

**Mark Bruce has choreographed, directed and danced internationally for over 25 years, working with Rosas, Bern Ballet and Ballet Black, among others. He was one of the judges of the contemporary dance section of BBC Young Dancer 2017. Mark formed the Mark Bruce Company in 1991; since then, the company has regularly staged exciting, innovative dance-theatre productions. Mark's theatre work includes choreography for *The Bacchae* (directed by Braham Murray) and *Antigone* (directed by Greg Hersov) at Manchester Royal Exchange Theatre, and several of his productions, including *Helen* (1996), *Love and War* (2010) and *Medea* for Bern Ballet (2011) have drawn on themes from myth and Greek tragedy. The Mark Bruce Company's production of *Dracula* in 2013 won the Sky Arts South Bank Award, while in 2014 at the National Dance Awards, Jonathan Goddard received the Dancing Times Award for Best Male Dancer for his role as Dracula, and the company won the Best Independent Company Award. Last year, the Mark Bruce Company staged a production of *The Odyssey*, which toured London and the South West. Chrissy Combes spoke to Mark Bruce about the production at Wilton's Music Hall in March 2016. Since the interview Hannah Kidd (Penelope in the production) was nominated for the Outstanding Female Performance Award by the Critics' Circle at the 17<sup>th</sup> Dance Awards, and Eleanor Duval (Circe) was included in Top Ten Best Dance of 2016 by Luke Jennings, Dance critic of The Observer.**

*An illustrated version of this interview is available online at*

*<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2017/bruce>*

**CC.** I am talking today to Mark Bruce, dancer, choreographer and director. In 1991 Mark formed the Mark Bruce Company, which specialises in innovative and compelling dance-theatre. Since its formation, the company has staged many exciting productions, among them *Dracula* in 2013, which was greatly acclaimed and won several major awards. Mark's theatre work includes productions at the Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester, and he has worked with many dance companies, including Rosas, Bern Ballet and Ballet Black. Mark writes music for his own productions and for art installations. His book of short stories, *Blackout Zones*, was released in 2010 and he has completed a book on choreography, due to be published by Oberon in 2017. This year, the Mark Bruce Company toured their production of *The Odyssey*, which was based on Homer's epic poem. The review of the production in *The Observer* named Mark Bruce as '*one of the most consistently thought-provoking choreographers working in Britain today.*' I am talking to Mark at the famous Wilton's Music Hall, a very beautiful venue on the company's tour. Mark, you're a very busy man. Thank you for seeing me today, I'm very grateful to you. Could I ask you how and why you formed the Mark Bruce Company and what the aims of the company are?

**MB.** Well, I formed the company because I wanted to make the work I wanted to make, or pursue making it. And I think when you work on a more freelance basis you quite rightly have responsibilities to the companies you are working for and their audiences. And I wanted to do something that I would be wholly responsible for. And if it went wrong, it would be only my fault! I wanted to push forward with the work and I wanted to collect the artists I wanted to work with, the collaborators, the dancers, the actors, and build it all myself.

**CC.** I saw your production of *The Odyssey* here at the atmospheric Wilton's Music Hall and was absolutely stunned by the impact of the design, music and lighting and by the beauty and power of the dancing. The dances ranged through very exciting ensemble pieces to intimate duets and seemed to incorporate contemporary dance, classical ballet and jazz. So Mark, could I ask you first: How would you define your dance style? Can you define it?

**MB.** I don't think you can define it, really. I'm influenced by all kinds of art forms and I think, in a way, I deal with sound and vision and the work is very filmic and has a strong choreographic language. It all feeds together to create a vision that I have. And so I don't think I break it down. There are many parts to the machine. Again, that's why I think I started a company, so that I could really spend many, many years learning about all the different mediums that I use so that I'm not just dipping into them. You know, that's why I spend much time working in the theatre, and playing music, and I've done a lot of writing, all sorts of things go into the mix, and in a way, there are no rules. And it's a very rich way to work because you get pushed by each medium and how it informs you, and you have to make decisions all the time, often about which way to favour getting a particular idea or image forward. It can be dance, or sometimes there's a visual image, or sometimes it's a sound. It's a company without any rules so therefore it's very difficult to define. Call it Dance Theatre for want of a better phrase really. But the choreographic language, the choreographic world is always very present and that's important. Yes, but if I had my way, I wouldn't define it all.

