

GREEKS ALIVE!

A Collection of Greek Myths
For Young Audiences

by

Judy Matetzschk-Campbell
with
Katherine Gee Perrone

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Greeks Alive! was first produced by Pollyanna Theatre Company in Austin TX at the Long Center for the Performing Arts' Rollins Studio Theatre in January 2010. The subsequent touring production was altered to remove the King Erysichthon story, which was later replaced with the myth of Narcissus. The original cast and crew were as follows:

<u>SUITOR, PSYCHE, MIDAS, NARRATOR:</u>	Michelle Keffer
<u>TREE, NYMPH, SISTER, MARIGOLD, GREED, NARRATOR:</u>	Bethany Harbaugh
<u>KING ERYSICHTHON, SISTER, ZEUS, ECHO BARTHOLOMI, GREED, NARRATOR:</u>	Julie Linnard
<u>MINA, EROS, SUITOR, VISITOR, NARRATOR:</u>	David Meissner
<u>KING, COOK, CROWD OF SUBJECTS, SUITOR, APHRODITE, GREED, NARRATOR:</u>	Jason Marlett
<u>NARCISSUS (touring production):</u>	Toby Minor
<u>DIRECTOR:</u>	Judy Matetzschk-Campbell
<u>STAGE MANAGER:</u>	Andrew Perry
<u>SCENIC DESIGNER:</u>	Ia Ensterä
<u>COSTUME DESIGNER:</u>	Ia Ensterä
<u>LIGHTING DESIGNER:</u>	Don Day
<u>SOUND DESIGNER:</u>	Peter Blackwell

Cast of Characters

<u>NARRATORS:</u>	Alternating story tellers
<u>CROWD OF SUBJECTS:</u>	People of the kingdom
<u>KING ERYSIKTHON:</u>	A very hungry King
<u>COOK:</u>	Works in kitchen of KING ERYSIKTHON
<u>MINA:</u>	Daughter of KING ERYSIKTHON
<u>TREE NYMPH:</u>	A magical being that lives in a sacred tree
<u>PSYCHE:</u>	A beautiful princess, youngest child of KING
<u>EROS:</u>	God and archer, son of APHRODITE
<u>KING:</u>	Father of PSYCHE & her SISTERS
<u>PSYCHE'S SISTERS:</u>	Older siblings of PSYCHE, daughters of KING
<u>SUITORS:</u>	Guys who gawk at pretty princesses
<u>APHRODITE:</u>	Goddess of Love, mother of EROS
<u>ZEUS:</u>	Most powerful of the Gods
<u>NARCISSUS:</u>	A very handsome boy
<u>ECHO:</u>	A cursed mountain nymph
<u>MIDAS:</u>	A wealthy King, father to MARIGOLD
<u>MARIGOLD:</u>	Playful Daughter of MIDAS
<u>BARTHOLOMI:</u>	Servant of MIDAS
<u>GREED:</u>	A spirit or feeling
<u>VISITOR:</u>	A powerful spirit who can grant wishes

Greeks Alive! can be performed by as few as five actors, each playing numerous roles. The NARRATOR lines are intended to be divided and spoken by any available actor throughout the show.

Any characters may also be portrayed using puppet versions in addition to the live actors. Cross gender casting is also highly encouraged.

Any of the individual four stories may be cut from a production for time or preference.

For the Midas myth, GREED may be two or three actors moving and acting in unison, speaking both individually at times and together as one voice at others.

Scene

Various kingdoms and locations

Time

The ancient past

SETTING: An empty stage that can transform instantly to many locations.

AT RISE: The ensemble of actors enters and alternate lines as NARRATORS.

NARRATOR

Humankind has always had the need to understand their world and how human beings fit into the universe. Humans are naturally curious and have always questioned the world they see around them. Why are things the way they are? How did life come to be? What causes humans to behave as we behave? The Greeks created a large system of stories that helped them understand the answers to these questions and helped them teach valuable lessons to their children. This system is known as mythology. Some of you may already know that these Greek stories contain powerful characters that the Greeks considered to be supernatural and capable of influencing life on Earth. These characters are the many Gods of the Greeks. You will see some of these characters, these mythic Greek Gods in our stories today. You will also notice that human characters in our stories often being hardship upon themselves by making bad choices. Through these stories the Greeks attempted to remind themselves and to teach their children moral lessons about proper human behavior and values. This is the case in our first story, The Hungry King.

