

# The Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated People

A podcast with Nancy Rabinowitz, Rhodessa Jones, and  
Angela Wilson

introduced by Giovanna Di Martino

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## Giovanna Di Martino

Hello, everybody and welcome back to the APGRD podcast series. This is Giovanna speaking, and I'm delighted to be joined today by some very special guests who will be discussing an exciting project revolving around Medea and titled *The Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women/HIV Circle*. Introducing the project and the project members and leading the discussion will be Nancy Rabinowitz, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Literature at Hamilton College and a specialist in Greek tragedy and other literature. She is the author of *Anxiety Veiled*, published in 1993, and *Greek Tragedy* published in 2008 and is editor of many other books, amongst which *From Abortion to Pederasty: Teaching Difficult Topics in the Classics Classroom*, published 2014, and *Sex in Antiquity: Exploring Sexuality and Gender in the Ancient World*, published in 2015. In recent years, Nancy has also been an active member of the Hamilton Oneida Prison Education project, in which she teaches at Marcy Correctional Facility. So over to you, Nancy, and thank you all for being with us today.

## Nancy Rabinowitz

Well, it's a great pleasure to be here and to be with you and to introduce you to Rhodessa Jones and Angela Wilson. Hello, hello. Rhodessa is an activist-artist and the director of the Medea Project: Theatre for Incarcerated Women/HIV circle, and Angie has been a member of the company for 25 years. Rhodessa and the women of the Medea Project have worked on a message that articulates and performs personal experiences of trauma for healing purposes. The company, which takes his name from the infamous ancient Medea, uses art as a form of social activism. The performers' own stories of incarceration, of living with HIV AIDS, of addiction, of abuse, violence and aggression are often framed by stories from ancient myths which had been the basis of dramatic literary and visual arts for millennia. For example, they use *Medea* in their show *Reality is Just Outside the Window*, and built others around Pandora, Demeter, Persephone, Sisyphus... Under Sheriff Mike Hennessy the women, professional actors, dancers, social workers would develop shows based on the incarcerated women's own writing and perform them in theatres in San Francisco. Because they have to be visible at all times (rules of incarceration), they developed the use of a chorus. All were on stage for the whole show. Since Mike's retirement, they continue to find ways to work with and on issues of incarceration. I've been privileged to work with the project and Rhodessa over the past 10 or so years, and we've been doing workshops this past week. In Utica, refugee girls responded to the Trojan Women under their direction. It was very

moving to see what the Medea Project method elicited from those kids - 14 year olds etc. So let me turn to Rhodessa and then Angie with a few what I hope will be leading questions and I'm sure they will be because once you get these guys going..! Yeah, so my first question is "why myth?" Why classics and like, you know, antiquity? So, specifically, if you can talk more than we have lately, about what the women see, for instance, in Pandora, or Demeter and Persephone? Did they identify with Medea? Over to you.

**Rhodessa Jones**

Well, yes and no... But one of the wonderful things about our process, (this is Rhodessa Jones) and by our process I meant methodology... is about encouraging a love of literature of language. And so we read, we read the stories. And as the director, I bring in actresses, dancers, writers, storytellers, maybe English teachers as a way to introduce the incarcerated woman... reintroduce her to writing, to reading, to reasoning. And then yes, largely, as far as Medea...they were very down on Medea.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Perhaps you could tell that story, because these people won't have heard...

**Rhodessa Jones**

The Medea Project, you know... the story of *Medea* being that Medea murders her children in revenge. Well, in my own experience, as an artist working with the California Arts Council, which is how I began this work in jails and prisons - now around the world, was that I had been asked to come in and teach aerobics to incarcerated women at San Francisco city jail. And one of the early moments I had was encountering a woman that obviously was incredibly traumatised to the point that she was almost catatonic. And I'm inviting her to come to the gym and work out with me and some some of the other inmates. And all she said was that I'm waiting for God. Only God can judge me. And I was just kind of stunned at what does this mean? What does this have to do? This woman is sitting in a jail cell in the back of this seventh floor jail. So I go back, and I asked the deputies about this particular person. And they told me that she had smothered her daughter in revenge, basically, in a cocaine haze. Her husband finds out that she's been out scrounging for money to continue to do cocaine after he introduced her to cocaine. Because keep in mind that this is a woman that was that was educated, and had a lovely life until she was introduced to this white powder. And all of a sudden, she's obsessed. So she's out in the streets during the day while he's at work, trying to find money for drugs. But the bigger story is that she is accused and told that he... togo away. And he says, I want you gone. I want my baby out of this particular mess. And I think as, as...