**CC.** All right, fair enough, you don't have to, you don't have to. So let's talk about *The Odyssey*, about Odysseus, his *nostoi*, his long homecoming after the end of the Trojan war. Can you tell us what drew you to *The Odyssey*, what inspired you to use it as a basis for this piece of work?

**MB.** Well, every time I make work, whether I am making up a narrative myself – and sometimes the narrative is very tenuous, like dreams almost – when I'm connecting with those things I often find parallels in Greek mythology. That's probably why I've always been obsessed with Greek mythology. And I was obsessed with it before I even realised that I was. I didn't study it properly at school, we did the classics at school but I was just at a state school, I wasn't really pushed in that way. But I read the Robert Graves myths and something about the stories never left me alone. (And then the parallel with that is all the Ray Harryhausen movies. And all those fantasy elements.) And it obviously touches something in your subconscious and in the sides of us that continue to be archetypal. It's similar in a very roundabout way to my production of *Dracula*. There are bits missing and it opens your imagination, and you fill those parts in yourself. And with certain stories like that they just stay with you. And you get to a point when you realise they're still with you and maybe it's time to open them up and go even further into them and discover why and what they are touching inside you and I think that is the purpose of myths, and a myth that has lasted as long as that, there's got to be reasons for it. In a way, it's opening a can of worms because I realise it's an epic story to do, there'll be many opinions on it, I had to chop it into many parts, I had to include *The Iliad*, because I think if you don't come to *The Odyssey* knowing the story, you're wondering 'Who is this guy, what's his pain? I've no empathy for him.' And it's something I struggled with in *The Odyssey* anyway, finding any empathy for Odysseus. Some of the old versions refer to him as the hero. Well, he's not really a hero. And then they say 'Is he an anti-hero?' Well, no, he's just a man – doing those things, savage things that

happen to us in life, and dealing with the decisions that we make. And all those metaphorical experiences he has, when you really start opening all those things up, it opens up so much deep inside of us. And even though we're on our twenty-eighth performance, I am still looking at it every night and realising things and that, again (the same as when I started my company) is the purpose of creativity for me. So, I think I was just at a point where I wanted to open it up and try to tackle it. And I knew it was crazily ambitious.

**CC.** And it must have been hugely challenging in terms of deciding shape and structure? When I looked at the programme before the show and saw details of the music you had specially composed for the production, the titles of the pieces led me to believe that this was going to be a fairly traditional re-telling of *The Odyssey*, albeit without words and conveyed through music and dance. You have titles such as *Telemachus, Odysseus and Penelope, Circe*. However, I noticed that your opening piece of music was called *Metro Theme*, which didn't immediately evoke a recognisable scene from *The Odyssey*! And indeed, as the performance developed, it soon became clear that although this was an extraordinary interpretation of *The Odyssey* in terms of mood and atmosphere, you were not tied absolutely to the ancient epic poem, that you had made some radical changes, creating scenes and situations which shifted (very cleverly) between the world of Homer and the contemporary world. Judith Mackrell in the Guardian locates your production '*between myth and modern fantasy*.' As to the structure, I would imagine that *The Odyssey* presented real problems? The narrative order of the poem disagrees with the chronological order so much, many of the prior events working through flashbacks or storytelling. Odysseus is barely introduced at the start before the focus in the first four books is on Telemachus, his struggle to try to control the suitors during Odysseus's long absence, and his decision to search for his father. So, what was your process? As a narrative, it doesn't even begin at the beginning, does it really, it kind of starts in the middle. How did you cope with that? Did you gradually select what you were going to use? Did you have an outline in your mind beforehand, what characters to focus on, what ones to eliminate?

**MB.** Well all those things are part of the process. It's one of those stories – I'd mulled it over for years. And then I started to think more seriously about doing it, because people were asking, you know, what's the next show going to be, and I was saying it might be *The Odyssey*, and first of all it wasn't going to be called *The Odyssey* because my first versions were really out there, very very surreal. And we were going to call it *Homecoming King*.

