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A Note on *Ithaca*

Ithaca was created throughout the coronavirus pandemic as an almost entirely solo show – both in production and performance. In late October 2019 I returned to San Francisco after my UK student VISA expired and was unable to connect with a local arts community, as my emails were never returned. I was working as a barista when the pandemic hit and my work temporarily closed. Since I was furloughed and the entire world was shut away in our homes, I decided it was the perfect time to write this show. The idea for *Ithaca* has been kicking about in my brain for a while, as I've always wanted to create a show based on Homer's *Odyssey* – I just didn't know what form it would take. After I finally wrote my script I was again turned down for local support; and, as my usual artistic collaborators were thousands of miles away, I decided to produce the show by myself. *Ithaca* was recorded, directed, choreographed, rehearsed, and filmed in a sixteen square foot room (formerly the dining room) in my mother's home with a low self-funded budget.

In terms of the structure of the play, I took the chapters of the *Odyssey* focusing on Odysseus' journey and used them more as metaphorical rather than literal guidelines for the plot. While the play draws heavily from Homer's work, I wanted to make the show accessible for anyone (not just *Odyssey* nerds) by emphasising broad themes from Odysseus' story that relate to my own. In adapting *Ithaca* for screen, my intention was to bridge the gap between live and virtual performance. Filmed theatre productions, to me, often come across as quite distant – far from the atmosphere on stage. I decided to incorporate some effects and techniques from experimental film as well closer framing to attempt to immerse the viewer into the piece – to help audiences feel like they're in the room with me during the production.

The show is told from the perspective of Nobody, a feminine aspect of Odysseus. Nobody is an alias that Odysseus uses when trapped in the cave of a Cyclops as part of his plan to escape. Through many of the obstacles I've faced in my life I have (like many others) felt like Nobody. I decided to take on the alias myself partially to represent an element of universality to the feminine experience within my own. I also took on the

name in order to escape expectations that viewers might have for an actor with my personal experience and appearance, which is not the typical mould for women in the entertainment industry. I find that adapting Classical roles, especially traditional male roles such as Odysseus, is liberating as a female small-fat artist because there are no established conventions for this type of work on stage or screen. Playing a female version of Odysseus as well as embodying each of the monsters he faces allows me to share my story in a dynamic way that represents my authentic experience and places the fuller figured female body in a position of heroism.

I fundamentally believe that plays need to represent an inclusive and diverse audience – to tell relevant stories that reflect and resonate with a wide range of viewers. Plays should fit their audiences and individuals should not feel forced to minimise or conform to fit a play. I realised that instead of trying to change myself to fit a social role, I could work to change society. This brings me to a central point of *Ithaca*'s message, which is the encouragement to take the pen in your own hands and re-write how the world sees you. Show up as yourself authentically and unapologetically, stand up for yourself, and no one will be able to view you as anything less.

I am very grateful for the time I was given to create this work and for the support I've had from family and friends in making this dream production a reality. I am also incredibly grateful for the support network and resources that I have been given on my journey to reclaim, change the course, and re-write the narrative of my life. These resources are a privilege that should be available for all, but are not, due to systemic marginalisation, prejudice, and oppression, especially towards BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and disabled communities. Throughout my personal odyssey I have worked with physicians, therapists, lawyers, tutors, and I have had access to a great education. This is not without the consequence of significant debt, of course, but for others it is much more difficult or even impossible to access these services and tools. Hope is conditional on systemic equality. Without professional support, I would not have been able to work through my trauma or self-advocate for accommodations necessary to my education, health, safety, and wellbeing. This support is systemically inaccessible for the people who need it most, and there is much work to do to resolve this inequality.

As a small part of that work, I am sharing my story to raise awareness for the social issues that have impacted my life and that affect the lives of many others. Notably important to the plot of *Ithaca* are themes of fat phobia, bullying, domestic harassment,

chronic illness, mental health challenges, and difficulties with immigration. It is my intention for the show to open up and normalise discussion of these topics as well as to provide a platform for further education and connection. Through my Post-Show Talks I hope to start the conversation by sharing my experiences as well as providing facts and resources. My aim is to spark hope and reach out so that people who have faced similar challenges will feel seen and supported, and so that others will feel empowered to advocate for themselves.

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Thank you so much to all my wonderful friends and fellow artists who read the play and who encouraged me to tell my story. The fabulously talented Britta, Gab, Georgia, Lindsay, Louis, Stella – you're all stars.

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