(Group leaves the stage except one NARRATOR. The active NARRATOR will enter the action of the story in character when needed and then step back out of the action to keep the story moving forward. This is Story Theatre style... Pleasant and sunny music beings to play. This is a plentiful and peaceful kingdom, and it sounds like it.)

It is springtime in Thessaly. The land is bursting with grain. The trees are heavy with fruit.

(TREE enters.)

Olives and grapes ripen on the vine. A huge crowd has gathered for a feast.

(A CROWD OF SUBJECTS enter.
This may be a single actor
wearing a cutout of many
people with their face
showing, speaking for the
"crowd".)

NARRATOR (Cont.)

A birthday celebration greater than any the land has ever
seen. The subjects await expectantly the appearance of...

(Fanfare music plays and
KING ERYSICHTHON appears.)

Their King!

CROWD OF SUBJECTS

Hail King! Happy Birthday, your worship!

NARRATOR

Erysiichthon by name, a king so proud of his fertile
kingdom...

KING ERYSICHTHON

I am so proud of my fertile kingdom.

NARRATOR

So in love with the fruits of his rolling lands...

KING ERYSICHTHON

I am so in love with the fruits of my rolling lands.

NARRATOR

That his passion finally consumed him. A feast is given for
his daughter, the lovely and talented Mina, on the occasion
of her birthday.

(A feast table is brought
in. MINA appears as the
CROWD OF SUBJECTS wish her
happy birthday, adlib as
they exit.)

MINA

Papa, it is too much. The table groans under the weight of
the feast. I groan to think of eating it.

KING ERYSICHTHON

There can never be too much! In this fertile kingdom, too much is just enough! Where is the traditional birthday stew?

NARRATOR

The cook approached the King in fear.

COOK

My liege, my lord, my emperor, indeed. There is just one small problem with the stew.

KING ERYSICHTHON

What!?!?

COOK

It is cold. But it isn't my fault. You see, to roast a dozen cows...

(We hear mooing.)

To grill a hundred pigs...

(We hear oinking.)

To bake a thousand chickens...

(We hear clucking.)

As you, your highness, ordered, I had to use every piece of wood in the entire kingdom.

MINA

Every piece of wood in the entire Kingdom?

COOK

That is what I said, every piece of wood in the entire kingdom. There is none left to heat the stew.

KING ERYSICHTHON

There is no wood? Preposterous! I see a grove of trees right there.

(KING ERYSICHTHON points to the tree.)

COOK

But that is the sacred grove of the nymphs! Each tree is inhabited by the spirit of a goddess! It is forbidden for us to cut those trees.

KING ERYSIKTHON

Nonsense! Wood is wood is wood is wood. We'll not have cold birthday stew! Bring me my ax!

MINA

Not the ax!

KING ERYSIKTHON

Yes, bring my ax!

(COOK exits and returns
with ax and scampers away
to take cover.)

NARRATOR

So the king went to the sacred grove where the nymphs lived inside the trees. He brought with him a great battle ax.

KING ERYSIKTHON

Stand back! We'll soon have wood enough for a hundred birthday stews.

COOK

Please, great emperor, you must not do this. These trees contain the spirits of goddesses!

KING ERYSIKTHON

A cook tells the emperor what to do?! Be gone! You are banished from this kingdom. Cook for yourself in lonely exile.

(COOK exits very sadly.)

MINA

Please, Father, he is right. We don't need more food for the feast. There is enough.

KING ERYSIKTHON

There is never enough!

NARRATOR

The king began to swing his mighty ax!

(*Thwak! As KING
ERYSIKTHON swings, all
actors on stage make the
*thwaking sound together.)

And where his mighty ax bit into the tree...

(*Thwak!)

NARRATOR (Cont.)

The bark began...

(*Thwak!)

To bleed!

(*Thwak!)

Everyone cried for the king to stop.

MINA

Stop!

(*Thwak! CROWD OF SUBJECTS
reenters.)

CROWD OF SUBJECTS

Stop, please! King, stop! You will bring hardship upon us
all!

(*Thwak!)

NARRATOR

But he would not!

(*Thwak!)

