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SF PERUSALS

The Adventures of Jason and the Argonauts

A play freely adapted from the ancient myths

Phil Willmott

Samuel French — London
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ISBN 978-0-573-15039-5

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THE ADVENTURES OF JASON AND THE ARGONAUTS

First performed at the Scoop open-air Amphitheatre, More London Riverside, SE1 2DB on August 5th 2009 with the following cast:

King Pelias	Raymond Coker
Medea	Siobhan O'Kelly
Storyteller	Ursula Mohan
Jason	Joe Fredericks
Chiron the Centaur	Richard Franklin
Hera as a hag	Paddy Crawley
Princess Creusa/the Goddess Hera	Lauren Storer
Argonaut Narcissus	Christopher Hogben
Argonaut Hercules	Paddy Crawley
Argonaut Castor	Jamie Menard
Argonaut Pollux	Matthew Grace
Argonaut Atlanta	Joanna Woodward
Argrin the Boat Builder	Richard Franklin
Argonaut Cat/the Goddess Artemis	Briony Price
Lascivious Gatekeeper/ Crone of Lemnos	Ursula Mohan
Queen Callisto of Lemnos	Briony Price
Colchis Fishwife	Ursula Mohan
King Aeetes of Colchis	Richard Franklin
The Great Bull of Colchis	Raymond Coker
Dragon Snake	Christopher Hogben

Directed by Phil Willmott
Produced by Suzanna Rosenthal for The Steam Industry

CHARACTERS

King Pelias
Medea
Story Teller (male or female)
Jason
Chiron the Centaur
Hera as a hag (male)
Princess Creusa/the Goddess Hera
Male Argonaut Narcissus
Male Argonaut Hercules
Male Argonaut Castor
Male Argonaut Pollux
Female Argonaut Atlanta
Male or Female Argonaut Argrin
Female Argonaut Cat/the Goddess Artemis
Lascivious Crone
Queen Callisto
King Aeetes of Colchis
Colchis Fishwife
The Great Bull of Colchis
Male or female Dragon Snake
Additional Argonauts

The action of the play takes place in a city square

Costumes: Ancient Greece (with a few fun twists)

PREFACE

This script is a record of how the piece was originally performed in 2009 but I hope directors will feel free to make it funny and relevant to their own audience and to adapt the staging to make best use of their resources.

The tale is told by a group of travelling players in a town square so you only really need the type of simple props that can be pulled out of a prop basket. Additionally the original production had some big, elaborate puppets for Chiron the Centaur, the Bull of Colchis and the Dragon Snake. If you have some money I suggest you too spend it on these elements but if not you can just as easily represent the beasts with actors in masks. Try to get a beautiful model ship for the clashing rock sequence though, if you can.

Please feel free to update the topical references to film stars and TV programmes and several of the characters, notably the ship's cat, speak in youthful street language which dates very quickly so you may need to update this too.

You can present the piece as a play with minimal music, just including a pop song for Narcissus and a song at the end, or you can incorporate more numbers if you like. We used the Katrina and the Waves song *Walking on Sunshine* when Jason was training, reprising the tune in a tense arrangement as underscoring for the Clashing Rocks sequence and for a big sing-along finale. Perhaps you could use Bonnie Tyler's *Holding Out For A Hero*, sung by backing singers, when Jason strips and carries Hag Hera across the water. Our harpies sang Gloria Gaynor's *I Will Survive* and Narcissus charmed them with *Hero* by Enrique Iglesias. You may have better ideas. Twinkly celestial percussion can also usefully underscore the goddesses.

If you'd like to present the show as a two act, full-scale musical the lyricist Kenny Wax and composer Geoff Morrow have written a complete set of catchy songs you can insert. Details are available via www.kennywax.com. Although time constraints meant I eventually used very little of their music it was Kenny who first alerted me to the potential of putting Jason's quest on stage.

However you choose to incorporate songs please note the appendix at the back of this script entitled Use of Copyright Music. If you're using

pop songs and you can't manage a live band there are some excellent karaoke accompaniments available that you can sing along to.

Finally, although the show works very well on its own, we presented this comedy as the first half of a double bill. Later that evening the same actors performed the ancient Greek tragedy *Medea*, Euripides' dramatic account of the terrible events which befell Jason and Medea later in life. I'd recommend this to any particularly ambitious producer as it proved a fantastic way of introducing a new audience to Greek tragedy and the actors loved the workout performing the contrasting pieces gave them.

