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Dramatic Publishing

Homer's

THE ODYSSEY

A Play with Music

Adapted by

AMIE BROCKWAY-HENSON

Music by

ELLIOT SOKOLOV

Lyrics by

RICHARD HENSON



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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Music by
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Lyrics by
RICHARD HENSON

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(THE ODYSSEY)

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her use of twenty-four lines from the
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(Anchor Press/Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., ©1961)

Author's Notes

The *Odyssey*. The human journey. Myth. What could be more dramatic? Or theatrical?

A trip to Greece inspired the adaptation. The Open Eye Theater with its multi-generational audiences supplied the developmental process. Various translations of *The Odyssey*, including that of Robert Fitzgerald, a poem by Tennyson, and a Joseph Campbell lecture on *The Illiad* and *The Odyssey* informed the project, as did the talents of actors, designer, composer, choreographer, and response from our audiences. True theatrical collaboration.

We began work on *The Odyssey* at The Open Eye Theater with a few actors exploring scenes in which Odysseus and his Sailors meet the Cyclops Polyphemus and visit the land of the Lotos Eaters. This exploration gave form and style to the piece. We added a monster here, a new idea there—and *music*! When we staged an early version of the complete script, a group of fourth-grade students from The Heschel School in Manhattan attended rehearsals and provided insights. As the play developed further, audiences of children and adults talked to us about their experience of the play.

If we ever wondered how this ancient myth relates to our times of *real* problems (racial conflict, discrimination, homelessness, hunger, disease, drugs, violence, fractured families, overwhelming obstacles, meager rewards, political dissatisfaction leading to unrest, turmoil, and riot) we discovered the answers in the rehearsal and performance process. We also found humor and beauty. Life's journey!

The Odyssey was adapted and directed by Amie Brockway-Henson, music composed by Elliot Sokolov, with opening sequence improvised by Deborah Stein and José Garcia. Musical direction and lyrics were by Richard Henson, choreography by Susan Jacobson and design by Adrienne J. Brockway. The play was developed in workshop at The Open Eye Theater in New York City in 1986, produced there in February 1987, and subsequently in the fall of 1987, 1988, and 1992-93. The following actors and musicians performed in the ensembles:

David Amarel, Jeff Bender, Michael Burg, Randall Craig,
Sam Curie, John DiLeo, José Garcia, Elizabeth Gee,
Ricky Genaro, Liz Geraghty, Adam Grupper,
Steve Harper, Ernest Johns, Cindy Kaplan,
Deborah Laufer, Tara Leigh, Kevin Leslie,
Sharon Mann, Stephanie Marshall,
Janet Mitchko, John Moser, John Edmond Morgan,
Kevin O'Neill, Suzanne Parke, Joe Quinn,
Barbara Lynn Rice, Greig Sargeant, Steve Satta,
Shari Meg Seidman, William Seymour,
Deborah Stein, Amy Wilson

Photographers were Ken Howard and Scott Humbert

THE ODYSSEY

An ensemble theater piece
For 4 Men and 2 Women, expandable

CHARACTERS

- 1) MINSTREL/ANTINOUS/WIND/AUTOLYCUS/
HELIOS/EURYALUS
- 2) EURYMACHUS/POSEIDON/ALCINOUS/
EURYLOCHUS/ECHO
- 3) ATHENA/WIND/PERIMEDES/COW
- 4) PENELOPE/CALYPSO/NORTHWIND/NAUSICAA/
POLITES/FIRST OFFSTAGE CYCLOPS/CIRCE/COW
- 5) HERMES/TELEMACHUS/WIND/LAODAMAS/
ELPENOR/POLYPHEMUS
- 6) ZEUS/ODYSSEUS
- 7) FLUTE PLAYER/Also plays natives of various lands.*

* Live flute and recorded music are used together to accompany the text. If live flute is not available, the play can be performed with a cast of six instead of seven, and recorded music only.

THE ODYSSEY

SETTING: *There are rocks L, R and U, two long benches, long and short poles, two stools, a loom, large swatches of blue, aqua, wine, and purple fabrics. Masks of ATHENA, CALYPSO, HERMES, ZEUS, HELIOS, and POSEIDON are arranged on the rocks.*

AT RISE: *We hear improvised Flute Music and tambourine. FLUTE PLAYER and MINSTREL with tambourine enter from U. MINSTREL and FLUTE PLAYER call other actors to the stage one at a time, each with a specific rhythm and musical theme. Each actor, responding to music and rhythms with creative movement, explores playing area and relationship with FLUTE PLAYER and MINSTREL, discovers his/her god mask, and dances with it into position. At signal, when all actors are in place, they put on masks. FLUTE PLAYER wears mask of CALYPSO's MUSICIAN.)*

(FLUTE accompaniment. MINSTREL sings prologue.)

MINSTREL.