The King laughed.

(He does so. *Thwak!)

His ax flew...

(*Thwak, thwak, thwak!)

The spirit of the tree cried...

(The TREE NYMPH cries.)

But the king would not stop

(*Thwak!)

The great tree crashed to its side. The spirit of the tree
fled to Mount Olympus but before she left, she spoke a
powerful curse.

TREE NYMPH

You have felled my tree for your cookfire. Now the fire of
your hunger will burn forever. Though you should eat a
feast, you shall never be full and satisfied again.

(TREE NYMPH exits.)

KING ERYSICHTHON

Silly gods. Hmmm... Nothing like chopping wood to give a
man an appetite. I'm starving all of a sudden. Let the
feast begin!

NARRATOR

And so it did. All day long the King ate and drank and ate and drank. Pounds of meat and gallons of wine.

(KING ERYSIKTHON gobbles obscene amounts of food as MINA watches in disgust.)

KING ERYSIKTHON

Cows just aren't as filling as they used to be. I am still hungry and there is just never enough. Let us feast again tomorrow!

NARRATOR

The great feast lasted a month. But the Nymph's curse was strong, and nothing could satisfy the king's hunger.

KING ERYSIKTHON

(continuing to gobble)

More, more! There is never enough. Never enough!

NARRATOR

The King emptied his entire treasury to pay for the food, until all was spent. He traded his throne for a turkey...

(We hear a gobble.)

His crown for a fatted calf...

(We hear a calf moo.)

Finally, the castle was completely empty.

(The table tray of food is removed and KING

ERYSIKTHON is handed a large scroll that says "Acme Bill Collection Agency".)

The King had nothing left but his daughter Mina.

(MINA enters followed by the CROWD OF SUBJECTS.)

CROWD OF SUBJECTS

Will he eat his daughter?!

NARRATOR

Not being a cannibal, of course, the King decided to sell his daughter to the highest bidder.

SUITOR

(entering)

Your former highness, I will offer you a bushel of hams for your daughter. She will make a lovely wife.

(MINA cries and the CROWD OF SUBJECTS grumbles in sympathy. KING ERSICHTON looks at MINA for a moment before he speaks.)

KING ERSICHTON

Smoked hams you say? Smoked hams... Deal! There is never enough!

(KING ERSICHTON exits, leaving MINA and the SUITOR together.)

SUITOR

I shall make us a fine camp, for tonight is our wedding night. How about a little kiss?

MINA

(pushing SUITOR away)

Blech! Never! No, never!

SUITOR

I paid for you in full. We shall see!

(SUITOR exits, leaving MINA on stage alone. Very sad music plays.)

MINA

(praying)

Are you there, Apollo? It's me, Mina. Please hear my prayer. I did nothing to deserve such a fate. Sold. A slave- A wife without love- for a bushel of hams. Please Apollo, give me some way to escape.

NARRATOR

And the god heard her prayer. He granted her the power to transform from a lovely girl...

(MINA transforms.)

Into a bearded man!

SUITOR

(returning)

Honey, I'm... wait a minute... You're not Mina... Have you seen a lovely girl hereabouts?

MINA

(as bearded man)

There has been no one in this spot but me!

SUITOR

But... She has run off. Come back snugglemuffin!

(SUITOR exits.)

MINA

Father, Father, I'm back!

(KING ERYSIKTHON enters.)

KING ERYSIKTHON

Too late, sir. I've already sold my daughter. But if you have a spare chicken on you, I would be forever grateful. I am starving!

MINA

No, father, it is me. It is Mina. Watch what power Apollo has granted me.

(transforms back into
beautiful girl)

I am free! I am free!

KING ERYSIKTHON

Yes! Yes! You are free to be sold again and again! This is a marvelous gift that Apollo has given to me! I can feed my hunger for as long as your beauty lasts. This is marvelous!

MINA

No! Father, I will not be sold again! I refuse. I will not be used to feed your greed. You cannot chop me down like a tree to feed your fire. I am gone!

(MINA exits quickly.)

NARRATOR

So the old king is left alone with his hunger and his insatiable need. His stomach growls without end. His stomach cramps and his greed calls to him.

(We hear his name coming from the ensemble members back stage, "Erysichthon... Erysichthon... King... King..." etc. Tragic music begins to play under these voices and continues until the end of the story.)