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

And he was gonna take the kid, right?

**Rhodessa Jones**

He wanted the baby. He was going to... but he just said, I want you gone. And she acquiesced, I guess, but when he left, she smothered the baby in revenge because that's what women can do. So my opposition of Medea is I stand with her in certain ways, but to answer the question of how did the women around me the incarcerated

women hear and accept the story? They were outraged. They were just positively outraged that somebody would do this to their own child. And at the same time I as the leader, and also the one who brings the story, I said, "Wait a minute, what are the ways that we kill our children? What are the ways that we that when we abandon our children, we choose drugs over our children, we choose our men over our children, we end up incarcerated, and our children are left with our mothers and our grandmothers. This is an equal murder. And how different are we then to Medea? So it opened up the story... it gave them reason to come look at it; to gaze on the story.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So they felt the same way about Medea when you got to..? So that led you to want to do this play? Or to do something with the character?

**Rhodessa Jones**

Yes. So yeah, and I had some fine actresses. Edris Cooper, she was one of the members of the company, she wrote a piece - a modern day tale: *The Tragedy of Medea Jackson*, which was about black women, and the projects in America and dealing with an abusive man and again, Medea Jackson's one real recourse was that she could throw her children off- I think in the play they all jump off the bridge. Yeah.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

How did you work through the rage? Because I know you've told me that they wanted to tear the-the- what was her name? In the Jail?

**Rhodessa Jones**

Deborah.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Deborah. They wanted to tear her apart...

**Rhodessa Jones**

They were so angry, yeah. With the anger was as ancient as the story.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So did they transition from that with Medea?

**Rhodessa Jones**

For me as the visiting artist in the jail I'm witnessing the women... I'm witnessing Deborah, the crushed... this dishevelled, downhearted mother who has killed her baby... I'm witnessing the deputies taking her to the showers and the women want at her; they want to get her they just want to... they want to be there they want to tear her apart. And all of it was so painfully human in a lot of ways and I started to make notes on *Windows Reality Live*, which is which show that we that I made... this was *Reality is just Outside the Window*.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Did the day ever come around about Medea? Did they see some of your position, or did they-?

**Rhodessa Jones**

When we got the group together that ended up in the theatre. The group that ended up as the cast for this particular show. Yes, they did. Yes they did. They had a lot more sympathy for Medea and they really didn't like Creon who had come to tell her that he wanted her gone. Edris Cooper, who also was one of my star actors at the time, she was wonderful at telling the... at throwing all the... you know there's a moment when Medea bewitches a wedding... I guess a wedding night garment for the bride that Jason has taken. And everybody had a great time throwing in all kinds of drugs... "And we're gonna put some speed in it! And we got to put some fire in it! We got to put some..." you know, and we had this kind of Bacchanal of just like, "Yeah, we got to get it!" And that was a wonderful release for all of us. I think also it all brought us back to kind of a love fest with Medea herself.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

That scene where she tricks Creon is really great...

**Rhodessa Jones**

Yes!

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So Angie, were you...you weren't in the group at that point? So were you there for Pandora or Demeter?

**Angela Wilson**

Oh, I've been since 1998. So my first show was *Slouching Towards Armageddon*...

**Rhodessa Jones**

Which was a Pandora opening that box and all hell breaks loose...

**Angela Wilson**

Yes. Because I was...what was I? I was Curiosity, I think. I think you made me...oh no, I was Confusion. My character was Confusion.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

That's the real you! You are a very clear...

**Angela Wilson**

But you didn't know me then! I was very confused. I was always running into myself.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Do you remember what it was like working on that show? Share it with us...

