lina Lampraki, who was the major Greek actor at the National Theater of Northern Greece. From them I learned first of all “Ethos,” which is a Greek word that I can't translate exactly, but I would say it means the moral gravity that our art carries. They also taught me to have clarity in my vision, to be specific in what I want to say, to have a strong reason for saying it, and to express it with theatricality.

### What else are you working on right now?

Besides *Hercules: In Search of a Hero*, which is my main concern at the moment, I'm also working at Eclipses' next project. This May, we will present the second Greek Play Project NY, a series of readings of contemporary Greek plays in collaboration with Dr. Irene Moundraki of the National Theater of Greece, which will be produced again at NYU under the Auspices of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, the Consulate General of Greece in New York, the A.S. Onassis Program in Hellenic Studies at NYU and The National Theater of Greece.

Posted 23rd January by [Zack Calhoon](#)



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