

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



Persae

by Van Badham

EXTRACT

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Persae

Van Badham,

after *The Persians* by Aeschylus

Characters:

ATOSSA, *the mother of the President of the United States*

HERO, *a veteran of the Gulf War*

HERO 2, *Hero, but in his previous incarnation, before mutilation*

MELANIE HOWARD, *daughter of Empire*

Chorus Leaders:

Security Aide

Female Journalist

Sergeant

Spokesperson

NBC journalist

Male journalist

Expert

Chorus Characters:

Journalists

Media/Security Advisers

Soldiers

Muslim Women

Party Apparatchiks, in Suits

Emergency services workers, in white

Incidentals

Broadcast Producer

Kid with a Guitar

Scene:

The lawn of the White House, an impromptu NBC studio on that lawn

Kirkuk, Iraq

The ballroom of the Sheraton-Wentworth, Sydney, after a bomb blast

For Feargus Manning: most loyal comrade, tender friend.

Prologue

Darkness.

A videoscreen suddenly EXPLODES with a soundtrack as vicious as Blink-182's Dammit! BLARING over the audio. The video projects images of gunships, fighter-planes, tanks, bombing, animated maps of territory, US, British and Australian military events, Presidents, Prime Ministers and parliaments, the desert lands of the Middle East and images of the full might of the US and Coalition military machine. The images flick faster and faster and faster. The CHORUS invades the stage; journalists from the American, British and Australian news networks preparing for a broadcast – they are about to go live. They speak the following in a round (overlaps are indicated by '/'). Their voices are the strangely stressed speeches of television journalists in the differing accents of American, Australian and British newspeak. It is a horrific cacophony - as meaningful/less as the rapidly accelerating images of the screen. Welcome to the short-attention-span news.

CHORUS: At the head of a mighty host gathered from the innumerable nations of America's allies, / the youthful and impetuous President of the United States, has gone forth to defeat the forces of terrorism and especially to take vengeance / upon the oil rich dictatorship at whose hands his father suffered a... victory in 1991. Those closest / to the President are closely monitoring his present visit to the Coalition troops in Iraq / as rumours continue to circulate that support for increased military intervention is falling amongst crucial / international backers of the invasion. These regents, appointed by the President on his departure / disturbed by the absence and availability of intelligence reports from their armies, convene to take counsel in solemn session following the fortunes of their absent lord.

Note: In the following exchange "Chorus in Unison" signifies an attribution for more than one voice, but all or some at directorial discretion.

CHORUS MEMBER: *(stepping forward)* For all the men-at-arms, they that sail urge on steeds, and mach along the plain, have left the city and gone forth

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CHORUS-IN-UNISON: - gone forth -

CHORUS MEMBER: Gone forth like bees in a storm -

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: With the chief captain at the host –

CHORUS MEMBER: Making personal visits to injured service personnel on morale-boosting visits to hospitals and care facilities -

CHORUS MEMBER: The President got down and dirty with Coalition troops aiding reconstruction of this ruined pipeline -

CHORUS MEMBER: Making himself available to American troops -

CHORUS MEMBER: - British squaddies -

CHORUS MEMBER: - Aussie diggers -

CHORUS MEMBER: - And they too that dwell by sacred Tmolus pledge themselves "to cast the yoke of slavery" upon enemies of freedom.

CHORUS MEMBER: Joined by Marmons! / Rwanda, Slovakia, Ukraine!

CHORUS MEMBER: Tharybians! / Latvia, Lithuania and the Marshall Islands!

CHORUS MEMBER: / Babylonians! / Poland, Eritrea and El Salvador!

CHORUS MEMBER: / And Mysians! / Mongolia, Turkey and Palau!

CHORUS MEMBER: / Italy! Uzbekistan! Iceland! Georgia, Denmark and Micronesia!

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: Forty-eight countries are publicly committed to the Coalition.

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: Hurlers of the javelin, the spear, the mighty lance.
Golden warriors, bright flowers of our thousand nations, they of the
tank and gun, the airship, the rocket launcher, the smart-bomb, the
daisy-cutter, the aircraft-carrier, the anti-aircraft towers of the
battleship -!

CHORUS MEMBER: Amazed to meet their leader in person, as these pictures show.

CHORUS MEMBER: Like bees in a storm.

CHORUS MEMBER: The armament deals destruction to cities. The impetuous lord
of the Willing drives his wondrous warrior-flock against the whole
earth in swarms upon land, in air, on sea, resting his confidence in his
stalwart and stern commanders -

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: Many of who are veterans of the first Gulf War.

CHORUS MEMBER: His eyes glint like a Texan cowboy's, attended by a posse of
quick-witted, fighting men -

CHORUS MEMBER: - and the gun-totin' girls of the forces of freedom!

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: Many raised on the farms of his own home state.

CHORUS MEMBER: He leadeth against a people themselves renowned for sacrifice
and bravery, demonstrated over decades of nation-wrenching conflict.

CHORUS MEMBER: But there are none so proved in prowess that make stand
against this mighty, mighty tide.

CHORUS MEMBER: This flood.

CHORUS MEMBER: Terrible in battle.

CHORUS MEMBER: An unmatched weapons superiority ensures that strong
barriers stem the billows of resistance.

CHORUS MEMBER: These tiny waves.

CHORUS MEMBER: Piddles.

CHORUS MEMBER: The host of these Willing nations is not to be withstood -

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: - and valiant are the hearts of our liberal democratic states!

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: When sea whitens to foam beneath the tempest of our fleets, we trust to cables and devices -

CHORUS-IN-UNISON: And our god is our technology!

CHORUS MEMBER: Like bees in a storm.

CHORUS: Meanwhile, the President's mom, the former first lady will herself convene a special ceremony on the White House lawn, commemorating the heroes of the War Against Terrorism serving in Iraq. This is (Candy Dalloway/Herbert Zwicky/Agatha Teasdale/Bae-Joo O'Halloran/Peter Station/Brian Evans/Helen Badger/Ryan Kingston/Katie Toad) live in Washington for (NBC/CNN/BBC World/Fox News/Ten News/ITV/CBS/ABC News/Seven Nightly News).

Scene 1:

The White House lawn. A breeze blows across the screen. The sound of a helicopter taking off overpowers the soundtrack as ATOSSA enters with a chorus of suited security advisers and "media/security advisers" (spin doctors), who hand her briefing papers.

MEDIA/SECURITY ADVISER: "Behold this our band, called the Trusty Council of the Persians, who have departed to the lands of Hellas - warders of the royal abode, rich in plenteous store of gold whom Xerxes, our King, Darius' princely son, did himself select, by virtue of our rank and years, to be the guardians of his realm."

ATOSSA: Do we really need the fucking helicopters?

MEDIA/SECURITY ADVISERS: Yes.

ATOSSA: *(to the quoting adviser)* You're overeducated.

MEDIA/SECURITY ADVISER: You are the venerable mother of our President, the most exalted of our deep-girdled dames. You were consort of a President, and are like a President yourself. To you, I make obeisance, and the helicopters guard from snipers, grenade-launchers, and enemies of the state.

ATOSSA: And for this I've quitted comfort and Kennebunkport. What do you expect of me?

MEDIA/SECURITY ADVISER: We shall take our station on the lawn and devise some sage and deeply pondered counsel.

A MEDIA/SECURITY ADVISER produces a photo.

MEDIA/SECURITY ADVISER: He's a veteran. Unmarried. The scion of a simple house -