

King of Shadow, King of Shades by Clare Lauren Kelly

There is a musical that I have loved for some time since I first heard the music some years ago, the soundtrack is varied with the upbeat rhythms, softer melodies, sounds that make you feel like dancing and ones that make you feel like crying, along with some songs that just hit me in ways I can't fully explain, partially because the lyrics feel so true or real to me. A musical that takes Greek mythology and turns it into a more modern tale that while it is sad and a cautionary tale, the musical turns it into something that most might not be able to resist dancing along to for certain songs. *Hadestown*, written by Anaïs Mitchell. And a small note, since this is going to be a longer essay, I am splitting it into two parts.

I was lucky enough to somewhat recently get to see a traveling cast of the show perform it live and I loved getting to see it come to life on stage, hear the music and feel the energy around me, and it was one of the better memories and moments from this year. But now, I had the opportunity to go with a friend of mine who also really loves the show, to see a recorded version of it in theaters of the original Broadway cast, something both of us were extremely excited for. It is not all that often that I get to have a moment where I talk with someone about something we are both extremely passionate about, and it felt really good to get to share that experience with someone who appreciated the show and music as much as I did. When we got out after it had finished, we both immediately went to find somewhere to sit so we could just talk about the show, performers, music and more.

Now the both of us really enjoy the role and music that Hades has in the musical, and something that we both agree on is that if the actor playing Hades does not feel right for the role then it can be harder to enjoy the show as a whole. Both of us agree that for the Hades to be a good one, it's not just the presence that he needs to have, the big thing for us was him having a deep singing and speaking voice like the original actor for Hades, Patrick Page does. So us getting to see the live recording of Patrick Page as Hades was just amazing because getting to see him perform and hear him sing was amazing. And this performance was a bit different because Patrick Page actually was injured before this show, he suffered a full rupture of his Achilles tendon in his left foot and was unable to perform as Hades in the shows in London other than the

one where they were recording the live-capture pro-shot, and he worked with with the director and the creative team to adapt his staging and costume to be able to still perform.

Patrick Page performed as Hades with limited mobility, wearing a stylized medical boot as well as using a cane that added to his costume even if it was mainly meant to be support for him when moving. No matter what the main purpose of it was, the cane looked awesome and I feel like it really fit the character and added quite a lot to the performance. He would hold the cane in his right hand and lean on it while moving or standing, using it to point at people, and when he needed both hands the silver handle that was curved like a hook and appeared to have the head of a dog on the end, possibly in reference to Cerberus, would be hooked over his left arm and hang there till he needed to move again.

There was also a part of a song where the way Patrick Page was moving, the emotion in his face and his body language combined with how he was holding the cane, where I thought that he literally looked like he was about to take a swing at another character with his cane. It put me on edge and I found myself getting even more into the moment because it felt so real to me, it wasn't hard to believe in that moment that Hades was really angry and might lash out with his cane. I've always enjoyed the little details, accessories and other things like that in shows and films, and all the different bits of costumes, accessories, props and other little details added a lot to the performance, not just for Hades, but for nearly all the characters.

The way they worked the medical boot into his costume and added the cane as well was interesting, and I feel like it actually added a good deal to his character in a way that the other versions or previous performances didn't have. With the limits to what Mr. Page could do, limits to how he could move in a boot that angled his foot a bit, it added a sort of grace and predatory feel to the way he moved about the stage, the way he stood was deliberate and it worked well for the character, with the cane just adding more on top of it all. If anything, I feel like he was more intimidating in the boot with how it made him stand, the way he moved gracefully, and how he seemed to loom over the people he was interacting with or moving around.

Watching the pro-shot felt so different from the show I saw live, not just because of the actors being different or one being live and the other in a movie theatre, and a big part of it was in the way Patrick Page was moving about the stage. The way he was playing Hades as a very

careful and deliberate man, as someone who was tired, broken, a bit run down yet still very predatory, very intelligent and intuitive. This Hades was not someone to be underestimated in any way, because he may have seemed a bit more run down, but Hades is still the King of Hadestown and shows just how clever and enticing he can be, spinning webs with his honeyed words. Also, the fact that Patrick Page still danced in the song where he dances with Persephone truly surprised me, he did so well and it looked smooth and natural, not awkward or stilted and I am amazed at his dedication and ability to adapt.

Now for this little essay I want to focus more on the music, the lyrics that Hades is singing because I feel like his parts of the songs usually hit me the hardest, and it isn't just because of his deep sultry voice that feels like it is worming its way in through my ears and seeping into my soul. It is what he is saying that really hits and stays with me, the opinions that Hades seems to have and the way he looks at life, at interactions, deals, the people that he interacts with and how he thinks you need to behave in order to get and keep what you want. Before I really get into the songs though, I want to say that Hades isn't the only character that I love in the show, there are some of the other roles I enjoy when the ones playing them do it well and feel right for that character.

The Three Fates are always a highlight for me, I like that they are the voice in the back of everyone's mind, and they have some truly wonderful songs that are catchy which I always enjoy. "When the Chips are Down" is one of the best songs of the show in my opinion, and the short but very deep "Word to the Wise" is one that I always really like to listen to. When played well the Fates also feel very sassy to me, which just makes it even more fun to watch with the added bonus of the three of them singing their parts together, moving in sync, and the harmonizing that happens which is always a treat.

