

KEYNOTE: Ben Haggarty and Steph Brittain

Myth Lab presents: On Twists and Turns: Prasangs from the Odyssey in storytelling performance.

Prasangs (Sanskrit) Complete episodes within a larger epic

Epic: Where the Gods and Humans work with or against each other

King Odysseus' return home is a 10-year journey beleaguered with the twists and turns of fate. He is repeatedly blown off course and repeatedly brought down to earth. Transformations happen quickly and his cunning and creative deception are no longer trusty companions. He is forced to submit to forces greater than himself and when at last he touches the release and relief of return, balance is not fully restored, and he knows he is fated to leave again. And what of those he leaves, loses and returns to?

Attributed to Homer and thought to have been composed in the 7th or 8th century BCE the Odyssey is one of the most ancient and well-known epics in Greek literature. However, in the early twentieth century, instead of construing the *Odyssey* as a conventionally authored work, Milman Parry portrayed it as the product of a generations-long process of composition in performance by epic singers. These epic singers, often accompanied by the lyre, sang, shared and recomposed the poems that became the Odyssey in each performance.

Performance storytelling is the oral retelling of traditional tales and mirrors the experience of these epic singers. The words and the composition are not tied to the written word and are free and spontaneous. Ben Haggarty writes:

'Oral language is born of the body and its experiences remembered in the flesh; it is called into form and vibrant sound in the living moment. The absence of a fixed text allows improvisation, and the possibility of fresh insight to enter the telling of the story. Consequently, in storytelling, stories are rarely told in exactly the same way twice.' (Haggarty, 2005, 2)

Join us as we flesh out and weave together wild and rich Prasangs of the Odyssey Epic into a bold and embodied performance. Expect twists and turns, trickstering and transformations on a journey of flaws, fate and humility. Through these stories we explore, as did those epic singers who preceded Homer, what it is to be human. During the storytelling performance, the teller and the audience will travel together and, collectively, we will meet images and symbols that we recognise and that reflect the community of humanity... all will begin through the ritual agreement to step into the world of story and imagination. When we return and step back into the here and now something in us will be transformed.

Ben Haggarty has been a performance storyteller working in frontline community arts and on international stages for more than four decades. He is the founder and Artistic Director of the Crick Crack Club. Ben is a world-class performance storyteller and much sought after teacher, whose work delights and subverts audiences across the English-speaking world. Ben has performed in venues ranging from caves to the Carnegie Hall and has been commissioned by the likes of the Barbican, the British Museum, the ENO, the National Gallery, the Unicorn Theatre & the Guardian Hay Festival. He is the official storyteller for Yo Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble, devising shows for audiences of up to 10,000 people.

Steph Brittain is a storyteller and drama and movement therapist. Steph Brittain's love for storytelling developed whilst studying Kathak dance in Paris and Delhi and it continued to grow during her MA in Drama and Movement therapy. She is passionate about the vital role she feels

that orality and traditional tales can have in our expression of the universalness of humanity and community.

Both Ben and Steph are members of the epic storytelling ensemble, Pandvani 108.