

PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404
612-872-5108
FAX 612-874-8119

Jason and the Argonauts

By
Toby Hulse

Jason and the Argonauts was first presented by Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, UK, in 2017

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This adaptation is written for a cast of seven, with suggested doubling as follows:

Actor One (M)	Jason
Actor Two (M)	Orpheus, Chiron, Cyzicus
Actor Three (M)	Heracles, Phineus, Aeetes
Actor Four (F)	Zetes
Actor Five (F)	Atalanta, Hera
Actor Six (F)	Caeneus, Medea
Actor Seven (M/F)	Argus, Guard

*The **Ensemble** play Refugees, Talos, Amycus, Dryads, the people of the Doliones, Harpies, Sirens, fire-breathing Oxen and the Skeleton Army.*

JASON'S STORY

A refugee camp at the border to lolcus.

A crush of refugees all trying to pass through the gates and enter the country.

Jason at security.

Guard And you were born in lolcus?

Jason But brought up overseas.

Beat.

I am Jason, son of Aeson. My uncle is...

Guard Yes?

Jason King Pelias of lolcus. Your king.

Guard Really? You're the nephew of the king?

Jason Yes. Now let me through the border.

Guard And you've got the papers to prove that? Birth certificate? Identity card? Passport? Authorised letters of recommendation?

Jason You know that I have no papers.

Guard Then, 'Jason, son of Aeson', we aren't going to let you through, are we? We can't have just anybody turning up at our borders and demanding asylum, can we? We'd be opening our gates to a swarm of migrants.

Beat.

Jason I have a story.

Guard You've all got a story. Look around you – thousands of people, thousands of stories. Is yours different? Is it a true story? A sob story? Will it break my heart?

Jason I was told to tell it to you, and that you would understand. You have been waiting for me.

Guard Really?

Jason Yes, I am the Man with One Sandal.

*We are suddenly in the world of **Jason's** story.*

[To us.] I was born in Iolcus, but I was raised far away, on the rocky slopes of Mount Pelion. My guardian and teacher was the centaur Chiron, half man, half horse, a misfit in a world of misfits.

We see, on the slopes of Mount Pelion, all those in training to be heroes.

We were all children who did not know our parents. Chiron was training us to be something more than ordinary.

Chiron You will learn to fight with the skill and strength of Ares, to shoot an arrow as straight and as true as Artemis, to run and swim so far and fast that only Hermes can catch you. I will train you to rival the Olympians themselves. My children, when a world casts you out, you must become stronger than that world. You are the last of the old breed. You are the strongest men and women that Earth has bred, and you will be the strongest heroes against the strongest enemies.

Jason *[To us.]* The heroes on Mount Pelion were my family now, but I knew that these harsh rocky slopes were not my home. This was not my country. I needed to be where I belonged.

*[To **Chiron.**]* Where am I from?

Chiron You will learn when the time is right.

Jason *[To us.]* And then, on the morning of my eighteenth birthday, Chiron led me to the very top of Mount Pelion.

Chiron Look at the sea that glitters far below us. There's nothing but the sea. It connects us, and it keeps us apart. It is everywhere and nowhere. That sea is your dearest friend and your fiercest enemy. It will bring you the greatest joy and the deepest grief. It leads to life and to death also. That sea is your destiny. Now look further, beyond the sea. Do you see that column of smoke rising on the horizon?

Jason *[To us.]* The smoke was rising thick and black into the clear, blue sky. It was coming from a distant city in a faraway land. And there, on the beaches that led to the gates of the city, were hundreds of makeshift tents, and people, so many people.

Chiron That is the city of Iolcus. The smoke comes from the funeral pyre of the true king, Aeson.

Jason *[To Chiron.]* And the tents? And all those people?

Chiron Refugees, outcasts, those who seek a home in Iolcus, somewhere safe from the troubles of their own lands.

Jason Why are they living on the beach?

Chiron The city does not want them. The people are frightened of them.

Jason Why?

Chiron They are strange, different. People are scared of what they do not know and understand.

Jason Why are you showing me this?

Chiron That city is your home. Aeson was your father. You are now the true King of Iolcus.

Jason Why was I raised here?

Chiron Your uncle Pelias has ruled Iolcus in his brother's place for many years. At the moment of your birth, to keep you safe, the goddess Hera brought you to me, to raise you, to train you and, when the time was right, to reveal your destiny to you. Jason, you must return to Iolcus and reclaim the throne. Do this for your father, and for all those who are in need, cast out, different, far from a place that they can call home.

