

“

People are going
to understand
why this piece of
art, this work, this
exploration, is in
its truest form as
a play with live
bodies on stage.”

— Director Maggie Burrows



‘The Janeiad,’ a World Premiere From the Old Globe

by Makayla Hoppe

Penelope waited 20 years for Odysseus to return from the Trojan War. Despite a line of suitors at her door, she remained faithful to her husband. The story of Penelope and Odysseus is parallel to Jane’s own story: for 20 years, she has remained faithful to her husband since 9/11.

Jane and Penelope are the two main characters of “The Janeiad,” a new world premiere playing at the Old Globe this summer. Written by Anna Ziegler and directed by Maggie Burrows, the play explores grief, longing, and hope for the titular character.

“On that morning, it was just a regular day, and [Jane] was reading ‘The Odyssey’ for a book club,” Maggie explained. “The character of Penelope gets imprinted on her because she was around at the moment of emotional impact. She begins to rely on, learn from and emulate certain parts of Penelope’s process, ethos and way of living. The story is about how and when that serves her and what kind of journey she goes on with this guide and this support structure through her grief and her life over the subsequent 20 years.”

The show stars Michaela Watkins as Jane. Although the play explores grief and tragedy, it still relies on humor to process those emotions, and it requires an actress capable of channeling both drama and comedy.

“Anna’s writing is so spectacular in the way it kind of bobs and weaves between poetry and real belly laughs



LEFT: Anna Ziegler, playwright.

RIGHT: Maggie Burrows, director.

and humor about something that is deep and universal and hard,” Maggie said. “[Michaela] has this incredible combination of an internal engine and such honesty to her and then happens to be one of our greatest living comedic actors. So, the combination of all those things really spoke to the version of Jane that we were interested in moving towards.”

Nadine Malouf plays Penelope and other characters. The team needed an actress who could take on a major supporting role while also shifting into an entirely different set of characters.

“I was interested in an actor who could shift character by just using their body, voice, tone and posture. I didn’t want to put her in a different costume for every character because the play feels so much more psychological to me... I wanted an actor who could, just with the tools that they have available to them, really be able to shift into all of these characters — I think she plays seven characters besides Penelope. Nadine Malouf has done a tremendous amount of theater and just has this

chameleon-like quality. I thought, ‘Wow if we could get this for the play, we would be so lucky to explore the elements of what we have as theater artists.’”

This is the Old Globe’s third collaboration with playwright Anna Ziegler. Previous productions include “The Wanderers,” a 2018 world premiere, and “The Last Match” from 2016.

“Anna’s been such an amazing collaborator,” Maggie said. “I love working on her [plays] so much because of how theatrical it is... People are going to understand why this piece of art, this work, this exploration, is in its truest form as a play with live bodies on stage. And that is always such a tremendous honor and privilege to get to work on shows like that. Anna’s theatrical imagination is so vast. As a director and, I think, as an actor, we get to have that as a sandbox to play in.”

“The Janeiad” runs June 21-July 13 in the Sheryl and Harvey White Theatre. Bringing together love, literature and the power of grief, this world premiere will show how storytelling affects us all. ☆