

The Odyssey

Evening Standard - 2 March 2006

THEATRE

The Odyssey

Lyric Hammersmith

★★★★☆

Fiona Mountford

I'VE always thought The Odyssey would make a sumptuously picaresque big-budget film, preferably directed by Tim Burton.

David Farr, the Lyric's artistic director, sees it rather differently; his compelling version of the ancient-Greek poem is a stripped-down political fable about exile.

Thus Odysseus, one of the original asylum-seekers let down by the prototype dodgy boat, finds himself in a modern detention centre 10 years after the end of the Trojan war. In order to prove his identity, he is forced to recount his wanderings.

Farr cleverly also has the arch-schemer confront those whom his past bellicose actions rendered homeless.

Odysseus even shows remorse — in a kind of 21st-century mea culpa that would have Homer turning in his tholos (that's an ancient Greek grave).

Not for nothing is the show's tagline "A Trip Based on Homer's Epic". This edited selection of the best tales, including an ingenious take on the Cyclops episode and some lovely musical interludes, unfolds within the steel cage of the detention centre, making the whole narrative seem like a lotus flower-induced trip inside Odysseus's head.

Stephen Noonan is lean, muscular and, appropriately, largely inscrutable as Odysseus. The other five actor-musicians industriously play a decent selection of the numerous parts a 24-book, gods-and-mortals epic demands. A Farr-out trip well worth taking.

● *Until 1 April.*

Information:
0870 050 0511.