Gregg Goldston, as “Cyclops,” makes his way backstage for rehearsal of “Odyssey” on July 23. (Harry Scull Jr./News file photo)

Community collaboration brings a professional 'Odyssey' home to Artpark

By Melinda Miller | Published August 5, 2018
In the sprawling musical production of "The Odyssey" that had a two-day run at Artpark, Odysseus is described as the hero of ancient Ithaca. Odysseus is sooo 3,000 years ago; the true heroes this year are the people who made this massive mix of professional talent and amateur enthusiasm come together in such a rewarding show.

Homer's classic poem underwent a family-friendly rewrite for Public Works, a New York theater initiative whose productions are designed not only to engage the community but to include it actively on stage. More than 100 Western New Yorkers joined Broadway performers (https://buffalonews.com/2018/08/01/young-amateurs-community-join-with-the-pros-for-artparks-big-scale-odyssey/) and local professionals to bring "The Odyssey" home to Lewiston this weekend, and they did an impressive job.

Special credit goes to the working actors who took on the role of lifting up the kids from the Artpark Theatre Academy and amateurs from People Inc., Empower and local veterans groups. Terence Archie, who has had lead roles on Broadway and who played Odysseus when Seattle did this show, gives a muscular performance as the long lost king, a solid center for the rest of the action.

Actor Courtney Balan came from Chicago less than two weeks before the show opened when the original Penelope, Emily Skinner, had to bow out. Even with the short notice — or maybe it helped? — she displayed a touching believability as the lonely queen who, after 20 years without her husband, has only her heart to tell her she isn't yet a widow.
And then there was Christopher Guilmet, who filled in the plot as the singing narrator, giving us a wink and a nod with every bit and making even the tragedy between Scylla and Charybdis entertaining. Gregg Goldston, a mime who performs in New York City, did the same as the Cyclops, manipulating his monster's comical costume with grace and enjoying a hearty sailor sandwich between two pieces of sliced bread.

The out-of-towners weren't flying solo as far as stage experience goes. Buffalo actor Jake Hayes was in great voice as the king's son, Telemachus, and James Heffron brought a comically vicious swagger to Penelope's lead suitor. Locals may also recognize Niagara Falls singer Marsha McWilson in a strong solo.

The staging and design were clever and creative. Artpark has a wide and deep Main Stage, easily accommodating the population of Ithaca when they all turn out to sing, but the team kept the action intimate when it needed to be. Odysseus's journey through the Underworld is particularly effective in its lighting and stagecraft, as ghostly figures roam the stage while shadows wander the backdrop.


It is fun to see that Homer's millenia-old joke still works when Odysseus blinds the Cyclops and then tells him his name is "Nobody," as in "Who did this
to you? "Nobody! Nobody attacked me," a gag that gets an extra boost when Lewiston Fire & Rescue responds to the scene.

Beau Calato, a three-legged rescue dog, was everyone's favorite even though he almost missed his cue when Odysseus came home before bounding out on stage with wiggly brio.

No one will mistake the show for a big-budget hit such as "Wicked" or "The Lion King" (and the ticket prices reflected that). There were a few minor sound issues Saturday with some of the unmic'd cast members, and the pacing made the performance run a little long.

But a show like this throws out its own kind of light, the kind that draws the audience in.

For director Roger Danforth, who draws remarkable work from his novice cast, if people leave feeling that they were a part of the show, it has achieved its goal. As he puts it in his program notes, "Together we become true peers, equals and partners through the remarkable journey we take in 'The Odyssey.'"

... 

Theater review

"The Odyssey"

Rather than stars, let's give this show a bouquet of hearts.

An updated, family-friendly musical retelling of Homer's classic poem of a longest hero who finally makes it home, with professional actors and a supporting cast of community volunteers. Two
shows only (Aug. 4 and 5) at Artpark in Lewiston, but part of a larger initiative there for more community collaboration.

https://buffalonews.com/2018/08/05/community-collaboration-brings-a-professional-odyssey-home-to-artpark/