**Angela Wilson**

So...this is Angela Wilson. I mean, 1998... I was incarcerated for the umpteenth time. And Miss Jones came into the jail house with Sean her social worker and presented that we were going to be able to do the...if we could have a rehearsal, and we could possibly go to a theatre and perform. And, you know, my mother was really good. She had me in acting classes. You know, I had visions of being a soap opera

star when I was a girl. And so this was a thing. And then Paulette Jones actually had written a lot of music and produced it with Culture Odyssey and Rhodessa Jones and Idris Ackamoor. She was in jail at that time. And I was in the bathroom, and she's like, "you've got to do this, girl, it's so good!" So I was like, okay, okay. And also when, you know, when Miss Jones walks in the room, you're like, "Holy moly, who is this? And I want to know, I know, I want to know this person - what she's doing" and you know, and being reminded that I'm not just a junkie, that I'm many other things that was many things before this. And so in the jail, in the inception of the Medea Project theatre for incarcerated women, we were handcuffed and shackled and taken to the theatre after a three or four month intensive rehearsal with all the aforementioned players, you know, the actresses, the social workers, the English teachers that did the reading and it was actually... because I grew up in a farm in Idaho, it was actually the first time I was introduced to black women writers. Because, you know, I had never had that in my public education.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Just out of curiosity, did it present a problem? People coming and going with sentences? Or was this a long haul kind of facility? Because I know that in jail...

**Angela Wilson**

Some things have changed. You know, that was a long time ago - that was 23 years ago. So back in the day, with a little bag of dope, you're going to sit still for a minute. Now unless you have blood on your hands you get released. What Miss Jones would do is you look at all of the characters in the room and decide, "hey, do you have a TS date? When are you getting out?" And really be clear about how that was happening. And now, because of the nature of crimes, we're not able to handcuff, shackle and transport women to a theatre because of the nature of their crimes. But this is back in the day, right. But you know, the being hard on drugs and all of that stuff... And so that's how she would sift through.

**Rhodessa Jones**

Yes, and so systematically, back in the day as Angie's describing, if we as the management of the theatre company, whatever, we would look at, look at a person's date. Have they been sentenced to the county, if they have been sentenced to the county for a year, then they could be in the play because we wouldn't have to worry about right them leaving... But as Angie was saying, the crimes got different - it was very different - and it wasn't it wasn't an easy to actually decide who could be in the play and who couldn't be with that method. It became a whole other thing. And also a the sheriff in the beginning, Mike Hennessy was much more involved in who gets out who goes and the deputies that were there in, in the inception, they were very invested in this theatre for incarcerated women working, you know. Anybody that's from California, particularly San Francisco knows that we tend to be otherworldly. The society was.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Yeah, very different. Not like upstate.

**Rhodessa Jones**

Yeah, and the deputies... I put the deputies to their own rehearsal audition, to have them be a part with us.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

That was the point that you made last night, there was always somebody with you at all times. So with the deputies onstage...

**Rhodessa Jones**

The deputies were...they flanked the stage. And also, we were told to keep everybody on on stage, which just as I look back and think about making theatre, you know... you got to deal with the authority. So this is going to happen, and this has got to happen and enters Greek mythology, the Greek chorus. And as well as what I've learned lately, but that wasn't so much even the women escaping, it was to protect them. Because anybody finding out that some woman had been released from jail, even if it's just an evening to go do a play, and she had maybe hurt somebody in their family or something like that, the police were worried that they will try to get into the theatre, which would have been a whole other show.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

A sideshow, yeah...

**Rhodessa Jones**

God bless San Francisco, California, the then-enchanted state. They were very pro the work, they really saw it as... The sheriff himself really believed that art saves lives. And the more we talked about something like a myth, Medea, because we think we know something about it, because we're all kind of educated with Hercules... Prometheus...you know, these are things that we hear in high school, you know. And strangely enough, you hear more about the men, Jason is, you know... You don't hear about the women as much. But the sheriff was really invested in how can we take an art project based in theatre and and the classics and put it on women as a way to help change their lives. He really believed in that.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Is there something that women saw in these characters, do you remember? I mean, I know it's a long time ago, and I've been doing the research lately so it's much more in my mind. In Pandora? Or something about Persephone and Demeter? A mother who maybe could have felt like she let her daughter down? I mean, one of the things that we did (I'm speaking now to the audience) with some students in a writing class was *Nobody Told Her*, which is a very moving piece of the Medea project. And of course, you know, Persephone is out there with her friends, her followers, and nobody tells her that that's always the place where it happens to little girls in Greek myth. So I just wonder, do you remember any way that people resonated to the myth?