**CC.** Oh, great title.

**MB.** Yes. And I liked that title actually, but then I thought 'Am I going to stand up and say 'This is my version of *The Odyssey*'? And the more I went full circle with my ideas, the more I kept coming back to the original. And the more it started to drop into place and I thought 'No. It's *The Odyssey*.' And, so, talking about process, probably there are two years of thinking about it, then I always get to the point where all the ideas are written on paper all over the wall and I start connecting them all together and I sit down for about five weeks and I write a treatment, like a film script, but without words. (Sometimes I do use words, but I didn't use words in *The Odyssey*.) And then, at the same time, I'm listening to all kinds of music that I feel resonates with it, the subject matter, in an archetypal way, again

emotionally, pace-wise, what's visceral – because every scene must be visceral because you're only going to get a shot at a few of the scenes and they all have to be fundamental and very powerful and, if you really follow the subject matter, devastating. And so I build a structure – that's a very simplistic way of putting it – but then I start structuring it and I'm informed by all different mediums, particularly film. Really, in a way, when you see my work, it's a film on stage. And so I put it into a narrative, and, of course, the narrative of *The Odyssey* is not linear. Ironically, the order it is written in is not linear, but if you *made* it linear, it's a better order of events. I find it always very strange that Calypso happens at the end. No, the *first* thing he does is have a seven-year relationship with someone! You do that before you go to Hades surely? You don't go to Hades first and then decide to have a mid-life crisis! Actually, I'm not going to say that it's a mid-life crisis, because it's not, it's not at all. But the fact is he spends seven years on an island and you just think.... Now, if you put that before a modern-day editor of a novel, they'd think you'd got it the wrong way round. Maybe that's the way it was *told* that way round? It's very difficult to know. I think you can take a lot of liberties with it, I think you *have* to in order to make it relevant. How long was it before it was actually written down? People were going to be taking all sorts of liberties with it.

**CC.** You're right, a work passed down by word of mouth through generations in the Ancient Greek oral tradition - there must have been changes. And in your production it seemed absolutely right theatrically to make that change from the written text and to place Calypso in Act One rather than near the end of Act Two. These were very moving scenes. Christopher Tandy fully conveyed the anguish of Odysseus as he longs for home and his wife and son while kept captive by Calypso on her island for seven years. And Grace Jabbari as the 'shining goddess' Calypso also elicited great sympathy in the scene where Odysseus is finally leaving the island. You saw her longing for him, her desire. I was struck that you had choreographed and set the final love duet between Calypso and Odysseus (beautifully danced by both dancers) to Mozart's Mass in C Minor, the 'Great' Kyrie. The sad notes of the minor key seemed to become a lament for Calypso, the music emphasising the sense of yearning and of loss expressed in the dance by Grace Jabbari.

**MB.** I work very hard on trying to marry the music to the scene.

**CC.** I'd like come back to the music. But can I ask first – are you in charge of design aspects?

**MB.** I have a brilliant designer – Phil Eddolls. And a great Lighting Designer, Guy Hoare, and a wonderful Costume designer in Dorothee Brodrück. They're fantastic. I've worked with them for a while now. Guy I have worked with for 25 years. I have really strong visions to start with, but with such brilliant collaborators I don't just dictate to them but I talk about the world of the piece. We work on the images together. For instance, Phil took the main image I wanted of the 'ship' and worked on it brilliantly as a designer.

**CC.** That was such a terrific concept, the huge, imposing, circular shape which opened up to become Odysseus' ship, the Trojan horse, the entrance to Hades, a high viewing platform for the gods. The lighting design was dramatic too, with haze, flame, and strong colours for the battle scenes at Troy, mysterious shadows and beautiful pools of light for the duets. There were so many lovely design ideas like the massive burgundy coloured cloth which was made

to billow and represent Homer's wine dark sea. Behind the ship, there was the map of an island, picked out in lights. Was this Ithaca?

**MB.** It can be anything. It can be his homeland if you want it to be. We had a celluloid wheel onstage, there was a kind of broken down fairground image. For me, that is resonant with Coney Island in the 1970's. And that is based on me seeing the 1970's film *The Warriors* - film always informs me. You watch it now, it's quite a funny film to see now but it is also full of brilliant imagery, and there's a strange dystopian world. And I wanted to create a world where you could mix the ancient and the new. So we created a broken down world but a world where the gods could play. Because it is a recurring idea in my work that life is just a sideshow. In the production, the gods appear at the beginning. Athene (who we call Immortal Woman) sits at a dressing table at the start of the production, looking in a mirror and putting on her disguise - whatever she is going to be. For me, she is looking down from Mount Olympus - but there is a sense that she is also in Hollywood. When you think about immortals you think about Hollywood. Our version of immortality is a film star who died young but is always on celluloid, she never dies. This is all in the mix. And the dystopian setting and the modern images indicate a post apocalyptic world. So to go back to your question, the lights definitely pick out an island. It could be Ithaca. It could be Hollywood. Hollywood is an island in a metaphorical sense. It could be so many things. But we definitely start with the image of a woman looking down on us, and that is the image of an immortal looking down on humanity.