However you choose to present *The Adventures of Jason and the Argonauts* good luck, I hope you have fun. We had a great time.

Phil Willmott

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Lysistrata — The Sex Strike (with Germaine Greer, after Aristophanes)
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(Oberon Books)

Also by Phil Willmott:

The Lower Depths (adapted from the play by Maxim Gorky)
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For Ursula Mohan

This brilliant actress and teacher, who inspired thousands of young actors during her time coaching at the Arts Educational School, inspired us with a hilarious performance as the crones in *Jason* followed by a heart wrenching portrayal of the nurse in *Medea*.

The Adventures of Jason and the Argonauts

A city square

Herald (*announcing*) His Majesty King Pelias, supreme ruler of all Greece!

During the following speech, the Argonauts — disguised as travelling players — enter the town square. One of them "Robbie" is carrying a recorder

King Pelias (*addressing the audience as if they were his subjects*) Citizens of Athens, my people, (*with distaste*) little children, it is seven weeks to the day since my upstart nephew Jason stood before me here and accused me of murdering his father, my own brother. (*Pause*) You know me as a fair man. Rather than have his guts strung around this square as festival decorations, I decided to let the gods decide his fate and sent him on a quest. His challenge was to fetch the Golden Fleece from a distant land far beyond the horizon, a mythical prize guarded by every kind of monster, temptation and peril. If he could return by twilight this evening, I promised to step aside and declare him King in my place. (*Pause*) It is an hour until the time allotted for his return and I can reassure those of you who love me, your rightful ruler, that there have been no sightings of the snotty little brat. (*Pause*) The gods have sent us a clear message; the hurtful things he accused me of were all lies, and somewhere out there he has suffered a cruel death as punishment for his falsehoods. (*Pause*) Let the celebrations commence. Unicorn pie will be served to all on the steps of the palace at nineteen hundred hours and two hundred virgins will be sacrificed in the town square at midnight.

Herald May the gods protect King Pelias the great.

Medea (*in disguise*; *addressing the King*) Your Majesty!

King Pelias Ah, volunteering for the virgin sacrifice? Splendid. Sign up round the back.

Medea (*ignoring him*) Your Majesty, may my little theatre troop be first to congratulate you on your defeat of Jason.

Disguised Argonauts All hail King Smelly Arse!

King Pelias It's Pelias!

Medea Forgive our ignorance, your Majesty. We are a group of

travelling players, actors from across the sea who make our living by roaming from island to island performing stories of bravery and valour to entertain the crowds.

King Pelias Could you do *Phantom of the Amphitheatre?* I like that one.

Medea Alas, that is not in our repertoire. But we have heard news of your nephew Jason on our travels, and could enact his recent adventures for your entertainment.

King Pelias He comes to a grizzly end, right? I mean you're not going to spring a happy ending on me?

Medea Our story ends with Jason staring into the mouth of the gigantic Dragon Snake that guards the Golden Fleece. No man has ever escaped the vicious monster.

King Pelias Splendid! Splendid! What fun. I'm sure we'd love to see your little play. Songs by Andrewsus Lloyd Webbercus?

Medea No, Majesty. But we do have Robbie and his recorder!

Robbie steps forward and gives his recorder a rather pathetic trill

King Pelias (*unimpressed*) Oh… (*Excited again*) But there'll be lots of multi-million pound special effects, right? To conjure up all the monsters and battles and violence in the story.

Medea We've got some really cool puppets.

King Pelias (*dangerously unimpressed*) Is it short?

Medea Time will fly on Mercury's wings, Sire.

King Pelias Well, we've got an hour till the pie's ready. Can you fit your little show into an hour or so?

Medea The sooner we begin…

King Pelias Oh, very well, I don't suppose they've rounded up enough virgins yet. You may commence. (*He settles on his throne to watch*)

Medea Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls, Great Ones of Athens. May I introduce our storyteller...

The company present the Storyteller

Amidst much clatter of percussion

Storyteller Oh, for a muse of fire that would ascend
My feeble powers of narration!
All Greece for a stage, real princes to act,
And actual ships to ride the swelling seas!
What if young Jason, could *himself* appear,
Strap on a sword and armour here,

With (as fierce and loyal as hounds)
His friends the *actual* Argonauts?
They'd win much glory with this tale.
Suppose, within the girdle of our stage,
You see two teenagers meet, young Jason
And sweet Medea, a newcomer to Greece.