Jason *[To us.]* I left Mount Pelion that very day. It was not long before I came to a river. An old woman was waiting at the bank.

Old Woman Will you help me?

Jason *[To the Old Woman.]* Of course. I will carry you across.

Old Woman Thank you. It is your destiny to help those in need.

Jason What do you know of my destiny?

Old Woman None of us are who others imagine us to be.

*The **Old Woman** climbs on to **Jason's** back. They begin to cross the river.*

Jason You are heavier than I thought. Heavier indeed than any human I have ever carried.

Old Woman It is a good thing then that you are one of Chiron's heroes.

Jason How do you know that?

Old Woman I know more than you could possibly imagine. Jason.

Jason You know my name, too!

Old Woman Indeed I do. Watch out for the stones here. Be sure not to stumble.

Jason I will be fine.

Old Woman They are slippery.

Jason I tell you, I will be fine.

Old Woman Many have fallen.

Jason And I will not!

***Jason** stumbles, but does not fall. In the process he loses one of his sandals.*

My sandal! I have lost one of my sandals.

Old Woman I warned you. You must learn to heed the warnings of others if you are to fulfil your destiny and become the King of Iolcus.

Jason I ask you again, what do you know of my destiny?

Old Woman And I tell you again, none of us are who others imagine us to be.

*They have reached the other side. **Jason** helps the **Old Woman** down.*

Jason Who are you then?

*The **Old Woman** is transformed into **Hera**.*

Hera I am Hera, wife of Zeus, your protector. I have come to start you on the long and dangerous journey that lies ahead. You would do well to listen to me.

Jason I will.

His sandal bobs rises to the top of the water.

My sandal! Look.

Hera Leave it.

Jason It is within my reach.

Hera Leave it.

Jason I can't journey to Iolcus with only one sandal.

Hera I tell you to leave it!

He does so. The sandal sinks again beneath the water.

Jason I have left it. Why?

Hera You dare to question me?

Jason No, I...

Hera Travel to Iolcus as the Man with One Sandal, and when you reach the city gates, tell them this story. They are waiting for you.

We are back at the refugee camp.

Guard You claim to be the Man with One Sandal? Don't move.

*The **Guard** passes the information about who is at the gates through a labyrinth of bureaucracy. Eventually he returns.*

Come with me.

*He takes **Jason** into an interrogation cell.*

So, you say you're the rightful King of Iolcus?

Jason Yes.

Guard I've got a little test for you. Just a few questions that I have to go through.

Jason Really?

Guard Yes, it's... er... a kingship test. Let's just imagine, hypothetically, that you are the King of Iolcus, and it's been prophesied that one day a man wearing only one sandal, a hero, would turn up to chuck you off the throne, what would you do? Hypothetically, of course.

Jason I would want him to prove his identity to start with. Anyone could turn up wearing just one sandal.

Guard Correct. Well done. Now, how would you do that? Hypothetically, of course.

Jason I would set him a task.

Guard Please expand on your previous answer.

Jason A quest of some sort.

Guard Correct. What sort of a quest?

Jason It would have to be a very dangerous quest, one that only a true hero could complete.

Guard Can you give me an example?

Jason Oh, I don't know, travelling to Colchis, and bringing back the Golden Fleece of Phrixus.

Guard Why the Golden Fleece?

Jason The Fleece is the ultimate symbol of kingship. And it is guarded by a dragon that never sleeps.

Guard An excellent suggestion. Well done, you have passed the test.

Jason Then I can pass into the city?

Guard No. First you have to fetch the Golden Fleece of Phrixus, and bring it back here.

Jason What? I have just passed the test.

Guard I know. Bureaucracy, it's a nightmare. But you need to prove your identity.

Jason Colchis is many miles from here across the sea. I will need a boat.

Guard The beach is littered with them, rotten hulks, barely seaworthy.

Jason And a crew.

Guard Take any of the scum hanging around the camp. The more the merrier. Oh, but do us a favour and don't bother bringing them back.

Jason And when I do return –

Guard – if you do return –

Jason – you will let me, and my crew –

Guard – if they return –

Jason – and all those waiting desperately outside the gates into Iolcus?

Guard Whatever. None of you are coming back. Now, get out of here.

*The **Guard** shoves **Jason** out of the office, and back into the camp.*

***Jason** addresses the crowd.*

Jason Listen to me, all you who are outcast, and frightened, and seeking asylum. None of you are who others imagine you to be. When a world casts you out, you must become stronger than that world. You are heroes, true heroes. You have survived impossible odds to reach this camp, and, if you are brave enough to come with me and face the sea again, I will bring you to the end of your journey – a safe home! We go to Colchis, in search of the Golden Fleece. So who will join me? We have nothing to fear but fear itself!

