

AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER

Carey Perloff, Artistic Director Heather Kitchen, Executive Director

PRESENTS

WORDS ^{on} PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

War Music

ADAPTED AND DIRECTED BY LILLIAN GROAG
BASED ON THE BOOK BY CHRISTOPHER LOGUE
CHOREOGRAPHY BY DANIEL PELZIG
MUSIC COMPOSED BY JOHN GLOVER
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
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THE ULTIMATE ABSURDITY

A Note from the Adaptor/Director of *War Music*

BY LILLIAN GROAG

Helen (the most beautiful woman in the world), Prince Paris, Menelaus, Agamemnon, the Greeks, the Trojans, lust, gold, love, unspeakable violence: a city goes up in flames. Women are widowed, children are murdered, hosts of young men die. The story is some three thousand years old, as far as we can track. And yet, every year new translations in all languages continue to appear. Only recently Hollywood gave us yet another “Trojan War movie” (its fourth, fifth, eighth?) called, not unreasonably, *Troy*, which did very well at the box office. Why?

What is it about the story of an enraged, recalcitrant, lethal young man—Achilles—who chooses to die young and gloriously rather than live out a reasonable life in domestic but tranquil obscurity, that it continues to enthrall us in whatever form it shows up? What is it about these impossible men fighting to the death over stolen women—whom they actually treat like cattle and call nothing better than “shes” in Christopher Logue’s account—and oaths and honor and manhood, and treacherous gods they can’t count on no matter how much, how long they sacrifice to them, and the loss of beloved friends and wives and . . . Why have we been fascinated by this particular tale for *three thousand years*? Isn’t the *Iliad* that thing you kind of—although I understand, no longer—had to perfunctorily look at (I won’t say “study”) in school? And put it away as fast as possible because it was, you know, “Greek” and written somewhat before yesterday?

In Christopher Logue’s “account” of the *Iliad*, Achilles’ story is *not* three thousand years old. It is ever present and ever painfully alive. We all have to die. Is it better to go out earlier with Dylan Thomas’s “bang,” rather than later with T. S. Eliot’s humiliating “whimper”? Are we sure we know? And has any playwright of the “absurd” ever treated the “forces” that run the world with as much vitriol as Homer? Except perhaps Logue. In Logue’s (and in Homer’s) world we are on our own. *Nothing* can save us from our common fate. No prayer, no friendship, no love that feels “forever,” no government, and, much more alarmingly, no force of *logic or reason* in the world can alter our individual and common end. And yet, isn’t it spectacular, this wild breed, this humanity who will go to its grave howling and holding its mortality as a banner against the despicable frivolity of the eternal gods?

And isn’t war—in Logue’s words, a “criminal activity”—the ultimate absurdity? And yet *we* allow it to go on, and on, and on, and on . . .