

'Odyssey' into nightmares and dreams for teens

REVIEW Anon (ymous), an updated re-telling of Homer's poem, is delivered with sensitivity by a gifted cast.

Rohan Preston, Star Tribune, April 08, 2006

Eat your heart out, Hannibal Lecter.

Your charismatic, opera-loving cannibal kin, one Mr. Zyclo, is asking after names and offering mysterious sausage over at the Children's Theatre in Minneapolis. As enacted by Steve Hendrickson in a killer performance, Mr. Zyclo is both scary and engaging in a campy sort of way. His frisson-filled scene, suggestive of both "Silence of the Lambs" and "Sweeney Todd," is but one of the elements that add to the excitement and power of "Anon(ymous)," a one-act that premiered Friday.

"Anon," Naomi Iizuka's contemporary re-telling of Homer's "Odyssey," is a memorable journey into dreams and nightmares, directed with throbbing energy by Peter Brosius and delivered with sensitivity and wallop by a gifted cast.

Iizuka's script departs from Homer's narrative, in which Odysseus delivers long alexandrine lines and slays foes as he wanders the world. Instead, she has crafted a thoroughly modern adventure piece with a nameless war refugee who washes up on a strange shore.

Anon (Michael Escamilla) is separated not from his lover, Penelope, as in Homer, but from his mother, Nemasani (Rosanne Ma), who may have ended up in a sweatshop in America. His quest is to find her, but first he has to get from a beach where he washes up as exotica for a lusty rich girl, Calista (Becka Ollmann), who believes her father "owns the ocean." Anon is rescued by a goddess (played by the ever-exquisite Sonja Parks), who kisses him into happiness, then is off to other adventures in train tunnels and wild fields, back alleys and a sweatshop.

I'm not sure that Iizuka's ambitious script, which would be informative for the legislators debating immigration reform, is where it should be. It's hard to empathize too deeply with a character who has no name. But deft director Brosius has found a vivid theatrical language that makes it soar. He gives us disembodied faces as well as the spices of memory.

It benefits greatly from the cast, including Marvette Knight as a bartender and as an Indian mother, and Emil Herrera as Ali, a father blinded by war. Annie Enneking is superb as the cannibal's pet bird while Gavin Lawrence gives a fine performance as a dreamy immigrant sacrifice. "Anon" is pitched to teenagers (the blood and gore in the show makes it inappropriate for the young ones). Based on several post-show interviews, it has hit its mark. For example, Maria Berglin-Sampson, a 19-year-old college student who grew up going to shows at the theater, attended Friday's performance with her state-senator mother, Linda Berglin.

"It was engaging and cool the way they tied it all together," Berglin-Sampson said. "They put all these different cultures together in a way that really captures young people - and makes it appropriate for older ones too."

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