**CC.** And there is a sense of that, of course, in Book 1 of Homer's poem, isn't there? At the start (from what I remember) the Olympian gods are gathered to discuss Odysseus' homecoming from Ogygia, the island of Calypso. We are told that it is Poseidon who keeps relentlessly driving Odysseus back from his homeland because Odysseus killed Polyphemus, Poseidon's son. However Athene, who in *The Iliad* was angry with Odysseus and all the Greeks who fought at Troy, has now become more of a protectress to Odysseus. Does Athene protect him at any time in your version?

**MB.** Yes she does. But she is also constantly pushing him over the edge and pulling him back, that's what she does. In *The Iliad* and here she is extremely fickle. It is accepted that she is divine but her behaviour is much more interesting, more complex - like all the gods in Homer, she has extremely human characteristics. She really pushes Odysseus' buttons, knocking him this way and that way.

**CC.** In your production, the gods are represented by two characters - Immortal Woman danced by Eleanor Duval and Immortal Man danced by Christopher Akrill (replacing an injured Jonathan Goddard). Both characters are portrayed as sinister and manipulative and as clearly deriving real enjoyment from their meddling. And you have two other generic characters: Mortal Woman (Nicole Guarino) and Mortal Man (Jordi Calpe Serrats), who often interweave and dance with them. Christopher Akrill made a terrific impact in his first dance as Immortal Man. He 'introduced himself' through movement to the audience in a very intimate, conspiratorial way, breaking the fourth wall, and he then gradually segued into the role of the Showman, delighted in his foreknowledge of the events that were about to unfold onstage. It was a macabre dance, because he was surrounded by dancers dressed as skeletons

– a nod to your strong influence Ray Harryhausen and his film *Jason and the Argonauts*, but also an ominous reminder that Odysseus is to visit Hades, the Land of the Dead, on his travels. And the skeletons took the audience straight into Homeric themes of mortality and the death and destruction and brutality of war.

**MB.** I suppose in a way, I am trying to play the same role as myth. I have to put a landscape in my head but I'm doing things, with regard to character and location by suggestion. And I know a lot of people want to see real definite Homeric episodes but I'm saying 'Can't we go beyond that?' This is what I'm an advocate for. We should be able to do more than that, more than being absolutely concrete and definite, especially with the medium of dance theatre because that is all about 'going beyond'. And the way that the language of *The Odyssey*, this ancient Greek epic poem is written (so I am told, I don't read Ancient Greek and it is, of course, in translation) to me the language is like music and when you use the mediums of sound, vision, movement, they transcend words, either those passed on through an oral tradition or those written down on a page. When you listen to a piece of music you don't need to know, from a to b, from first bar to last bar, what it means. It's about what it makes you feel. And stories like *The Odyssey* have the same effect. They take us into what we feel, into the realm inside of us. So I don't intend to create a definitive version of what *The Odyssey* means. That is something different for everyone, for each individual member that makes up the audience. I want people to go home and dream about it.

**CC.** I'd like to refer again to your choices of music, the very eclectic selection of music you use, which works so well, ranging from music which you have specifically composed to classical music, jazz, and even American rock music of the 70's and 80's.

**MB.** Yes, that's right. Sonic Youth is in there, that's from about the 1980's. But about a third of the music is mine. And classical music, yes. I wanted a big dynamic range. I like drawing different eras together. I have no prejudice or snobbery when it comes to music, as in 'you can't put so and so with so and so' I don't have any rules in that respect. I think all music can be used if it is real and if you use it sensitively. If it is from the heart it doesn't matter if it is very primitive or very sophisticated as long as it can touch you.

**CC.** I thought the music choices were extremely clever. For instance, *Seafaring Song* by Isobel Campbell and Mark Lanegan, which was used to open Act 2, might have been written for a film of *The Odyssey*! You could almost believe Mark Lanegan's gruff, gravelly voice to be that of a weary Odysseus. And the lyrics about a long dangerous sea journey, wandering far from home, sailing to foreign skies, were so resonant with the sea storms and sea monsters to be found in the poem. Your soundscape also included several sacred arias. For instance, Mozart's *Laudate Dominum* is played in the scene where Odysseus is lashed to the mast so he will not be lured by the sirens to his death.