Jason and Medea are sulky inexpressive teens at this point

Medea All right?
Jason All right.

Medea can't suppress her energy for much longer. Jason still trying to remain cool

Medea My father sent me here to keep me out of trouble.
Jason Can you use a bow and arrow?
Medea Yes.
Jason Know any jokes?
Medea Yes.
Jason (*shrugging*) Cool.
Storyteller Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.
Think, when I talk of centaurs, that you see one
Printing his proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth.
For 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings,
Carry them here and there, jumping o'er times.

Chiron the Centaur appears. Chiron is a crotchety, professor type

Jason Who are you? What are you?
Chiron I am Chiron, a centaur. Half man and half horse seeing as you ask. Impudent boy! And you had best learn some manners. I have news for you — you are not who you think you are!
Jason You mean... You mean… I've got the X factor?!
Chiron Certainly not… Well, maybe… No. I bring news of much greater importance. You were stolen away from the palace as a baby. Your true father was a ruler here. You are the rightful king of Athens.
King Pelias (*interrupting the action from his throne from where he watches*) Funny! This play's so funny! (*To Medea*) You were right, virgin. This is most amusing.
Chiron (*back to the play*) Do you realize what that means?
Jason Of course — no more chores and homework.
Chiron Foolish boy, my news has greater significance. Your father

was murdered by his jealous brother Pelias. The younger brother has seized the throne and all Greece suffers under his cruel tyranny. It is your destiny to challenge the tyrant and take your place as rightful king.

King Pelias (*warning the actors*) Be very careful.

The actors bow to Pelias as if submissively

Jason Challenge a king, me? But I don't know ——

Chiron Precisely, you don't know anything. This is why we need to begin your training. Now, do you have some lusty youth to train alongside you for moral support?

Jason There's Medea?

Chiron A girl!

Jason But she's as brave and strong as any boy.

Medea And a lot brighter too.

Chiron That wouldn't be too difficult.

Jason starts to exercise like a boxer. Appropriate training music starts

Pay attention young Jason, work hard and we'll make a hero of you yet. (*He moves to one side*)

The Storyteller takes the stage once more

Storyteller With schooling all completed,
The centaur satisfied,
He leaves to claim his father's throne ——
Medea — Medea at his side.

Training montage and boxing music finishes

Storyteller Dare he rouse the spiteful king,
Complete the centaur's plan?
All we need's an actor who
Can play this cruel man.

A very unassuming actor puts on a crown or a crown is given to a member of the audience

King Pelias (*indicating whoever's playing him*) Is that supposed to be me?

Storyteller I'm afraid he's the only actor available, Majesty.

King Pelias (*to the actor playing him*) Step aside! If anyone's going to play me in the movie it's going to be me. Unless?
Storyteller Yes Majesty?
King Pelias Tom Cruisicus isn't available, is he?
Storyteller No, Your Majesty.
King Pelais Then I suppose I must give reign to my thespian tendencies.
Storyteller A script, Your Majesty?
King Pelias I remember what I said. (*Stepping into the story*) So, young Jason. You expect me to give up my throne, just like that, based upon the lies of (*indicating Chiron the Centaur*) old horse chestnuts over there?
Jason I speak the truth. The gods will prove it so.
King Pelias Will they indeed? Personally I never trouble myself with the gods. *Songs of Praise* isn't my kind of tea time viewing.
Jason You doubt the gods?
King Pelias I don't bother them, they don't bother me. It's obvious they want me as king. Perhaps now is the time to test my theory. I challenge you to capture and bring home the Golden Fleece of Colchis!

The challenge is spoken against a drum beat. This can be performed "straight" or as a rap

As the speech continues the Herald shows the audience related pictures from a flip chart — a snake, the fleece, a piece of cake etc.

If you're the man you say you are,
I challenge you to journey far,
Make across the mighty ocean,
For distant Colchis, where a snake,
A giant Dragon Snake in fact,
Guards a precious artefact.
They call this prize the Golden Fleece,
Return with it in seven weeks
And I'll hand back my crown to you.
It sounds a simple thing to do,
Yet many try and all have failed.
You'll see as soon as you set sail,
That many perils wait to snare
The traveller so best beware.
Babes who turn to vicious birds,
There's crashing rocks too I have heard;
A bull so fierce its breath is fire,

Skulls who fight and never tire.
And yet, no doubt, for heaven's sake,
You'll find all that a piece of cake!
A lad like you, in seven weeks,
Can easily fetch me that Fleece.
So hurry, boy, *auf wiedersehen*.
(*Aside*) We won't be seeing him again!

