

## An Odyssey encompassed

By IFAN PAYNE

"THIS is the story of a man..." sang Homer.

In Rex Doyle's brilliant new adaptation of the great saga Odysseus lived again — through Compass Theatre Company's production of *The Odyssey*, at St Donats Arts Centre on Thursday evening.

As Homer's rosy-fingered dawn broke over the auditorium, four men and two women in drab tracksuit trousers and sleeveless T-shirts with only half-a-dozen bamboo poles on an otherwise empty stage, became sailors and armies and gods and giants and goddesses and Odysseus, Telemachos, Athene and Penelope as they created a full-blooded, intensely physical theatre of the imagination in the retelling of Odysseus's return from Troy.

Using a stylised form of

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presentation that had in it elements of Mummings Theatre, comedia d'el arte, Japanese matsurigoto, mime and contemporary dance, the six actors conveyed an immediacy of experience which lurched effectively between terror and laughter.

On the one hand the audiences' stomachs were set squirming at the butchery of limbs being hacked by imaginary swords while, on the other hand, the actors beguiled the ear and filled the air with the audible shimmering of the Siren's enticing song.

Nick Chadwin, Julian Gartside, Dave Rees, Julia Office, Robin Welsh and, most strikingly of all, Mary Bullen, conveyed

with virtuosity and relish the brutality of the Cyclops, the bestial excesses of the suitors and the soul-chilling, tormented spirits in the kingdom of the dead.

From freeze-frame mime to the eroticism of writhing bodies, the production was strong stuff for weak hearts but was also an affirmation of the

power of the theatrical spirit to transcend the bounds of time, place and the bare stage.

● Following the Yehudi Menuhin School Pupils, on April 27, the St Donats Art Centre will present Roy Harper on May 4 and the contemporary dance of Lisa Kraus and Stephanie Skura, on May 7.