NARRATOR (Cont.)

But his castle is empty, barren. He is alone. No crowd of subjects to do his bidding. No cook to prepare a feast. No feast to prepare. In his greed and gluttony, he begins to feed. He swallows now... HIMSELF! Until finally, even he is gone.

(We hear a burp.)

His hunger has eaten itself.

(A shift to new story.)

Myths often involve human royalty- kings, queens, and their children- and tell of their interaction with the whole system of Greek gods. Curiously, the stories often explain human nature by attributing their origin to supernatural action. This next story is the story about the children of royalty, both earthly and supernatural princes and princesses. This is just a portion of a very long myth about the marriage between a human princess named Psyche and the Mythic prince Eros, the son of the Greek Goddess Aphrodite. Through this myth the Greeks were able to teach each other about the dangers of jealousy and curiosity. Watch how this myth teaches some very valuable everyday lessons through these extraordinary characters.

(The ensemble leaves a single NARRATOR on stage to start the next story.)

Long ago, in Greece, there lived a king who had three daughters. It was thought that the charms of the two eldest...

(Elder SISTERS enter.)

...great as they were, could yet be worthily celebrated with words of praise.

SUITORS

(from off stage)

Aren't those girls charming? Aren't they cute?

NARRATOR

But the youngest daughter...

(PSYCHE enters.)

NARRATOR (Cont.)

...was so strangely and wonderfully fair that words could not begin to describe her beauty.

SUITORS

(from offstage)

You are so strangely and wonderfully fair that words cannot describe it!

(SISTERS fume and stomp off while PSYCHE is bashfully grateful.)

NARRATOR

A multitude of strangers were drawn to the kingdom in eager crowds to see the young girl. Her name was Psyche.

(SUITORS enter.)

SUITOR 1

Oh, Psyche, we have never seen anyone so beautiful!

SUITOR 2

You just take the cake!!

SUITOR 1

Why even Aphrodite herself, a Goddess, cannot hold a candle to you!

(Bashful PSYCHE exits and the SUITORS follow her.)

NARRATOR

While all of this was true, one can just imagine how Aphrodite, the Goddess of all that is beauty and love, felt about having this earthly rival.

(APHRODITE enters, pacing and very angry.)

APHRODITE

I hate having this earthly rival! There must be a way to get rid of her. I have to think... I know what I will do.

(calling for her son)

Eros! Eros! Come here quickly!

(aside to audience)

APHRODITE (Cont.)

My son, the archer, will take care of this problem for me!
Eros, where are you? I need your powerful help. Quickly!

(APHRODITE exits.)

NARRATOR

Now, you must remember Psyche had no idea that Aphrodite was jealous of her beauty. You would think that she would have been happy to have all of this attention from the young men of the Kingdom, but even in a crowd Psyche was lonely. Being so lovely can be so lonely.

(PSYCHE enters. While PSYCHE speaks, the SUITORS return and enact what she is saying.)

PSYCHE

While it is nice to have so much attention, I am afraid I will be a terrible old maid! All the young men of my Father's kingdom love to come to the castle to look at me, but once they have declared how beautiful I am...

SUITOR 1

You are soooooo beautiful.

PSYCHE

...they are at a loss for words.

SUITOR 2

I am at a complete loss for words!

PSYCHE

They seem afraid to speak with me. My beauty leaves them feeling inferior.

SUITOR 1

I am so inferior.

PSYCHE

It is as if I wouldn't find them interesting, as if they aren't good enough.

SUITORS 1 & 2

We aren't good enough!

(The SUITORS exit.)

See what I mean? Being so lovely can be so lonely.

(PSYCHE exits very sadly.
Her Father the KING enters,
seeing her distress.)

KING

What should I do? My Psyche is so sad. One so lovely should not be so lonely. Even Aphrodite herself, the Goddess of all that is beauty and love, cannot hold a candle to my youngest daughter. Psyche is the most lovely girl ever born. But what the Gods have given with one hand- outrageous beauty- they have taken back with the other- her happiness! But after all, the Gods are in control.

(pause to think)

That's it! I will call forth Zeus, the most powerful of all of the Gods, and ask for his advice and help.