An uneasy silence.

Argus You will need a ship if you are to get to Colchis.

Jason What is your name?

Argus Argus.

Jason Do you have a ship, Argus?

Argus The Argo.

Jason Is she fast?

Argus Fast enough for you, young man.

Jason I need to avoid any entanglements with the authorities.

Argus I have been bringing refugees across that sea all summer. I know how to avoid the authorities.

Jason Then we sail in the Argo.

Argus Passage comes at a price.

Jason I have nothing...

Argus Then you have no ship.

Jason ... but, when I return with the Golden Fleece, I will be the King of Iolcus. You will have your payment.

Argus I will have double my payment.

Jason Double your payment.

Argus Then you have a ship. But I am captain, and, on board my ship, what I say goes.

Jason And I choose my crew. *[To the crowd.]* We sail on the Argo. Who else will join me?

Orpheus *Orpheus steps out of the crowd.*

Orpheus I will.

Jason And you are?

Orpheus Orpheus.

Jason Orpheus?

Orpheus Yes.

Argus Can you fight? Or sail?

Jason He can sing. The music of Orpheus is so beautiful that it charms all living things. Rivers change their course, the trees bow down before him, the very rocks dance.

Argus And why would a singer wish to join a quest such as this? Surely he'd be better off scraping a living by singing love songs to the drunks in the local tavernas.

Orpheus I have reasons enough.

Jason As we all do.

Orpheus Take me, Jason. Please.

Argus No.

Jason *[To Argus.]* We take him. *[To Orpheus.]* Welcome to the crew, Orpheus.

Zetes steps out of the crowd.

Zetes And me.

Jason Who are you?

Zetes I am Zetes, the daughter of Aeolus, God of the Four Winds. I can bring us fair weather with the help of my father.

Jason *[To Argus.]* We take her.

Argus Half human, half god?

Zetes Yes.

Argus I don't like her sort. Half-breeds. She stays here.

Zetes begins to step back into the crowd.

Jason And I choose the crew. Zetes comes with us.

Argus A boy, a singer and a half-breed. What kind of crew is this?

Heracles steps out of the crowd.

Ah, Heracles, the strongest man on earth. A proper hero, at last.

Heracles You know me?

Argus Who doesn't know you, Heracles?

Heracles I wish it were not so.

Jason Welcome to the Argo, Heracles. Your strength will be invaluable.

Caeneus steps out of the crowd. There is an almost universal revulsion.

Argus Caeneus? No. In the name of the Gods, no.

Caeneus Please.

Argus Never. Look at you. Born a woman, changed into a man. What's wrong with you? What are you? Disgusting. Unnatural. That's what you are.

Caeneus I am different, that is all.

Argus You are not stepping one foot aboard the Argo.

Caeneus Jason?

Argus If that... thing... that freak... joins your crew, then you no longer have a ship.

Jason But –

Argus You have no choice.

Jason I am sorry, Caeneus.

Heracles The ship does not sail without Caeneus.

Argus What?

Heracles And if it does, it also sails without Heracles.

Jason We can't afford not to have Heracles with us.

Heracles It seems, Argus, that now you have no choice.

Jason Welcome aboard, Caeneus.

Argus But...

Heracles snarls at Argus, who quickly stops protesting.

Jason *[To us.]* And so the crew assembles – misfits, outcasts, refugees. But all of them special, all with their own unique qualities, qualities that would see us across the sea to Colchis, and to the Golden Fleece, the crew of the Argo, the Argonauts!

ATALANTA'S STORY

Atalanta *[To us.]* I am Atalanta. This is my story, the story of how I joined the crew of the Argo, and of the part that I played in the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece.

I had been swimming for three days. For the first two days I was pushing the small boat with my sisters in, desperately trying to get them to the camp at Iolcus. The boat was crowded, overladen, so that the sea constantly threatened to come over the gunwales and swamp us.

Sisters Stop moving at the front! Sit down or you'll have us all overboard!

Atalanta *[To us.]* My sisters were exhausted and wet, freezing cold by night, baked by the fierce, unrelenting rays of the sun by day. Fresh water was running out, and I knew that we did not have long, but it is better to face the dangers of the sea and the promise of a new home, than the nightmare that we had left behind us. Then we saw, in the distance, a patrol ship approaching, moving fast, filled with armed men. My sisters were too weak even to wave to them. Soon they were on us.

