

## **Award-winning ‘True Blood’ actor brings Homer to life at Clarice Smith Center**

**O’Hare’s one-man show tells the story of the Trojan War**

*Article posted: Monday, April 21, 2014 by Will C. Franklin Staff writer*

As Russell Edgington, the 2,800-year-old vampire from Mississippi in HBO’s “True Blood,” Denis O’Hare ruled without fear, almost causing an all-out war between humans and vampires.

In “An Iliad,” which he co-wrote with Lisa Peterson, O’Hare brings both the glory — and the pain — of Homer’s poem about the Trojan War to life.

An Iliad

When: 8 p.m. May 2-3

Where: Kay Theatre, Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, College Park

Tickets: \$10-\$40

For information: 301-405-2787; claricesmithcenter.umd.edu

The award-winning actor will bring “An Iliad” to the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center as part of the Visiting Artists Program on Friday, May 2 and Saturday, May 3. A discussion about Homer’s poem with O’Hare, along with Iraq veteran and artist Drew Cameron, UMD Classicist and Homerist Lillian Doherty and emergency medicine physician and combat veteran Sudip Bose, will take place Thursday, May 1.

“[‘An Iliad’ is] a one-man exploration of the story of Troy,” O’Hare said. “It’s an evocation of the storytelling tradition.”

According to O’Hare, Peterson had the idea for the show and approached O’Hare in 2004 about the project.

“At that time, we were in two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and Lisa was sort of wondering where the theatrical literature was that was exploring the fact that we were now a nation permanently at war,” O’Hare said. “She wasn’t really finding anything. She began to look at ancient literature for great war plays or war poems and she came across ‘The Iliad.’ She asked if I would be interested in developing a piece with her and I said, ‘Sure.’”

O'Hare and Peterson first worked together in 1987 when Peterson hired O'Hare to be in a play in Chicago. Even though they both enjoyed working together, they wouldn't combine their efforts again until "An Iliad."

"We had always stayed friends, we just hadn't done anything professionally," O'Hare said. "I collaborate with a lot of people and I always go into it with a sense of adventure but [also] caution because you don't know how someone is going to work. Lisa and I worked very, very, very well together."

O'Hare has taken "An Iliad" all over the country. Since the show has been so successful, O'Hare and Peterson decided to write another show — this time one that featured the Bible.

"It's called 'The Good Book,' which is a play about the Bible and the history of the Bible and how it evolved," O'Hare said. "We work via Skype, we work on the phone, we work in person, we take retreats together to write side by side, we research together ... We very rarely butt heads. Occasionally we do because everybody does, but even when we do that, we both know when to back off or when to let the other person win."

Of course, O'Hare has the evil and sadistic Russell from "True Blood" under his belt, but he also has made a name for himself on shows such as "American Horror Story," "The Good Wife," and movies such as "Milk," "J. Edgar," and "Dallas Buyers Club."

Still, most folks will recognize him from the horror shows. His work in the movie "Quarantine," helped push him into that genre.

"It was my first time doing [a horror movie] and I went into it with a shrug and I thought, 'Well, everyone does a horror film every now and then, so I'll do it,'" O'Hare said. "When I got 'True Blood,' I didn't think of it as horror. ... With 'American Horror Story,' it's definitely horror, there's no two ways around it. But it's so inventive and so insane ... the first year was a haunted house, the next year it was an asylum, the third year was witches and this year it's going to be circus freaks.

"Acting is acting and when you have a scene where you have to rip somebody's spine out of their body, you still have to approach it like an actor and think, 'What am I feeling about this moment? What am I thinking about this? Why am I doing this?'"

The show does have an anti-war message, according to O'Hare.

"People have said the play is anti-war and of course it's anti-war," O'Hare said. "Whenever you show the horrors of war, that in itself is anti-war."

Since he's taken the show across the country, audiences have responded differently to the themes of the show. According to O'Hare, there is no ideal audience.

“As a performer, what you’re trying to do is you’re trying to communicate with your audience,” O’Hare said. “Communication is a two-way street. I’m not only telling them something, I’m listening to them. I’m listening to their reactions, their silences, their laughs, their sighs.

“We just did it in Arizona in Scottsdale and I think I went in there with a little bit of trepidation not knowing what I would get. The audiences were incredibly respectful and incredibly attentive. We had a discussion afterwards and a lot of them stayed... You never know who’s coming and you never know why they’re coming, so there’s no point in judging them.”

O’Hare said the one area he and Peterson have struggled with when it comes to “An Iliad,” is what message they hope the audience takes from the show. Since every audience is different, it can be a daunting task.

“Obviously, I’m a human being and I have a point of view,” O’Hare said. “I have a lesson or a message that I hope I can impart. But I don’t think we can necessarily control what an audience takes away. ... I don’t even know if it’s reducible to a message because it’s a big piece and it has many, many, many messages. ... We would ask the audience to simply meditate in a way on these characters and come up with their own reaction and their own conclusions.”

<http://www.gazette.net/article/20140421/ENTERTAINMENT/140429989/1151/award-winning-x2018-true-blood-x2019-actor-brings-homer-to-life&template=gazette>