(KING kneels. Powerful,
ominous music begins to
play, music worthy of ZEUS
himself.)

Zeus, Greatest among the Gods, Zeus, come forth!

ZEUS

You called me forth to consult my Godly wisdom!

KING

It is my daughter! Please, oh Zeus, you must do something. She is so lonely.

ZEUS

I will deliver an oracle about your beautiful Psyche, but you may not like what it holds for your family.

KING

But speak it anyway, oh great Zeus. I must hear what you have to say. My poor daughter cannot go on this way.

ZEUS

Alright. I warned you. Here is what must happen. On some high cliff, oh King, set forth the maiden Psyche. In all the pomp of a funeral, in funeral robes arrayed, she must

ZEUS (Cont.)

jump off the cliff to find her mate! That is what it will take to end her loneliness. Take her there today!

KING

No!!!! Not that!!! Ask my beautiful Psyche to jump off a cliff? What if there is no one to save her? How would she survive?

ZEUS

I warned you not to asks for my advice! One way or the other, this plan will end her loneliness. Either she will meet her groom or she will meet her death and doom.

(Both exit in opposite directions.)

NARRATOR

Being a faithful man, the King set about to do as Zeus had commanded. Meanwhile, the jealous Aphrodite had finally found her powerful son, Eros the Archer, and was hatching a plan to see Psyche dead.

(APHRODITE and EROS enter.)

APHRODITE

So that is the plan, my son. Follow Psyche wherever she may go. Wait for a moment when she is alone and use your arrows to end this earthly rivalry, once and for all. Take careful aim and do not fail me.

EROS

Yes, Mother. I will never fail you! I will search her out and find her. And using my sharpest arrows, I will see that soon no one alive will be your rival.

NARRATOR

The commands of heaven must be obeyed, and the unhappy Psyche must go to meet either her groom or her doom.

(A funeral dirge begins to play.)

It was a sad day, indeed.

(PSYCHE appears on the edge of the cliff.)

PSYCHE

This is a sad day indeed.

NARRATOR

Psyche was taken to the cliff to throw her incredibly beautiful self down onto the rocks below.

PSYCHE

Hello? Is anyone there?

NARRATOR

It seemed like Zeus's suggestion that an unearthly husband was not going to materialize to save her.

PSYCHE

Again, I am alone.

NARRATOR

She stood at the top of the cliff and paused, looking down in tears. Just then...

(EROS enters)

Eros found her, reached for one of his arrows, and began to pull back his bow. But at the last moment, he could not let it fly. Psyche was so beautiful, Eros started to cry.

EROS

She is so beautiful!

NARRATOR

It seems that, like all mortals who had ever seen Psyche, he too fell deeply in love with her and could not kill the object of his love!

EROS

I cannot kill the object of my love! Although my mother, the great and powerful Aphrodite, will never approve, I must have Psyche to be my wife!

PSYCHE

One... Two...

EROS

(realizing PSYCHE is about
to throw herself off the
cliff)

Psyche, what are you doing!?

PSYCHE

Three!

(PSYCHE jumps off the cliff and EROS catches her in his arms, sweeping her away off stage.)

NARRATOR

And with that, Eros took the unconscious Psyche to a beautiful house he created for her. He is a God, remember. He can build houses with magic in the blink of an eye.

(EROS and PSYCHE reenter.)

He placed the sleeping beauty to rest on a golden bed of dreams.

EROS

(watching her sleep)

You are more beautiful than anyone could explain. But if my mother finds out what I've done, there will be the wrath of a Goddess to pay... I know! I will use my powers to be invisible when I am with you. Not even you, my lovely, can see who has saved you to be your husband. You will know that you have a husband who loves and cherishes you, but you cannot know who that husband is.

(He puts on a mask/cloak which makes him invisible.)

By day I will be away from our home working for my mother, Aphrodite, as usual. She will not suspect a thing. But by night I will be here with Psyche, invisible from her eye. We will both be safe from Mother's wrath!

(EROS exits and PSYCHE wakes. Music indicates that time is passing.)

PSYCHE

What a nice house.

NARRATOR

So that is exactly what happened. Time passed and the couple was very happy. Day in and day out Eros woke in the morning, left for work, and returned by evening. Psyche spent her days in her beautiful new home.

PSYCHE

I love my beautiful home!