**MB.** For me the search for the god or the other or whatever is inside you crosses the centuries from the ancient Greeks to now. We just live in different times. My belief is that if Mozart was writing in a different time and within a different religion, his music would probably sound very much the same because he was searching for the same thing. And I think that dealing with our mortality is what *The Odyssey* is about. So I don't see a dividing line with

regard to choices of music. And in that particular scene with the sirens where you have the most Catholic music, there's a connection too to the women's roles, to the way women were treated in Odysseus' world and the way they are still treated in our world. A lot of the problems the male has with the female is with trying to come to terms and have control and not being able to control, so having to suppress feelings. And in the siren scene, there's an aspect inside Odysseus that he is wrestling with within himself, something very extreme, I think. I wasn't attempting to create the scene purely as it is depicted in Homer, any more than I did with the other scenes. I stuck my neck out here and the choice of music was part of that. I was exploring a lot of territory with this scene. But if you don't try, you never know.

**CC.** It was an incredibly haunting scene, both visually and musically. The shimmering, lyrical soprano voice in the *Laudate Dominum*, backed by the chorus, soared around the auditorium and enhanced the onstage movement and dance. You completely believed in these sirens and their exquisite voices and beautiful, seductive song. And the gently rocking violins in the music helped to convey the motion of Odysseus' ship on its passage through the waves. Unforgettable. It is interesting that you spoke about the role of women and the way women were and are treated. I was fascinated by the interpretation of Penelope in the production because she seems, depending on the way you read *The Odyssey*, to be the archetypal, chaste, faithful wife. But here, in your production, I guess she was those things, but she was also quite feisty, wasn't she?

**MB.** Yes. Absolutely. I found the original Penelope really boring! And in this day and age, she's a cliché, I'm afraid. And where do you go with that? What's really going on inside her soul and inside her gut? In this day and age, she would be furious. The main thing for me was to really show at the beginning that these two people are absolutely in love.

**CC.** Which you did in the second or was it their first duet? It was so beautiful, so tender.

**MB.** The first duet. And young. And that is destroyed. But life destroys people and people change. So rather than him coming back and her being exactly the same as before, she's been touched by all kinds of demons. And literally scarred.

**CC.** You included the call to war and Odysseus sacrificing the ram – a very grisly scene with a dancer wearing an incredibly realistic mask of a ram (masks by Jonny Dixon). Christopher Tandy conveyed Odysseus' reluctance to leave Penelope and the baby Telemachus.

**MB.** Yes, Penelope has tamed him. And there is something about the precious baby that makes it so difficult for Odysseus to leave. But, ultimately, he feels 'My path is to go.'

**CC.** Could you talk about the later scene where Penelope was shown having lines carved into her back? This was a very well executed theatrical effect, with dripping blood; it was very disturbing.

**MB.** Odysseus goes to the horrors of war and to the horrors of his terrible journey home after the war. But I wanted to show that his wife is broken as well, that she is deeply traumatised during his absence. Odysseus' twenty year absence from Penelope is like a prison sentence to her. So each scar that is cut into her back represented each one of the twenty years. I think I had images in my head of North American Indians - their scars were a mark of their strength. Because Penelope is strong, she stays in there, and endures this punishment. I don't really know where the idea came from, but it was one of the first images I had and I never questioned it, I just knew it was the way I wanted to show twenty years. She is marked and changed by the passing of those years.

**CC.** It was a shocking visual image of her suffering. She is, of course, completely defenceless, the palace having been invaded by the hordes of suitors who take advantage of the tradition of hospitality, seek marriage with her and want to usurp Odysseus' place as king. Alan Vincent, as your main suitor, really demonstrated the crass boorishness of the suitors and their menace to Penelope and to Telemachus as they plan his '*grim destruction.*' You truly incorporated your theme of life being a sideshow in these scenes with Telemachus (Wayne Parsons) being strapped to a spinning wheel while the Suitor (Alan Vincent), blind folded, threw knives at him! Little wonder that Hannah Kidd does not depict Penelope as traditionally patient and circumspect while waiting for Odysseus. In a remarkable closing scene to the first act, she sat with two handmaidens for a moment or two fairly tranquilly while she was weaving the shroud for Laertes, Odysseus' elderly father, in the trick to delay the suitors' encroachments. It was almost like a depiction in art of the faithful, loyal Penelope. The next moment, expectations were confounded as Penelope started ripping out the stitches in howling fury, everything about her physicality expressing her burning anger and torment.

**MB.** As I said, she is deeply changed.

**CC.** And Odysseus - he's such a strange, complex, ambivalent character really, different in *The Odyssey* from what he is in *The Iliad*, I think, maybe not quite as wily.....

