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LEISURE/WEEKEND DESK

FAMILY FARE; It's Odysseus Vs. Tomatoes

By LAUREL GRAEBER (NYT) 984 words

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Two years ago, "The Odyssey" was made into a television miniseries; now it's a puppet show. If you think this might have Homer turning over in his grave, never fear: although this "Odyssey" is hardly Greek drama, he might at least be gratified that someone has made his work accessible to 6-year-olds.

That someone is Raphael Sperry, who adapted the script, designed and directed the production and plays the hero. His "Homer's 'Odyssey' " combines live actors, their heads sometimes encased in huge masks, with puppets of all varieties.

Some of them are even vegetables: Odysseus's soldiers are carrots and pickles wearing helmets, while Penelope's suitors have tomatoes for heads. This allows the Cyclops to literally devour some of the crew and makes for plenty of mock gore when Odysseus slays his rivals. An additional benefit is that the scenes are no more scary for children than watching their parents make salad.

The production also offers hilarity for adults, from a Circe who is dressed like a leather-bar dominatrix to a ghost of Odysseus' mother who speaks like an aggrieved yenta. Here, the soldiers are beguiled not by eating lotuses, but by watching Lotus TV, and menaced by a Scylla made of writhing vacuum-cleaner hoses.

Part of the new Nino Nada Theater Festival for Children, "Homer's 'Odyssey' " features intrepid actors - Joana Cole, Patricia Comstock, Brad Malow, Tara Taylor and Hilary Weissberg, in addition to Mr. Sperry -- who create an atmosphere of inspired lunacy. While they may not actually induce your children to eat their vegetables, they may well whet their appetites for epic poetry.

"Homer's 'Odyssey,' " tomorrow and Sunday at 4 P.M. at Pink Pony, 178 Ludlow Street (between Houston and Stanton Streets), Lower East Side. Information: (212) 715-1914; to reserve \$9 tickets: (212) 269-4849.

Steps Into the Past

While most children would be reluctant to have a history lesson before school had even started, the one about to take place on Long Island is sure to appeal: it is living history, dramatized by the descendants of the first people to own the land.

They are the Shinnecock, who will hold their 53d annual Powwow tomorrow through Monday on the

Shinnecock Reservation in Southampton.

"We want it to be educational," said Lance Gumbs, chairman of the Powwow Committee. "We're not the hedonistic savages we were once thought to be. We are a very culturally sound people, and we have a lot to offer Americans that they may not be aware of from history books."

The Powwow, which will also include 50 to 100 other tribes, is to hold both day (noon to 5 P.M.) and evening (7 to 10 P.M.) sessions, except Monday. Each will begin with the Grand Entry, a procession of all the tribes, followed by dance and drum competitions.

This year the Powwow will also offer a table where children can do beadwork, as well as a small shooting range, where they can try a bow and arrow under adult supervision.

Other activities will include pony rides, craft demonstrations and, during intermission (5 to 7 P.M.), entertainment by the Shinnecock Youth Dancers and flutists from the Andes.

Highlights of the evening session will be a fire-lighting ceremony, an Aztec fire dance and, at the end, a round dance, "in which we have the audience come up onstage and participate," Mr. Gumbs said.

Shinnecock Indian Powwow, tomorrow and Sunday from 10 A.M. to 10 P.M. and Monday from 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. at the Shinnecock Indian Reservation, Old Montauk Highway, Southampton, N.Y., (516) 283-6143 or (516) 283-8047. Admission: Adults, \$8; the elderly and ages 5 to 12, \$5; under 5, free. Free shuttle buses will run all day between the Southampton station on the Long Island Rail Road and the Shinnecock Reservation.

Something Fishy

Some wild animals are easier to glimpse than others. Lions are usually at the local zoo, raccoons and deer are rarely farther away than a ride to the country, and squirrels are probably right outside your window. But sharks and walrus?

"You can't see a walrus on the street," said Denise Lacinski, the coordinator for event marketing at the New York Aquarium.

Sharks may be another story, but no one would argue that they aren't easiest to identify in a tank of water. To make them and all sea life seem closer to home, the aquarium will offer its Dare to Discover Weekend tomorrow through Monday, when visitors will be encouraged to "discover animals you wouldn't normally get to see," Ms. Lacinski said.

These will include horseshoe crabs, cownose rays and sea stars, all of which children will be invited to handle. Visitors will also be able to watch divers hand-feed the rays.

Representatives of the Maritime Oceanological Society are to present an exhibit, "Science at Work Underwater," which will explore both the sea's living and nonliving secrets. It will include information on how artifacts on the ocean floor are retrieved and restored, as well as opportunities for looking at marine life under microscopes and in the water.

For those who prefer to experience the ocean at an esthetic remove, there will also be arts and crafts and music with aquatic themes by Annie and the Natural Wonder Band.

Dare to Discover Weekend, tomorrow through Monday from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. at the New York Aquarium, West Eighth Street and Surf Avenue, Coney Island, Brooklyn, (718) 265-3474. Free with admission: Adults, \$8.75; the elderly and ages 2 to 12, \$4.50; under 2, free.

Photo: A version of "The Odyssey" that combines puppets and live actors. (Joshua Sperry)

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