**Angela Wilson**

So one of the things that's really great about Rhodessa's methodology is - like she said earlier - is that we read the myth, we break it down, we understand it. And so understanding that when Pandora with her with her nosy nature, right, and beautiful and read the world, but she had this one thing, she couldn't stay out of everybody's

business, right? And when that box opens, all hell broke loose. And so we can all of us, especially incarcerated women, can totally understand that we're just skipping along doing whatever we do... Drama! Bam bam! A bunch of stuff happens, right? And there we are, we are like, "What the hell is happening?", and all the behaviours show up. And then we end up incarcerated leave our children, maybe we're, you know, a junkie or whatever.

**Rhodessa Jones**

Surprising everybody, like "What happened to her?" Nobody told her that she can be ambushed socially, psychically, spiritually.

**Angela Wilson**

And that one was *Slouching Towards Armageddon*, a conversation on race. So Angie, that's me, being the only white girl that ended up staying throughout the whole show and you know, being taken to the theatre. And that was really really really - like it changed my entire life. It changed everything I thought about stuff. Because I grew up in Idaho on a farm. It's very, very, very white. Coeur d'Alene, Idaho is the home of the Ku Klux Klan. Like we had a very clear...the way that I've been indoctrinated around beliefs, right, and then here I am in this place - in jail. I actually wrote a piece about hair: "My hair, your hair, happy nappy, oh yeah." Because, you know, white girls, their hair, when they want it curly they perm it. Black women, when they want to straighten their hair, they perm it. So it's this thing, and I was just like, you know, all of the ways that we're the same. And so that was very exciting. And then I remember writing a piece about being just a number and not a name. And the ways that systems, you know...

**Rhodessa Jones**

And I remember when Angie first came, you know, and I first started to observe her, there was another person seeking their PhD, Martha Effinger, had come in to work with the Medea Project. And Martha asked if there was a pill that you could take - remember, this is the captive's conversation on race. She said if there was a pill that you take, and it made you black, would you take it? And Angie said, "Yeah, I would, but only for a short amount of time: and people got mad at her. And she was able to say, Wait a minute, the world is down on black people, which was such an amazing revelation. It wasn't like she was being racist. To me. This is definitely a social observation. And it became a part of the conversation as well, you know, and I think and that endeared Angie to me, it opened her eyes...opened up other people's eyes around about what are we talking about here? As well as for me, when we're talking about this conversation on race, reminding other people in the jail that everything is not Jesus, you know, that there are all kinds of religions, and people never thought about it? People have never thought that you could be Muslim. You know, you can even be Catholic, because so much of the basis of who the people are in jail, the black people, and all of a sudden you're dealing with the fact that well, you know, there are Muslims, there are Catholics, there are Buddhists, that all of this mixed up as well, in the jail in the middle of making this piece about a captive's conversation on race?

**Angela Wilson**

Just thinking about it now, you have this idea about this race theory and what kind of history is taught in schools and that sort of thing. Literally, like I knew about Martin Luther King, but I had never been educated like that in the way when I sat in the room with Miss Jones, and just all of this, you know, very clear American history. But that had never been taught. And one of the beautiful things about the Medea Project that people don't know when they're not inside, is we began to eat together. Yeah, we were able to ask, Hey, can we all like be in the same bed area, if you will? We're not always allowed that but we became like, we are travelling now today. We are a collective of women. And we're a democracy until we're not because we know who was in charge and it's not us - it's Rhodessa Jones. However, that's how she has taught us is to love each other as women, we travel as a collective, we all go to the same place. We all stay together, we all do this thing. It's true. And it's really teaching because it gives you the opportunity to navigate the world in a whole other way. And so what happened to it organically, what happened to us, is we were sisters. And of course, we argued and you know, carried on, but we were no longer interested...

**Rhodessa Jones**

As sisters, do!

**Angela Wilson**

We were no longer interested in harming each other. And that had never happened, you know, in the jail because we're always interested in harming each other. It's just the nature of the beast, right? We all put down our weapons and we sat together and loved on each other.

