

# THE ARTS ETC CHESTER THEATRE COMPANY “The Iliad”

Donna Bailey-Thompson, August 24, 2013

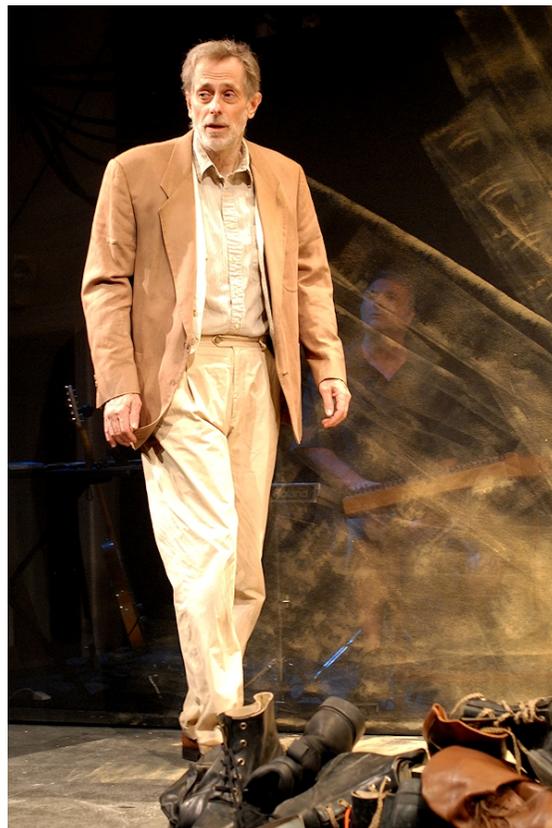
[Steve Hendrickson](#) includes bravura in his encompassing, riveting performance as The Poet, an updated adaptation of Homer’s The Iliad.

At the beginning of this spiraling tale, mention of the beautiful Helen of Troy and the Trojan Horse connect with memories of simplified versions of the familiar stories introduced in grammar school. For the emotional distancing of a child who enjoys playing Cowboys and Indians, the heroic stories about the ancient Greeks are sanitized.

However, that custom is not adopted in the harrowing version written by Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare. The brutality of the warring Greeks are described within the histories of Homer’s oral poetry. As The Poet, Hendrickson gives the gods – and near gods – new life – and death. At the beginning, he confesses, “Every time I sing this



song, I hope it will be for the last time.” Years ago, a young John Kerry asked a question relating to Vietnam. The Poet muses about the same question: “How do you ask a man to be the last man to die?” Hendrickson has naturally merry eyes that darken when his character is overwhelmed by man’s atrocities to man. Towards the end of the play, he reels off detailed war statistics stretching from the Bronze Age through Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, Chinese dynasties, the nine Childrens Crusades and more. Today in Egypt before I’ve



finished writing this, the death toll may have reached 700.

With the inclusion of prehistoric information combined with modern records, the numbers of wars and uprisings are staggering. The Poet’s recitation includes pawing through a collection of old shoes and boots which he ties in with the war du jour. At the Washington DC Holocaust Museum there is a glassed-in exhibit of hundreds of shoes whose owners were gassed.

An exhausted Poet says he can go no further. “After eleven days, the Greeks will stop fighting and then resume on the twelfth.”

An Iliad is the most revealing and gripping and depressing play I have ever seen. Rodney King asked, “Can’t we all just get along?” Good question, but the answer seems to be, “Apparently not.”