Two other characters I enjoy are Hermes and Persephone, one because in a way they are the narrator of the whole show and are the one guiding us along through the story, while the other is at some points a sort of comic relief character. There are times when they are making fun of others and trying to bring joy in the moment, mainly for themselves because they are bored, but as the audience you feel included. The original Hermes, played by André De Shields, and Persephone, played by Amber Grey, were done so well by their actors and I found myself

pulled into the story more than I expected. I was also laughing my ass off when Persephone was playing around. Or when she was just being a bit over the top to get laughs, but then when Persephone became more serious, Amber Grey was able to switch so well from acting one way to acting another that it felt natural to me, like it was something she had done before. Never thought I'd say this, and my friend is the one who brought it up first and I fully agree with her, but Amber Grey is really good at acting drunk.

On to the music. Now I'm not going to go through the whole plot of the musical, so if you have not seen it and are not familiar with the story of Orpheus and Eurydice and Hades and Persephone, this might not make complete sense to you, so I do recommend learning more about the musical is about before reading the rest of this. And for the most part I am only going to be going through the songs that Hades sings, and the lines that are sung by him, so even if I love so many lines by other characters, for this I am only focusing on Hades.

Starting with the first song that Hades has more than only a few words in, "Chant" continues the story down in Hadestown, Persephone is discontent about the conditions there, and she and Hades fight which shows the audience their state of marital conflict. In the meantime, in the world above as winter rages the rift between Orpheus and Eurydice grows as Orpheus gives his full attention to writing his song while Eurydice struggles to find food and firewood for the both of them while a storm threatens them any everything in the world above. This is the first real glimpse that we as the audience get, not only at the state of things between Hades and Persephone, but at Hades himself from his own point of view, from his words, his thoughts, and not the things others say about him.

This is also where we get an idea of just how lonely Hades is. I don't believe the first thing we hear Hades say in the show is a coincidence. During the song "Way Down Hadestown" the audience hears Hades speak for the first time and his line is very simple, when Persephone tells him that he is early, Hades replies with a small smile saying simply, "I missed ya." (Anaïs Mitchell) And in the song "Chant" Hades literally admits to being lonely when replying to Persephone. "Lover, you were gone so long/Lover, I was lonesome." (Mitchell) Hades is missing his wife, he is lonely, and he is attempting to hold the loneliness at bay, trying to be productive, and at times it felt to me like Hades is trying to make Hadestown as close to the surface during

summer as he can. Even though Hades knows and understands why Persephone can't stay with him year round, there is still some part of him that believes if he can make Hadestown into a place Persephone wants to be, a place she enjoys, a place that she won't want to leave when it's time for summer again each year.

The thing about the loneliness Hades feels, is that it has been building for a long time and he also doesn't fully let it control him and does not succumb to it, Hades does what he can to keep himself busy with contracts, managing Hadestown, keeping things running and making sure the shades in Hadestown are working on the wall, in the mines and more. In the song "Chant" Persephone is commenting on the changes she notices in Hadestown, things that weren't there before she left when it was time for summer to start again, and Hades proudly responds with the things he has added and built. "So I built a foundry/In the ground beneath your feet/Here I fashioned things of steel/Oil drums and automobiles." (Mitchell) Later on in his second verse, Hades continues telling Persephone about what he has been doing in Hadestown since she left as a result of her having been gone so long, as a result of him being lonesome. "So I laid a power grid/In the ground on which you stood/And wasn't it electrifying/What I made the neon shine?/Silver screen, cathode ray/Brighter than the light of day." (Mitchell)

Hades is trying to make Hadestown more appealing to Persephone, like I said in a paragraph above I feel like there is a part of him that is trying to recreate the world above down in Hadestown with the hope that his wife will stay with him. "Then I kept that furnace fed/With the fossils of the dead/Lover when you feel that fire/Think of it as my desire/Think of it as my desire for you!" (Mitchell) Then in his second verse, it changes tone slightly. "Lover when you see that glare/Think of it as my despair/Think of it as my despair for you!" (Mitchell) Near the end of the song in the third verse Hades sings, it takes another emotional tone change as what Persephone has just said seems to have felt like a rebuke to him, he has put in work to try and make Hadestown into a place she would be happy to stay in, a place where she would happily stay with him, but that is not what Persephone sees when looking around Hadestown. "Every year, it's getting worse/Hadestown, hell on Earth!/Did you think I'd be impressed/With this neon necropolis?" (Mitchell) Persephone then continues to try and talk with Hades, to ask him what he has become and say that she no longer recognizes him anymore.

To this Hades replies that everything he does, “I do it for the love of you.” (Mitchell) And after what Persephone said, after how it might seem like she rebuked him and the effort he had been putting in to try and keep her with him so he wasn’t lonely anymore, Hades is becoming more and more bitter, more lonely and not as able to keep that at bay. “If you don’t even want my love/I’ll give it to someone who does/Someone grateful for her fate/Someone who appreciates/ The comforts of a gilded cage/And doesn’t try to fly away.” (Mitchell) Hades is trying to provide all the things that the women he loves could possibly want, but it isn’t working so Hades pivots a little, I guess maybe he thought he just needed to try and make Persephone jealous and that it might bring her back to him. Not fully sure if that was what he might have been thinking, but in my mind I guess I think of it as Hades is lonely and his wife has pulled away from him even during the months she is with him in Hadestown. Then when she is in the world up above she is partying, living it up on top, while Hades is alone down in Hadestown with only his workers. What Hades wants is someone that will stay with him, someone that will appreciate the things he provides and what he makes for them, the security and more that he has to offer. “Someone who could love these walls/That hold her close and keep her safe/And think of them as my embrace.” (Mitchell)

Here is where the first part will end, and hopefully if you have enjoyed my thoughts and analysis so far you will move on to the continuation where I will focus on the last few songs as well as my favorite of the songs Hades sings will be.