The hero of my song is King Odysseus,
Wisest of Argive lords at windy Troy,
Who fought that ten-year war, as brave as any.
When Troy fell, the other chieftains turned

Their black ships toward their homes, where wives
and children
waited, and welcomed them with love and honor.
Odysseus only, of all those kings and heroes
Blocked from his home by harsh Poseidon's wrath,
Wanders the wine-dark waves for ten years more:
Begin his story, Athena, where you will.

(MINSTREL hands ATHENA tambourine.)

ATHENA. Let's begin near the end of the story when
Odysseus had been gone from home for nearly twenty
years.

(ATHENA plays rhythm and FLUTE PLAYER plays music for MINSTREL to become HELIOS. He responds to the music and rhythm, explores stage, discovers his mask and puts it on.)

Helios, the Sun God, has destroyed Odysseus' ship and
drowned his sailors because they slaughtered his cattle.

(HELIOS exits.)

Odysseus alone survived the Sun God's wrath, and for
seven years, has been held captive by the nymph Calypso.
She wants him to forget all about Ithaca, his wife Penelope,
and his son Telemachus. She wants him all to herself.

(CALYPSO and FLUTE PLAYER exit.)

Poseidon, god of the sea, is angry with Odysseus for blinding his son, the cyclops Polyphemus, and has vowed to torment him if he sails. At the moment, however, Poseidon is guest of honor at a great feast in distant Ethiopia.

(POSEIDON exits.)

The rest of us gods are gathered on Mt. Olympus.

ZEUS. Men are such fools. They blame the gods for their troubles, when it is their own wickedness that brings them suffering.

ATHENA. But, Father Zeus, Odysseus is no fool.

HERMES. Are you sure about that?

ATHENA. He's not!

HERMES. Well, then, he certainly is unlucky.

ATHENA (*again to ZEUS*). It's not fair. Day after day Calypso holds him prisoner, trying to make him forget Ithaca with her sweet talk; and Odysseus, yearns only for home. He is not only the wisest man alive, but the most generous in his offerings to the gods. Yet you are unmoved. Why are you so cruel to him?

ZEUS. I am not cruel to him. I like Odysseus. It is Poseidon who torments him.

ATHENA. Well, he's suffered long enough. Look, Poseidon's not here right now. He's gone to Ethiopia. This is a good time to bring Odysseus home.

ZEUS. How? What's your idea?

ATHENA. We send Hermes to tell Calypso she must set her prisoner free ...

HERMES. Wait a minute!

ATHENA. ...and I go to Ithaca to speak with Odysseus' son Telemachus, and give him courage to stand up to that obnoxious mob of Suitors hanging around the palace, making a mess of the place while they wait for a chance to take over and marry Penelope. (*Puts on her Chieftain cape.*) What do you think?

ZEUS. That's a good idea. Hermes, convey our decision to Calypso. It's time for Odysseus to come home.

HERMES. I wish, just once, I could spend a day doing what I want to do!

(They exit. FLUTE PLAYER enters playing Party Music and takes her place as PALACE MUSICIAN, followed by PENELOPE, ANTINOUS, and EURYMACHUS. PENELOPE goes to her loom. SUITORS compete in a wrestling match. In the following scene they are eating, drinking, and attempting to get favors from PENELOPE and PALACE MUSICIAN. TELEMACHUS and ATHENA, as TAPHIAN CHIEFTAIN, enter.)

TELEMACHUS. Welcome, sir, to the home of Odysseus. Have something to eat, and then tell me why you are here.

(TELEMACHUS takes a bowl of food and offers it to ATHENA/CHIEFTAIN. ANTINOUS crosses and takes the bowl from her and eats from it himself.)

Those freeloaders think of nothing but music and food. They're living scot-free on Odysseus, whose bones are probably rotting in some distant land. If only he were here! One glimpse of that strong warrior and they'd

trade everything they own for a fast pair of legs to get out of here. (*Remembering his guest.*) I'm sorry, but they make me forget myself. Tell me, sir, who you are and where you come from. How did you get here? And what is your purpose?

ATHENA. My name is Mentos. I am chieftain of the Taphians, and an old friend of your father's. I came here to tell you I have news of Odysseus.

TELEMACHUS. Have you seen him?

ATHENA. I have heard he is alive.

TELEMACHUS (*not convinced*). Since Odysseus has been gone, there is not one chieftain anywhere around that isn't here most of the time, trying to get my mother to marry him. My mother tells them she cannot choose until she has finished weaving a fine robe for my father's father Laertes. (*Pleased.*) Yet she will never finish, for each night she tears out the work done that day. But, in the meantime, they are eating me out of house and home!

ATHENA. Listen carefully. You can't just sit here doing nothing. Tomorrow morning, choose your best ship, man her with twenty oars, and go find out for yourself where Odysseus is, and why he has been gone so long. I believe you will learn that he is alive and on his way home. If you do, put up with these Suitors for a little longer—until he gets here and puts an end to their insolence. But if, on the other hand, you learn that he is dead, come home and give him a proper funeral. Then give your mother to a new husband, and send the rest away.