Storyteller And so Jason left the King's presence. A million questions reverberated around our young hero's mind, chief amongst them being ——

Jason and Medea are alone

Jason What's the Golden Fleece?

Medea (*don't you know anything reaction*) It's a sheepskin coat made from a magical ram that once belonged to Zeus, the king of the gods. One of your ancestors flew on its back to the distant land of Colchis where the ram was sacrificed to the sun god and its coat was hung in a sacred grove guarded by a Dragon Snake. (*Beat*) Weren't you paying attention at all in hero class?

Jason So I just have to fight a Dragon Snake? No problem.

Medea There's more to it than that, it's a long perilous sea voyage to Colchis and the king there believes he will lose his power if the fleece is ever stolen, so the grove is well protected.

Jason I'd better pack some sandwiches. Sounds like I won't be back till late.

Medea Jason, you have to plan this carefully! Colchis is a long boat journey away (*pointing out front*) beyond the horizon, beyond many uncharted islands, home to many strange creatures and customs. Now, what does your hero training teach you?

Jason Er… We'll need a boat?

Medea Brilliant!

Jason But May, we're broke!

Medea What does hero training tell us is more useful than cash?

Jason Credit cards?

Medea Friends!

Jason Oh yeah, well, I've got you.

Medea You have.

Jason And… and… we don't really know anyone else.

Medea That's the trouble with home schooling.

Hera (disguised as an old hag) enters with a tray of medicines

Hera (*calling out her wares*) Potions, cures and poultices, remedies and rhymes! Let Old Mother Superdrug cure what ails you! Potions, cures and poultices, remedies and rhymes! Get your potions, cures and poultices, remedies and rhymes, here.
Medea Hallo, old lady!
Hera Potions, cures and poultices, remedies and rhymes!
Medea We're in very good health.
Hera I tell fortunes too for two groats.
Jason We've only got half a groat.
Hera (*snatching it*) I'll take it! There's a recession on. Give me your hands. (*Standing between them hand in hand and incanting*)

O mighty forces of Earth, Sea and Air,
Spirits of fire, of pleasure and care,
Give me the knowledge Athena forbids;
What lies in store for these two crazy kids?

There is a thunder clap

Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear.
Jason Not good news?
Hera (*handing them merchandise from her tray*) Here, take some of my failsafe industrial strength ointment of cloves and some soothing sleeping balm for the forehead. You're going to need them.
Jason Really? Well, thank you er...?
Hera Old Mother Superdrug.
Jason Thank you, Old Mother Superdrug. But can you be more specific?
Hera The perils that await you should not be faced alone. You must win friends to help you.
Medea Win them?
Hera Quite so. Through kindness.
Jason I don't understand, is it like winning the lottery?
Hera Even better.
Jason Wow! Where can I buy a scratch card?
Hera You must show the world an act of selflessness. (*Slyly*) For instance…
Jason / **Medea** (*together*) Yes?
Hera Well, I need to get across the water, it's many days walk around it but… Well, you're a bit of a hunk... you could carry me across on your back, handsome?
Jason What do you think, May?

Medea The centaur taught us to do good deeds whenever possible and I can sprint around to the other side. Got your swimming trunks?
Jason Well, yes but…
Hera Strip!

Jason appears to carry Hera "piggy back". One of "her" legs can be thrown over Jason's shoulder while he stands with the other on a box behind him to take his weight. Jason mimes swimming with his arms

Storyteller As Jason strode out across the bay with the old lady on his back she seemed to grow heavier and heavier.
Hera Cheeky!
Storyteller But with diligence, dexterity and care he ensured she arrived on the opposite bank completely dry.
Hera (*indicating she's thirsty*) Actually, I am a bit parched.