**Rhodessa Jones**

But back to the myths also, you know... a Persephone, a Pandora, a Medea. You could name them all, those three just came to my mind. All of a sudden, we're looking at the ancient history of women. And the struggles of women. The Trojan Women.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So did you ever get pushback about using these ancient texts? I mean, I know it's hard because you're the boss. But I wondered whether...because sometimes students of colour do come into my tragedy class and say "Why do I want to read all these dead white guys?"

**Rhodessa Jones**

No, no, it was definitely reading. We were reading in jail, you see, and it wasn't always largely black women at the centre of it. It was all of us; even the deputies themselves were from different places. And I can't express enough how wonderful it was to have us all...as Angie said, we were encouraged to be together, we were allowed to be together in and outside of that rehearsal hall, the multidisciplinary room. So no, we didn't get that kind of pushback. I mean, I think people, if they didn't like it, they just didn't come back. They just didn't come back. But I think even those people on the edge, they still didn't move. "What's this got to do with me?" that was much more the question; but also "What's this got to do with women?". And I think it lifted up the whole history of women in the world.



**Angie Wilson**

But it's also not just... let's break down a myth right now: women, incarcerated people, women for this for this interview, are hungry for education. We're hungry to understand; women love to connect. We are, you know, we're connecting people. And so the idea that somehow incarcerated women would not want to be bothered isn't true, because we're always sucking up everything, no matter what, even if I can't read. If I'm in that room, you know, you're gonna understand what the story is when you walk out. And you're gonna be left with questions like, how does this relate to me? And then you have, you know, Rhodessa Jones, but also Edris Cooper, she turned, you know, the *Medea Jackson*. And so it's to make it make sense, right? And so when you leave, it has something to do with you.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

That's wonderful. So I have a couple of other questions. But I think I want to merge some of them. So why performance? And you know, what difference does it make, that you go out there? In shackles, albeit, but you do it. And what does that do the process of making a piece? And then can a programme like yours really affect mass incarceration? I mean, I think a lot of the money comes from the promise of fixing recidivism, or the hope?

**Rhodessa Jones**

but the larger question is, how does it affect the female population? And I think that we're still moving towards that. You know, I mean, as is the world. Where women are equally balanced as men are. In prisons, but also in the world, just like, women's rights and male rights, that kind of thing. And I can't remember what it was-?

**Angela Wilson**

Can you rephrase the question?

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Sure, because I doubled it up. So it was: Why performance...what dimension did that add when you were able to do it? And then how does a programme like yours, affect mass incarceration? So I'm assuming, you know, the performative part of it has something to do with addressing mass incarceration.

**Rhodessa Jones**

I think, a whole other level of formatted performance, people coming in and looking at this ritual, you know, and women at the centre of this ritual. We drew attention to the fact that there was so many women at the county jail. So educated the public about who was there. And also the way we made work was that women got the major advantage. You know, I am Rhodessa, call me Persephone. Even just recently, we never use Pandora per se, but we would name her... call me Auntie.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So one of the things that I know happens here in performance, and...now I'm thinking about my own question! There's a kind of accountability. We're doing the show, I'm depending on you, we're sisters. And that ups the ante, I bet. So maybe that also helps in whatever behaviours you're going to need when you get out.

**Angela Wilson**

Well, I think it's so many things. And I think it's different for everybody. So first of all, someone's listening, and it starts here, and then we go to the theatre, people come and they pay to hear what we have to say. We all know it's cathartic to be able to share our story in some way. Performing is cathartic; back to the ritual. We belong. We all want someone to see us and we all want to belong to something. Right? And in those moments that you feel that way, you don't feel the oppression and the isolation and you know, you're just a number... you don't feel none of that. And especially when you have Rhodessa Jones as the leader, that's a walk in, I see you, I love you even though you're really really messing up stuff. You abandon your children. We don't like heehee and haha about it; it's not okay, let's talk about why it's not okay. Because you know, like Miss Jones said with Medea, we kill our children...

**Rhodessa Jones**

In different myriad ways. Yeah.