TELEMACHUS. But...

ATHENA. You are no longer a child. You are strong, like Odysseus; and in time will be as wise. You must be brave.

TELEMACHUS. Sir, I shall not forget your words.

(ATHENA exits. Party Music ends. FLUTE PLAYER as AEIDO starts up The War Song. ANTINOUS sings.)

ANTINOUS.

Sing, oh goddess, the wrath of deadly Achilles,
Which brought in grief a thousand Achaeans low
And left their carcasses to be stripped by dogs
And birds of prey—and sent to the shadow world
Unnumbered heroes' souls.

PENELOPE. Antinous, your song makes me cry for my husband. Aeido, please play something else.

TELEMACHUS *(asserting himself and setting up his plan)*.
Mother, let him play as the spirit moves him. You must be brave and nerve yourself to listen. Odysseus is not the only man who did not return from Troy; many men died.

(FLUTE interlude of Party Music as PENELOPE exits. The SUITORS begin a series of competitions, lunging at each other with pieces of furniture, barely missing TELEMACHUS, much to their delight, and in short, make a shambles of the palace.)

Gentlemen! Go home and eat your own food and wreck your own houses! I pray to the gods for a day of reckoning, when I can destroy all of you.

EURYMACHUS. Oh, listen to him! He sounds like he thinks he can tell us what to do! Are you the king, now, Telemachus?

ANTINOUS. Heaven grant that you may *never* be our king!

TELEMACHUS. Whether I am king or not, I will at least be master of my own house.

EURYMACHUS (*sarcastically*). Of course you will, Telemachus. We respect your position and your possessions.

ANTINOUS. Yes, we do. But tell us who your guest was.

TELEMACHUS. He was an old friend of my father's from Taphos, the chieftain Mentos.

ANTINOUS. He wasn't here long. What did he want?

EURYMACHUS. Did he bring news of your father's return?

TELEMACHUS (*carefully*). No, he didn't. And if he had, I wouldn't believe him. My father will never come back.

(*ATHENA enters.*)

ATHENA. For the rest of the evening and into the night the Suitors ate, drank, and made merry. At last, when they all went off to sleep, Telemachus planned in his mind the journey I had prescribed.

(*SUITORS and TELEMACHUS exit, FLUTE PLAYER as ISLAND MUSICIAN, HERMES, CALYPSO, and ODYSSEUS enter.*)

By then, Hermes had reached the remote island of Ogygia, (*CALYPSO's song begins. ODYSSEUS takes his place on the beach, gazing sadly out across the sea.*) where he walked along the beach until he reached the great cave

of Calypso. (*ATHENA exits, dancing to CALYPSO's song.*)

CALYPSO (*singing*).

Odysseus has lost his ship,
So I am resting him from his trip,
Though he's sad to be here with Calypso,
he's pretty lucky if you ask me.
Ask me—he's pretty lucky if you ask me.

Sun and sea, blue sky and sand,
The livin' is easy, the company grand,
I admit it's not just what he planned,
But he's pretty lucky to be with me,
With me—he's pretty lucky to be with me.

(*HERMES has been dancing to CALYPSO's song. CALYPSO notices him.*)

(*Speaking.*) Hermes, what brings you here? Can I do something for you? Have some ambrosia and nectar.

HERMES (*taking food and drink*). Thank you. I am here because Zeus sent me. Otherwise I would never have come across that unending expanse of sea water. Not a city on the way, not a mortal soul to offer sacrifice. But, as you know, what Zeus says, goes. And he says you have to free that man. You have kept him seven years, and Zeus says to tell you that is long enough. Now you must send him home.

CALYPSO. What!?! No, I won't! I rescued Odysseus when he was drifting alone astride the keel of his ship. I have

a right to keep him. I welcomed him with open arms; I tended him... I was going to give him immortality and eternal youth! (*Pause.*) Zeus says I have to send him home?

HERMES. That's what he said.

CALYPSO. That's not fair! (*Pause.*) Well, then, let him go. But he'd better not expect *me* to provide a ship, with oars and crew. He can build himself a raft. I will give him directions, and no more.

HERMES. I knew I could count on you.

(*CALYPSO goes to ODYSSEUS.*)

CALYPSO. My unhappy friend, I have good news for you. You are free to leave this island now.

(*HERMES hands her a short pole which she gives to ODYSSEUS to use as an axe.*)

Cut some tall trees for timber and make a big raft. I will stock your raft with bread and water and wine, and send you a wind, so that you may sail straight to Ithaca.

ODYSSEUS. Hold on a minute! Are you plotting some new mischief against me?

CALYPSO. Odysseus! What a thing to say! Let Earth be my witness, with the broad Sky above, that I have no ulterior motive.

(*HERMES, satisfied, exits. ISLAND MUSICIAN also exits.*)
