

**The Odyssey**  
The Guardian - 3 March 2006

---

## **The Odyssey**

**Lyric Hammersmith, London**

★★★★★

---

David Farr's brilliantly entertaining version of the Greek general's attempts to return home to Ithaca after the sacking of Troy is subtitled "a trip based on Homer's epic". Indeed there is something hallucinogenic and nightmarish about the staging, with its puddles of bright colour for the island of the lotus-eaters and a terrifying Cyclops who is portrayed as a tyrant in an oversized great coat with a beaming searchlight eye.

There is a child-like glee and wonder about this evening. The invention and pleasure keeps on coming in an unaffected and generous show. But this is not just a journey into the exotic tales of ancient Greece, but into the mind and the experience of being an exile and refugee from home. With the help of Stu Baker's jaunty and haunting songs, it makes the very good point that, in the best possible world, nobody would ever choose to leave their home because "these stars are not my stars – until I see my home again".

From the opening moments when Stephen Noonan's weary wanderer is washed up on British shores and taken to a detention centre and interviewed by Roger and Harold, the Little and Large of the immigration services, this becomes as much a story about the refugee Trojans as it does about Odysseus.

The trick of Farr's production is to bring together victor and vanquished, the famed and the forgotten. The general's final cry of "I am nobody" not only echoes the episode with Cyclops, but shows the shift from ignorance to understanding that his journey has brought. Too often attempts to squeeze the contemporary from the classic, seem contrived and trite but Farr and his fantastic cast do it with such a lightness of touch, humour and tenderness that this ancient epic story seems as fresh as on the day it was first told.

**Lyn Gardner**

*Until April 1. Box office: 08700 500511.*