

The Odyssey behind “Epic: The Musical”



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The concept album that breathes new life into a piece of literature from the ancients.

Greek mythology has had a bit of a resurgence in popular culture over the past few years. From Madeline Miller’s *Song of Achilles* to Disney’s adaptation of Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson*, it seems we can’t escape these ancient tales. However, out of all modes of adaptation for such epics, a musical adaptation is perhaps the most unexpected of them all.

Epic: The Musical is a concept album created, written and produced by Jorge Rivera-Herrans. It depicts the story of the mythological hero Odysseus, as he attempts to journey home to his wife and son. His journey is thwarted by ruthless and mystical powers, which force Odysseus to grapple with his own morality. It is a loose adaptation of Homer's *The Odyssey*.

As someone who loves Greek mythology, it is lovely to see an adaptation of *The Odyssey*. It often feels like it's overshadowed by the popularity of *The Iliad*.

The Odyssey, despite its strange elements, is at its core about a man trying to return to his wife and son. It's a story that seems fresh to even a modern audience. It's a pleasure to see *The Odyssey* get the recognition through this new adaptation.

Epic started as a passion project that Rivera-Herrans cultivated from his college dorm room back in 2019. He was heavily influenced by music and storytelling methods used in both video games and anime.

In January 2021, he began posting snippets of early drafts of the musical's songs on TikTok (@jorgeherrans). Alongside these snippets, he would post updates on his writing process, his storytelling choices, and deep dives into his choices behind the instrumentation of *Epic*.

Rivera-Herrans enthusiasm for this project shone through many of these videos, as well as a playfulness when it came to the more meme-able moments of this adaptation.

On 19th March 2022, Jorge Rivera-Herrans had the opportunity of holding a seminar on *Epic* at the Goodspeed Festival of New Musicals. It was livestreamed on TikTok via Rivera-Herrans' account.

It was announced at this seminar that the musical would be released over time in chapters, or sagas as he called them, as opposed to all at once. He also announced that he would be releasing the first saga, *The Troy Saga*, later in the year.

Soon after this, Rivera-Herrans began holding auditions over TikTok for certain notable characters in the musical. The final version of the musical was completed in August 2022. *The Troy Saga* was released in December 2022.

The fully sung-through musical consists of nine sagas. Currently, seven of the nine sagas have been released. Rivera-Herrans celebrates the release of each saga with a livestream on his YouTube channel (@JayHerrans), alongside revealing animatics by various content creators that he had commissioned.

Over the last few years, *Epic's* fanbase has steadily grown. The musical has brought together people from various online spaces, from animators and actors to musicians and writers. I believe this is due to the genuine passion and enthusiasm everyone involved in this project has.

Rivera-Herrans has highlighted that his main goal with *Epic* is simply to have fun with his fellow cast members and producers. His TikTok page is filled with numerous videos of him and the cast members acting out scenes and goofing around during production. There is a sincere sense of enjoyment in the behind-the-scenes of the production, which seems rather infectious judging by the wider online community.

The concept album so far is hauntingly brilliant. It feels like a seamless, intricate weave of ideas, all delivered by poignant and impactful voices. It does not shy away from the bloodier aspects of its source material. It fleshes out the more stoic parts of Homer's epic poem, drawing on themes of humanity and monstrosity.

Despite these changes, the musical remains faithful to the heart of *The Odyssey* as well as the ancient culture it draws from. Unlike many adaptations of Greek stories, *Epic* does not remove the supernatural and divine elements of *The Odyssey*, but instead places them front and centre of the story.

The most recent saga to be released is *The Wisdom Saga*, which introduces us to Odysseus's son, Telemachus, and Ithaca, the kingdom that Odysseus left behind. This saga, and the previous six, are available wherever you listen to music.

Epic is just a concept album for now, meaning that it won't be performed at any of your local theatres just yet. For now, we'll have to settle for listening to the songs in the privacy of our homes, and dream of the potential it has for when it is finally staged.