**MB.** What in *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*?

**CC.** No in *The Odyssey*, perhaps.

**MB.** They're constantly calling him the wily Odysseus in *The Odyssey* and he just makes one stupid decision after another!

**CC.** He does. Exactly! Well I suppose he disguises himself, slithers out of situations.....

**MB.** Well not really. It's not rocket science! No, to be serious, in this version Odysseus is a character who is traumatised and lost. He is weary and destroyed, his mind has gone. You sometimes have to ask the question about that long journey home after Troy. Are all the

monsters Odysseus meets just things inside of him? For instance, Is the Cyclops a metaphor for Odysseus himself and for his one eyed view of the world, the savage side to him that he has to confront before he can return home?

**CC.** Christopher Tandy as Odysseus certainly looked traumatised rather than resourceful and ‘god-like’ as he is sometimes described in the text. He was a brooding figure, soldierly, powerful, shaven headed, but essentially vulnerable. I thought his vulnerability was especially evident in his scenes with Circe (Eleanor Duval). Am I right in thinking that it was a deliberate choice that Immortal Woman (Athene) should also play the witch goddess Circe?

**MB.** Yes, absolutely. We wanted to show that Athene is continuing to play with Odysseus by taking on the disguise of Circe.

**CC.** Like Calypso, Circe is an enchantress but she can also be deeply malicious with her knowledge of malignant drugs and potions and her ability to transform her enemies into animals. Eleanor Duval was clearly emphasising the dangerous and lethal qualities of Circe?

**MB.** Yes, Circe as witch.

**CC.** The scene where she bewitches Odysseus’ crew and turns them into swine was extremely vivid and exciting, the dancers all in black pig masks. (Again, cleverly created by Jonny Dixon). But I thought that the duet between Circe and Odysseus was another wonderful duet, very erotic and beautiful. Odysseus seemed seduced by her and repelled by her at one and the same time.

**MB.** Yes. With Circe, Odysseus goes into the world of the witch. And he goes into the darkness of himself.

**CC.** And from that darkness, the darkness of the year with Circe, as depicted in Book 10 of Homer’s poem, Odysseus is sent into the darkness of Hades, as in Book 11?

**MB.** Yes, but I had to make changes from Book 11. The episode in the poem where Odysseus meets his mother is moving, but we did not have time to include that, nor did we include Teiresias, Agamemnon, Achilles and so on. We have a company of only 11 dancers. And you can’t do everything in terms of plot lines. But we had Odysseus go into Hades and there they show him his wife and his son and ask him ‘Are you ready to go home?’ Throughout his travels he has been hanging out with the immortals – Calypso, Circe, the Sirens. But he has grown and he finally understands himself. He chooses mortality. He chooses to go home.

**CC.** The scene where Odysseus arrives home in your production was thrilling with the axes being set up and the arrow from Odysseus’ bow flying directly through them. Great stagecraft! But there was a bigger shock when Penelope (Hannah Kidd) finally recognised

this Odysseus. Instead of running to him and throwing her arms around him, as in Homer, she greeted him with a knife to his throat.

**MB.** Yes she does. But the production ends with them just managing to touch hands. It's ambiguous because this is certainly not a 'happy ever after' situation. It is much more 'Can we go forward from this? How are we going to go forward from it?' And that's the question of the gods at the end.

**CC.** That's a dark ending. There are some strong moments of humour in this production, but you are quite dark, aren't you?

**MB.** I don't mean to be. If you deal with subject matter like this, if you go for the truth of it, it is dark, but then life is dark. But that doesn't mean that life isn't beautiful and wonderful. And I'm not a really down or depressive person at all. I think people think I live in a hole or something, but I really don't. I go for the heart of things and there is savagery and tenderness in the darkness. But there is light within it. And that's life isn't it?

**CC.** Yes, it is.

**MB.** So to me it's not darkness. It's reality.

**CC.** Yes. The reality of the human struggle. Mark, it has been a privilege to talk to you about your production, a work of astonishing visual and aural power, in which the stunning artistry and passion of your dancers fully convey the epic journey of Homer's Odysseus as seen through your own bold, unique and deeply poetic imagination. Thank you very much for talking to me today.

### **AWARDS**

**Hannah Kidd (Penelope) was nominated for the Outstanding Female Performance Award by the Critics' Circle at the 17<sup>th</sup> Dance Awards, 2016**

**Eleanor Duval (Circe) was included in the Top Ten Best Dance List of 2016 by Luke Jennings who is the resident Dance Critic of The Observer**