Someone brings her a cup of tea

Thanks, love. (*Drinking it down and staring into the cup*) Ooh my word, look at these tea leaves, very suspicious configuration I must say. (*Incanting*) What can you tell us o mystic tea leaves? (*Holding the tea cup to her ear*) The leaves say… the leaves say… It is time for me to throw off my disguise and reveal my true identity! (*Straightening up and throwing off the disguise to reveal himself as a rather unconvincing beauty*) Behold. Feast your eyes upon my beauty as your just reward. It was me all along!
Jason I'm sorry have we me—— ? Do we know each other?
Hera It is I...
Jason Er?
Storyteller Hera.
Jason Can't quite place…
Storyteller (*prompting him*) It's Hera, the beautiful goddess of women.
King Pelias (*interrupting again*) No wonder Jason doesn't recognize the goddess, that actor looks ridiculous. You need a looker in this role and I know just the beauty. Ladies and gentlemen, for one night only, in the role of the goddess Hera, my youngest daughter Alcestis.

Vampy music

A big entrance for Creusa, a real babe, who takes over the role of Hera amidst wolf whistles etc.

Hera (*incanting*) Mighty winds of North and South,
East Wind, West Wind roar about,
Make young Jason's crew appear,
Sweep them up and blow them here!

Jason covers up as a huge gust of wind blows the Argonauts, one by one, before Jason. First up is Narcissus. A swaggering pop star type

Narcissus (*checking out Hera*) Hey, who's the babe?!
Hera I am the goddess Hera.
Narcissus Why is it all the cuties are always taken or celestial deities?
Jason I'm Jason.
Narcissus Hey, always up for adventure, Bro. My name's Narcissus. Now I know what you're thinking — what's an A-list pop star doing taking time out from a busy career? Fair point Jase, the truth is me and my record company need a little time out too, know what I'm saying? So what better than a tour to get back to my roots, pick up some new vibes… meet some chicks. There's gonna be chicks where we're going, right?
Jason I'm sure.
Narcissus I'm on board if you'll have me, Jase.
Jason Glad to have you with us. Who's next?

Atlanta steps up. A hearty Wild West gal

Atlanta Howdy y'all, I'm Princess Atlanta. Yee-ha!
Narcissus Yee-ha! (*She slaps Jason on the back*)
Jason Yee...Oww!
Atlanta I hear you're looking for adventurers. My pa, Iasius, wanted a boy and left me out on Mount Olympus to be brought up by the animals — so I can hunt as hard as a grizzly bear, see as sharp as an eagle and fight as fierce as a mountain lion and did I mention I can sing like a coyote? I sure as heck ain't settlin' down to married life now pa's taken to fixin' me up with a husband. So I've run away and I'm happy to hitch up with you if you'll have me.
Jason Love to have you along.

Castor and Pollux arrive

Castor }
Pollux } (*together*) Greetings, Captain Jason.
Castor We are the famous twins, Castor ——
Pollux — and Pollux.

Castor Side by side we fight bravely for injustice wherever we find it.
Pollux Identical in bravery, agility, guile and swordsmanship, the world cannot tell us apart.
Castor We also have a cool habit of being able to ——
Castor / **Pollux** (*together*) — finish each other's sentences.
Pollux Which can also be quite annoying depending ——
Castor — on how you look at it.
King Pelias (*interrupting the play*) Those actors don't look anything like each other?
Pollux Who said that!?
Castor Who said that!?
Pollux I'll slice 'em in two, Caz.
Castor Teach 'em a lesson, Pol.
Castor / **Pollux** (*together*) No one disses the Tyndarius twins.
King Pelias All right, move on, we get the idea.

Argrin arrives

Argrin Which of you is the rightful king of Greece?
All Argonauts (*to Jason*) That's you!
Jason Er — that would be me.
Argrin I am Argrin. My father Argo, the boat builder, sends you greetings. Our dads fought in battle together and although my dad is too sick to make the journey here today, he sends me to offer you our family's support in your quest to overthrow the tyrant Pelias. Your journey to the fleece will be a long one — you need a mighty ship. My father sends you such a vessel and if you will allow me to act as navigator I promise you as safe a journey as Neptune allows.
Jason I accept your kind offer. Crew, we have ourselves a ship and a navigator! May the gods bless the good ship Argo and all present and future.
All Argonauts (*shouting*) ARGONAUTS!

Hercules arrives

Hercules Excuse me, excuse me, excuse me, does anyone know anything about that ship over there? The Argo?
Argrin I built it, why?
Hercules I'm afraid I slipped and put my hand through the side.
Argrin But it's solid oak.

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