



ERIC POOR/Monadnock Ledger Staff

Sebastian Lockwood of Greenfield is a storyteller who performs classic epic stories like Homer's *Odyssey*. Here he performs in a recent appearance at the Mariposa Museum in Peterborough.

# A teller of classic epics

Greenfield man makes basic truths accessible, meaningful

By ERIC POOR

Monadnock Ledger Staff

GREENFIELD — For Sebastian Lockwood it's all about the telling. Lockwood, 56, is a master storyteller who specializes in classic epic tales like Homer's *Odyssey* and *Beowulf*.

"What I do is take difficult texts and make them accessible and meaningful," he says.

The reason these stories have endured is the truth they contain, he says. He loves to share those truths the way they were first presented — by the telling of them.

His most recent performance was the telling of Homer's *Odyssey* at the Mariposa Museum in Peterborough on July 31. His next scheduled performance is "Caesar, Cicero & Cato" at Club Passim in Harvard Square in Cambridge, Mass., on Sept. 1.

In between those performances he'll get married to his partner of the past seven years, jazz singer and composer Nanette Perrotte. They often work together on projects and they have created a company, Lumen Arts, together.

"We're true collaborators," he says.

A traveling bard for six years now, Lockwood has been a resident of Greenfield for the past three years. He and Perrotte bought a 1792 hip roof colonial and Perrotte created a music studio at one end of the house and Lockwood built his own studio at the other end, in the attached barn. He has a magnificent view of the backside of Crotched Mountain.

"I'm pretty much sitting in my dream," he says, sitting in his studio. "I dreamed this room and this view."

A Canadian by birth, Lockwood is a high school dropout who returned to college as an adult at age 23 and earned a bachelor's degree at Boston University and master's degrees in education and anthropology at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom. In Boston he drove a cab by day and attended classes at night.

When he's not telling stories, he's a teacher at several universities. For Lesley and Endicott he teaches creative arts and the use of poetry, visual arts and storytelling in the classroom. For the Boston Conservatory he teaches a course on visual anthropology.

Universities are also one of the venues for his storytelling. In early September he will perform *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and Homer's *Odyssey* on successive days at Clarkson University in New

## PROFILE



SEBASTIAN LOCKWOOD

York. In late September he will take Homer's *Odyssey* to Tufts University in Massachusetts.

At first too shy to express his love of storytelling, Lockwood worked to be a novelist and poet, writing three novels. "I stabbed my tongue with a pen for 30 years," he says.

But the effort was not in vain. He mastered the language, which is one of the basics of storytelling, he says.

"That's the magic that keeps your attention — the power of language," he says. Combine that ability "to carve sentences" and create and maintain rhythm with the energy of an audience and spirit of the story and the effect is mesmerizing, he says. "I'll put a spell on you."

He puts everything he has into the telling and the hour-long effort is exhausting, he says. "When I'm done, I'm completely done. I've used up every bit of energy I have. I can't talk the next day."

When he tells Homer's *Odyssey* it is also Lockwood's *Odyssey*. He continually re-establishes the rhythm of the story with phrases like "the rose-tipped fingers of dawn" and "the wine-dark sea," but he uses many of his own words to tell the story.

Sometimes he is surprised at his own words. In his telling of Homer's *Odyssey* at the Mariposa Museum, he used the current military slang phrase "suck it up" and afterward told the audience he didn't ever think he would hear himself using those words in the story.

He began getting serious about storytelling about 10 years ago. A friend, a Flamenco guitarist named Jose, was doing progressions on the guitar and Lockwood just started telling the *Odyssey*. It seemed natural. Flamenco guitar is basically a lament and the *Odyssey* is "a great lament," Lockwood says.

"The story just started flowing out of me," he says.

He returned to the text and studied the art of telling the story, which is how it was originally done. Lockwood has been a performing storyteller for six years and now he sees that as becoming his full-time occupation. "I'm totally in love with it," he says. "It's an honor and a privilege to tell these stories. A joy."

Telling them also makes him realize how great they are and why they have survived a couple mil-

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lenniums.

"Telling these stories makes me aware of just how incredibly brilliant they are," he says. "What Homer was able to do in the turn of phrase is so far beyond the abilities of the current geniuses of our literature."

The stories are within us all, Lockwood says. They are already hard-wired within.

"Every child has imagined a Cy-

clops that eats people."

So the great stories are like an inheritance and they come with a sense of truth and déjà vu.

"You're hearing something that you don't know that you know."

When he's not telling stories Lockwood enjoys playing guitar, gardening and practicing archery. He also enjoys songwriting and writes lyrics for Nanette.

Living with another artist makes life twice as exciting, he says.