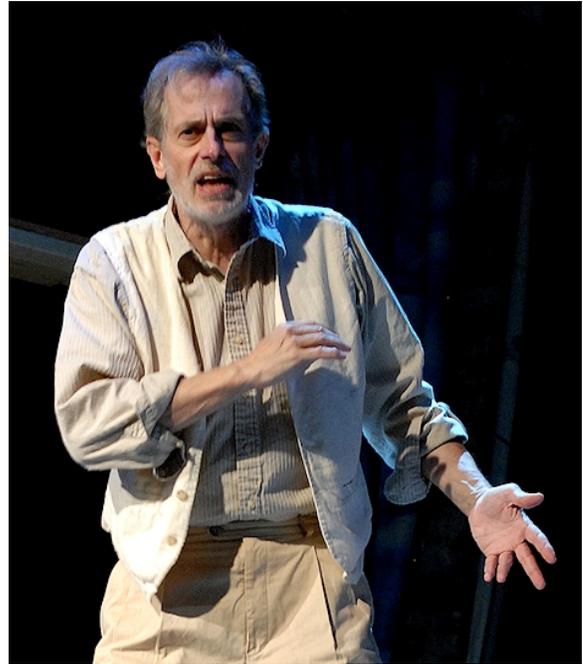


Berkshire Bright Focus On Theatre, Music, Visual Arts and more "Nine Years. They'd forgotten what they were fighting for."

Author, Source, August 13, 2013

The power of the human voice. A storyteller uses gesture, voice and emotion to tell a tale, sometimes a familiar tale, but he tells it through the power his voice can control, contain, confine or concentrate into emotional and energetic bursts. The Poet (Homer) alive for centuries, a witness to the recurrent tragedy of war, tells the story of Hector and the beautiful Helen whose face launched a thousands ships and Achilles and all the rest of the tragic heroes of the Trojan War through his most tragic work, The Iliad. He has come to this small stage in Chester, MA and he tells his story as he saw it, heard it, noted it. The audience and the storyteller are in full light and the daylight story ultimately becomes a nighttime yarn spun by a master weaver of facts and emotions.

The tragedy that emerges is not just the death of



Hector and the betrayal of the Trojans trust by the Greek mesmerizer. The true tragedy unfolds in a counting scene, not written by Homer but rather by Denis O'Hare and Lisa Peterson, wherein The Poet counts off an interminable list of wars that have taken place since the Trojan War using the boots of long-dead soldiers to rack up the numbers. One of the most unforgettable minutes in a one-act play from which there is no escape, it is played by Steve Hendrickson with clarity and scope. It leaves you

breathless, glad you came and sorry you have contributed in any way to the horror unfolding once again in front of you.

Homer's day was long before spot-on television reportage of the worst of war and long before the embarrassment of stand-up comedy clubs as well. Unlike most of our one-actor one-act plays there is a dearth of humor here. A few furtive laughs escape in the slightly shallow and silly moments in the story, but these are only a few early on and any that follow are evidence of the nervousness we feel when we're accused of a crime we didn't commit, but could have under other circumstances.

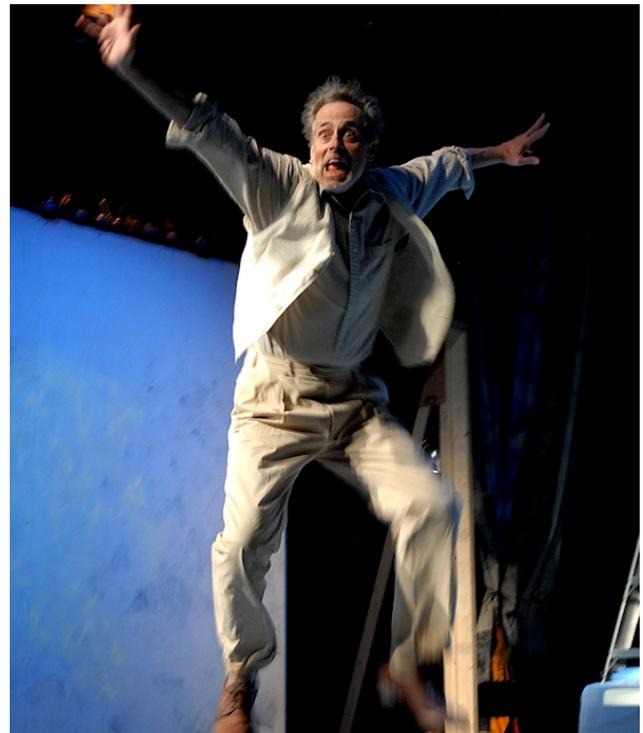
Sheila Siragusa has directed this most interesting and exhausting play with firm hand and a clear belief that many many points can be made through the performance of the words on the page. She has defined the art of the storyteller brilliantly. She permits, or asks for, the largest of gestures and the loudest of vocal explosions. She has directed the intimate, soulful moments to shine through like kerosene lamps placed in a farmstead window. She

has clearly shaped the use of high emotional content in ways that are hypnotic and elusive, though highly present and accessible. Working with this material - which is truly exhausting to perform - she and her actor have accomplished the nearly impossible: she has given him his head while controlling his mind. Whatever he brings to the interpretation is allowed by her, shaped by her and placed before us to illuminate for us the ugliest of truths in the most accessible manner, the telling of the story.

Steve Hendrickson has graced this stage before in several ways and it is clear that his personal style is always edgy and out there. This makes him the ideal choice for such a performance piece. It is, though, an exhausting performance in a non-stop regaling of an almost willing audience. Hendrickson sings, chants, speaks, shouts, struts, strokes us only to strike us. He examines every motive in momentary advance of extolling or condemning it. He is alternately charming and brutal. He manages to reel us in time after time only to cast us, with an overhand casting, back into the murky waters of truth. His performance really does define "tour-de-force" for the journey he pulls us through is one of force and fear and formulation. Hard as it is to use the word "brilliant" it is appropriate in this instance.

In the first production author and actor Denis O'Hare had to split his week of performances with actor Stephen Spinella because the work is so draining that not to have a break would be a killer in an open-ended performance. The run at the Chester Theatre is limited to ten days so, presumably, Hendrickson will emerge with his sanity intact. That is assuming he is sane after accepting and rehearsing this role.

In fine old poetic practice Hendrickson is not alone on the stage. Behind a mystic scrim is Tom Shread whose sound design with live instruments making both music and effects is partially responsible for the emotional impact of the play. He uses his music to comment on the narrative as well as to support it with sounds that imitate nature and also initiate the voices of the muses and the ancient gods. His work is transportive and makes Hendrickson's storytelling into an event and not just a job.



Vicki R. Davis has given us a durable backstage setting and a contemporary suit of clothes for this modern-dress Homer. Lara Dubin's lighting is amazing in its intent to engage the audience in the mono-drama. We begin in full house light with Homer's entrance and finally one hour and seven minutes later we are plunged into the artificial night that is the theater's purview. If you can recall camp or scouting with horrific narratives told around a blazing fire you have a good idea of how Dubin's work affects a theater full of people.

An Iliad is a play within a play within a monologue recited by an ancient soul. It is one of those very curious events that will leave you wondering exactly what it was you saw and trying to see how much of it you can remember. Recollection is its theme and as a body of work trapped inside a single story it is something to call up from time to time and to try to recall. Even two hours after seeing it there are vague moments that rival the poignant ones for attention. Let's just say that this is a play and a performance that are so worth seeing that seeing it twice, though difficult and disturbing, would not be impossible to do and might be of great benefit to a world in constant disarray.