**Angela Wilson**

And I think mass incarceration...that's a cute buzzword. I think that the only thing is going to stop mass incarceration is our incredibly racist government. The New Jim Crow. I think these are how mass incarceration happens, I think that we need to begin to understand that once somebody serves their time, that when they walk out, they get an opportunity to have a job, they get an opportunity to go back and get their licence that they had before they went in there, they get to go back and redeem themselves, if you will. And what we do as a society, especially violent crime, once you been convicted of a murder, for example, say you did 25 years, I can assure you, you've changed. And when you walk out of there, most people find some kind of spiritual practice. When you walk out of there, you're a new human most usually, or unless you're just so crazy and violent, that you'll never get out anyway, but you walk out and you're carrying like a really heavy suitcase. And it's like a mark on your forehead. You know, now I've done this thing, and I can't get past it. So what I do a lot in my own work, outside of the Medea Project, it's a mindset too. Just because I have a really long rap sheet doesn't mean you can tell me what I can and can't do. But you know, not everybody carries that with them.

**Rhodessa Jones**

Where we are now...we're back to just being the director of a project inside and getting people to buy into it. It's as simple as reminding people that you said, you can, you work with us, you have an obligation to yourself as well as us to move through on this, this beautiful thing; the creative process. But the other side of that is the when we look at the new Jim Crow, when we look at people being released from prison, how are assisted? They're not. You know, and women come out with a double whammy burden of oh, I've totally failed the culture. I've failed myself I've failed my family. And woe is me. And largely you don't necessarily get your children back. So you've been punished for all time, you know, and, and as Angie was saying, until we can change this attitude of this racist government, this racist culture, this racist element that we live in...

**Angela Wilson**

...and mass incarceration.

**Rhodessa Jones**

...and be willing to say, Okay, did your time? How can we help you to get a leg up and to move on?

**Angela Wilson**

The last part of that is that people just don't realise that formerly incarcerated people are really hard workers; formerly incarcerated people have more integrity than most normies have, because they've been through a process, right? We are really incredibly smart, amazing people. There are so many people behind bars right now that could change the game, they could change the whole world. Right? But they're locked up. And when they get out, we're not going to give them an opportunity to even hear about it, especially if you're black or brown,

**Rhodessa Jones**

Well, you draw this veil of suspicion...how can you ever earn the respect of the culture? Because it's like what, you know, how do you how do you how long must you play repentance? What does repentance look like? You know, and the whole idea of reparations right now is on the air, which is fair, you know, that we should be looking at how are how are black people going to be compensated for what we build in this country with that with, with no money with nothing with our bodies and our souls. And the money that has been generated in this country so much, the wealth of began on the backs of slavery. And nobody's willing to deal with that; nobody's willing to deal with the reparations that that should be figured out how, the rest of my life for the rest of my life...beyond my life: my children, my grandchildren, my great grandchildren, get to just go to school for free, you know, medical care, instead of just medical disparities amongst black and brown people.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So we should probably wrap up but I want to give you guys an opportunity to talk about what's happened since those days of the big public performances. And now with the pandemic time you've shifted your strategies and I know you're still using myths because you told me that you use Daphne...

**Rhodessa Jones**

We use Daphne, we use the phoenix. Yes. Even on Zoom.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

You switched to Zoom. So just briefly, I know Arts in Corrections has been a new project. And then before that you were still working in the jail, well the troupe was. So...Well, here we

**Rhodessa Jones**

Well here we are. Here we are. And we've been dealing with reentry, we've been getting ex offenders. We've been getting women to write about reentry, in the Phoenix and the shero turn. It's been it's been really interesting online. Zoom. Creating a magazine online.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So were you working with incarcerated women on Zoom?

**Rhodessa Jones**

Yeah, they're ex offenders.

**Angela Wilson**

So the reentry workshop was born...so we had a grant. And so we called in Lisa. Lisa Frias is the Zoom queen. So she's part of it, and Fe Bongolan, and myself Angie... and obviously Miss Jones.

**Rhodessa Jones**

...and Felicia.

**Angela Wilson**

...and Felicia, she was AIC, and then every reentry workshop. What we did is -because I have such a great connection to formerly incarcerated people - we wanted to have formerly incarcerated like, just out, because it's reentry. However, what we ended up getting was some really, really strong women that had been incarcerated now have their master's degrees and everyone's got their children and buying homes and all that and so they all came all of them afraid like "I don't do this I don't write I don't..." you know, "I don't perform I don't do any of that". And so it was brilliant. We did use the Phoenix we use the Shero's journey. Used some other...

