


**EDINBURGH
INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL**

Mythos: A Trilogy

Gods. Heroes. Men.

Written and performed by
Stephen Fry

Shaw Festival / Tim Carroll

European Premiere

Please ensure that all mobile phones and electronic
devices are switched off, or put on silent.

19 August **Gods** 7.30pm
20 August **Heroes** 2.30pm
20 August **Men** 7.30pm
24 August **Gods** 1.30pm
25 August **Heroes** 2.30pm
25 August **Men** 7.30pm

FESTIVAL THEATRE

The performance lasts
approximately 2 hours 30
minutes with one interval

Mythos: A Trilogy

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Stephen Fry was born in London in 1957 and educated at Stout's Hill, Uppingham and Queens' College, Cambridge. At Cambridge he joined the Footlights where he first met Hugh Laurie. He has numerous television appearances to his credit, most notably *A Bit of Fry and Laurie*, *Jeeves and Wooster*, *Blackadder* and *QI*, and is a regular contributor to radio shows including *Just a Minute*, *I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue* and *The News Quiz*. Major film roles include Peter in *Peter's Friends* (1990) and Oscar Wilde in *Wilde* (1997).

He is the author of the best-selling novels *The Liar*, *The Hippopotamus*, *Making History* and *The Stars' Tennis Balls*, as well as the highly acclaimed autobiography *Moab is my Washpot* and, in 2005, a well-received guide to writing poetry, *The Ode Less Travelled*. The second and third instalments of his autobiography, *The Fry Chronicles* and *More Fool Me*, were both bestsellers. His most recent books are the bestselling *Mythos* and *Heroes* – unique retellings of the Greek myths.

Director

Set Designer

Lighting Designer

Projections Designer

Original Music

Tim Carroll

Douglas Paraschuk

Kevin Lamotte

Nick Bottomley

Paul Sportelli

Foreword

I was lucky enough to pick up a book called *Tales from Ancient Greece* when I was quite small. It was love at first meeting. Much as I went on to enjoy myths and legends from other cultures and peoples, there was something about these Greek stories that lit me up inside. The energy, humour, passion, particularity and believable detail of their world held me enthralled from the very first. I hope they will do the same for you. Perhaps you already know some of the myths told this evening, but I especially welcome those who may never have encountered the characters and stories of Greek myth before. You don't need to know anything to enjoy these shows; it starts with an empty universe. Certainly no 'classical education' is called for, no knowledge of the difference between nectar and nymphs, satyrs and centaurs or the Fates and the Furies is required. There is absolutely nothing academic or intellectual about Greek mythology; it is addictive, entertaining, approachable and astonishingly human.

But where did they come from, these myths of ancient Greece? In the tangle of human history we may be able to pull on a single Greek thread and follow it back, but by picking out only one civilization and its stories we might be thought of as taking liberties with the true source of universal myth. Early human beings the world over wondered at the sources of power that fuelled

volcanoes, thunderstorms, tidal waves and earthquakes. They celebrated and venerated the rhythm of the seasons, the procession of heavenly bodies in the night sky and the daily miracle of the sunrise. They questioned how it might all have started. The collective unconscious of many civilizations has told stories of angry gods, dying and renewing gods, fertility goddesses, deities, demons and spirits of fire, earth and water.

Of course the Greeks were not the only people to weave a tapestry of legends and lore out of the puzzling fabric of existence. The gods of Greece, if we are archaeological and paleoanthropological about it all, can be traced back to the sky fathers, moon goddesses and demons of the 'fertile crescent' of Mesopotamia – today's Iraq, Syria and Turkey. The Babylonians, Sumerians, Akkadians and other civilizations there, which first flourished far earlier than the Greeks, had their creation stories and folk myths which, like the languages that expressed them, could find ancestry in India and thence westwards back to prehistory, Africa and the birth of our species.

But whenever we tell any story we have to snip the narrative string somewhere in order to make a starting point. It is easy to do this with Greek mythology because it has survived with a detail, richness, life and colour that distinguish it from other mythologies. It was

captured and preserved by the very first poets and has come down to us in an unbroken line from almost the beginning of writing to the present day. While Greek myths have much in common with Chinese, Iranian, Indian, Maya, African, Russian, Native American, Hebrew and Norse myths, they are uniquely – as the writer and mythographer Edith Hamilton put it – ‘the creation of great poets’. The Greeks were the first people to make coherent narratives, a literature even, of their gods, monsters and heroes.

The arc of the Greek myths follows the rise of mankind, our battle to free ourselves from the interference of the gods – their abuse, their meddling, their tyranny over human life and civilization. Greeks did not grovel before their gods. They were aware of their vain need to be supplicated and venerated, but they believed men were their equal. Their myths understand that whoever created this baffling world, with its cruelties, wonders, caprices, beauties, madness and injustice, must themselves have been cruel, wonderful, capricious, beautiful, mad and unjust. The Greeks created gods that were in their image: warlike but creative, wise but ferocious, loving but jealous, tender but brutal, compassionate but vengeful.

Mythos begins at the beginning, but it does not end at the end. Had I included heroes like Oedipus, Perseus, Theseus, Jason and Herakles and the details of the Trojan War these shows would have been longer than even Penelope could patiently endure. Moreover, I am only concerned with telling the stories, not with explaining them or investigating the human truths and psychological insights that may lie behind them. The myths are fascinating enough in all their disturbing, surprising, romantic, comic, tragic, violent and enchanting detail to stand on their own as stories. If, as you watch, you cannot help wondering what inspired the Greeks to invent a world so rich and elaborate in character and incident, and you find yourself pondering the deep truths that the myths embody – well, that is certainly part of the pleasure.

And pleasure is what immersing yourself in the world of Greek myth is all about.

Stephen Fry

This introduction is an edited extract from *Mythos: The Greek Myths Retold*, first published in 2017 by Michael Joseph, an imprint of Penguin Books
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