Patrol Turn away. Go back to where you came from. You are not wanted here.

Atalanta *[To us.]* A couple of arrows were fired as warning shots across the bows, but I knew that, as awful as these men were, they were our only hope. I turned our boat towards them and swam harder. I don't know what happened, but the next thing I remember is floating alone in the middle of the sea, no sign of land, the boat with my sisters in, gone. I struck out in the hope that I was heading towards Iolcus, when I saw a ship approaching through the waves...

It is the Argo.

Zetes *[From above.]* There's someone in the water.

Jason Steer for them.

Atalanta *[To us.]* They reached me just as my head was going under for the third time, and pulled me spluttering on to the deck.

On board the Argo.

Jason I am Jason. You are on board the Argo. This is the crew, the Argonauts.

Atalanta Thank you. You have saved my life.

Jason What were you doing so far out to sea?

Atalanta I need to get to Iolcus. Can you take me?

Jason We are heading away from Iolcus, bound for Colchis.

Atalanta Can you turn back?

Jason We will not go back to Iolcus until we return with the Golden Fleece.

Atalanta Please. I beg you.

Jason We cannot. I am sorry.

Atalanta But I think my sisters are there. I hope my sisters are there.

Argus Where are you from?

Atalanta I am from Arcadia.

Argus Arcadia is many miles away.

Atalanta Three days. Swimming.

Argus You swam from Arcadia to here?

Atalanta Pushing my sisters in a boat.

Argus That is not possible.

Atalanta Everything is possible when the need is great enough. It was the only way that we could escape our father.

Jason Who is your father?

Atalanta It is not safe for me to say.

Zetes We are all on the run from something. Outcasts. Trust us.

Atalanta looks at the crew.

Atalanta *[To Zetes.]* I trust you. My father is King Iasus of Arcadia, I am Atalanta, his oldest daughter. I have six sisters, but no brothers. My father does not want daughters, so when we were born we were left on the mountain side to die. But we are strong women. Each of us has survived. I was suckled by a she-bear, and then raised by hunters. The strength that I drank with my mother's milk runs strong within me. When our father discovered that we were still alive he imprisoned us, and tried to force us to marry hideous men we did not know. On the day of the wedding we ran. We were chased, but our childhood on the mountain side has made us swift and tireless. When we reached the coast we found a boat and set off, leaving our country behind us. We can never return.

Jason Now that you have shared your story, you must join the Argonauts. You are strong, and fast, and without fear. You swam for three days to save those you love. I need you as part of my crew.

Atalanta But I need to get back to my sisters.

Zetes Sometimes the best way back is to keep going forward. I try never to look back.

A terrifying metallic clanging.

Jason What is that? Zetes, to the mast head!

Zetes climbs to the top of the mast.

Zetes *[From above.]* We are approaching a narrow strait. A huge man of metal stands across it, barring our way.

Atalanta *[To us.]* This is Talos, who guards the sea approaches to Iolcus, a mechanical monster fashioned from brass. Talos has one job, and one job only, to stop outsiders, foreigners, from passing through the straits. The brass automaton towers over the water, hurling rocks with deadly accuracy at the ships that try to sail beneath its legs. One! Two! Great fountains of water plume into the sky, as enormous rocks land on our port and starboard sides. Talos has found his aim. The next rock will sink us for sure. But there is a weakness to everything, living or mechanical, a fatal flaw that will one day lead to our undoing. My eyes are keen from my years on the mountain side. Quickly I scan the monster for that

fatal flaw and there, there it is, a bolt on its heel, slightly rusting. A single arrow will dislodge that, for sure. But I only have one chance. I notch an arrow in my bow, swiftly take aim and loose. The arrow arcs through the air and hits the bolt, knocking it from its place. The ichor, the monster's vital fluid, runs out of him like molten lead. The monster crumples, and, with an almighty splash that lifts our ship high above the ocean and then pulls it back down again, it collapses into the water. We shoot through the straits on the towering wave of its destruction and are free, out on the open sea again.

Jason Atalanta, we need you. If promise to bring you back safely to Iolcus and your sisters, will you join the Argonauts.

Zetes joins Atalanta from the masthead.

Zetes Until then, you have a new sister.

Atalanta I will come with you.

Jason Welcome to the Argonauts.

Atalanta *[To us.]* And so I journeyed far from those I loved, with no idea of what further dangers lay ahead, with Zetes at my side.

HERACLES' AND CAENEUS' STORY