**Rhodessa Jones**

Daphne; we used Daphne!

**Angela Wilson**

So it culminated into a performance on Zoom; all on Zoom. Every Thursday night for like 12 weeks. It was incredible! And then we have AIC like we said, that California... Yeah. And so that was Fe Bongolan, Lisa Frias, obviously Miss Jones and my sister, Felicia Skaggs. And so we all taught. That was less performative and more about how to navigate the system.

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

So that was with professionals who were looking towards...

**Angela Wilson**

Yeah, they ran the gamut. We had a formerly incarcerated gang member of 25 years, and then we have PhDs. You know, there were people that were humans that were getting PhDs...

**Rhodessa Jones**

And it was also initiated by the state of California,

**Angela Wilson**

A really smart group.

**Rhodessa Jones**

The state of California is trying to figure out how to use the artist in the relationship. And I think that I can proudly say that we were very instrumental in that. The Medea Project. We've been around so long, so we were invited. And we were given a certain amount of money and agreed to be...actually it was experimental. What kind of systems can we set up, almost. We had...how many weeks did we do?

### **Angela Wilson**

I think we did 12. And actually part of the grant was that we would make a document and it is beautiful. We put it together, we threw some music on top of it. We scoured through all these hours of films, and we came up with a really clear document that can tell you how to go in a jail, what to expect in a jail. What to do, what not to do, you know, to get down. What is it, manipulation as a superpower? I created this little curriculum and yeah, it was really good. I'm super proud of that work. We had Lisa and because she's a school teacher she's been teaching on Zoom since the pandemic appeared. So she was able to come in *do-doo-doo-doo-doo*. So we looked so good! We're all smart, but she made us look good, you know.

### **Nancy Rabinowitz**

So mindful of the time. I wonder if I haven't asked a question that elicited something you would like to say to these...this is the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, and their mailing list. So if there's something you'd like to say to those folks?

### **Rhodessa Jones**

I would just like to say that I feel like the kind of work that we've been involved in...that we have created... The Medea Project - Theatre for Incarcerated Women is definitely at the centre of theatre arts for the 21st century, as well as its arm of healing.

### **Nancy Rabinowitz**

Talking about HIV at all...

### **Rhodessa Jones**

Yes. We've spoken a lot about mental illness...just as Andy's work has gone on, even past what I've done as an art teacher, now she's in the jails... We need to have, I think, people who have an art based curriculum to understand that they can go so many places. And I think it's invaluable to where we want to go in the 21st century and classics should and are very much a part of the whole, for lack of a better word penal system. It's as ancient as the penal system. And I think it's a way to engage people inside in large mythic ways, because we have painters, we have theatre directors, you know, and as I'm sitting here talking amongst us, you think about the other forms that have grown out of this struggle. Hip hop. All of them speak to the whole idea that the ancient history is now. Everything that ever was is again. Everything that ever was is new again. And I feel like, the classics really are part of that. Whose classics? They become even more our classics. I'm really curious as to see what the what will be done with reading classics in prisons. And they will be, and I think we should all encourage that that happens because it gives life to classics, it gives a new place to classics.

### **Nancy Rabinowitz**

Thank you so much.

**Angela Wilson**

What is your email address, Miss Jones?

**Rhodessa Jones**

rhojones09@gmail.com

**Angela Wilson**

Thank you. I think that if you love incarcerated people, and you want to change the game for people, Miss Jones' theatre, The Medea Project Theatre for Incarcerated Women/HIV Circle is a really great place to start. We've been teaching here in Hamilton, she brought us with her and she's teaching us how to teach her methodology. And we've been doing it for quite a while so it looks like it could be a future. We're coming back in October to Cornell, and so if you would like to get a hold of us it's at rhojones09@gmail.com

**Rhodessa Jones**

And also with our website: [www.medeaproject.com](http://www.medeaproject.com)

**Nancy Rabinowitz**

Thank you very much Rhodessa and Angie - over and out!