



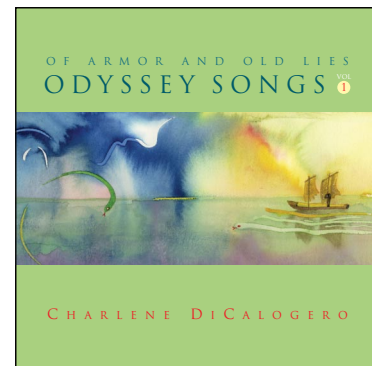
# CHARLENE DICALOGERO

**Charlene DiCalogero** doesn't look like a Homeric bard. The puckish singer-songwriter, a veteran of the folk and coffee house scene, seems thoroughly contemporary — not the person you would expect to give voice to the gods, monsters, and storm-tossed heroes of ancient Greece. But as Homer knew well, appearances can be deceiving. In seven original songs on her debut release, ***Of Armor And Old Lies: Odyssey Songs Volume I***, Charlene takes the familiar tales of Odysseus' ten-year journey home from the Trojan War — the subject of countless adventure films and the bane of many a glassy-eyed college freshman — and recrafts them as compellingly sensuous pop-folk songs.

"The idea to do a cycle of songs based on The Odyssey just dropped on me one cold December night," says Charlene. "I had just gotten through a long, devastating breakup, and was kind of drifting on a raft, emotionally. I couldn't sleep and the song "Dangerous Eyes" — which I had written years before — came into my head. That song was inspired by Odysseus, and I started thinking about his story and how it resonated with me on a very personal level: the smart and determined hero who still manages to trip himself up, the long search for home and a beloved companion, the inner monsters turned into visible ones. Suddenly I saw the whole story transformed into songs that I knew I could write."

This personal frame of reference is the secret strength of *Odyssey Songs*. Unlike such recent takes on The Odyssey as the Coen brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, Charlene's goal is not simply to be clever. In the same way that Homer collected stories that were already very old, and retold them in a way that his Bronze Age audiences could relate to, she uses Homer's tale as a sort of skewed mirror, to look deep into the yearnings and contradictions of the modern psyche.

Thus a song like the opening "Dangerous Eyes," is not only about Odysseus sizing up the dangers he faces and the choices that have brought him there, but also a portrait of anyone addicted to risk and doomed relationships. A lament of Odysseus' weary crew, "And If I Ever (Roll Through the Foam)," is also a timely examination of survivor's guilt, and the terrible price we all pay for our leaders' ambition. The ballad "Release Yourself," with its haunting image of a woman "wedded to phantoms" resonates achingly with the unrelenting parade of loss and grief in our daily news.



But the album is not all sorrow. One of its great joys is the way that Charlene restores music to Homer. "The Odyssey was never meant to be read silently," she says. "It was meant to be sung. Names like 'Ithaca' and 'Penelope' are musical words. They always were. It's just that most of us don't think of them that way any more." And the songs go beyond the usual singer-songwriter territory into a wide range of musical styles and inventive vocal arrangements, such as the rocking "Sacrifice," where she adds a humorous bite to the heart and understanding that run through these songs.

Carried by Charlene's smooth alto voice, these words float in a dusky blend of acoustic guitars, piano, sax and backup vocals — a timeless sound with just enough electric guitar to have one foot firmly in the 21st Century.

In this way Charlene — Homeric bard and contemporary songsmith — straddles centuries and worlds.

