

PHÈDRE: CASTING BREAKDOWN AND AUDITION SIDES v1.1

"What does it mean to fall in love with the wrong person? In a world where affairs of the heart are sometimes confused with affairs of the state. Where Gods, mysterious and implacable forces of nature, shape our destinies. And beautiful monsters wander through our dreams."

CASTING BREAKDOWN

ARICIA: orphan, rightful heir to the throne of Athens, descendant of Erectheus, last of the Pallante, imprisoned in Troezen at the behest of THESEUS, rebellious, intelligent, mischievous, charming, especially to HIPPOLYTUS, more perceptive than passionate, much less in thrall to VENUS than PHÈDRE, sworn antagonist of THESEUS, increasingly regal, female, playing age 20-30

Note: ARICIA and ISMÈNE will likely sing a song and dance playfully together accompanied by music at the beginning of Act 2

HIPPOLYTUS: son of THESEUS and ANTIOPE, an Amazonian, stepson of PHÈDRE, disputed heir to the throne of Athens, undisputed heir to the throne of Troezen, hunter, proud, somewhat unworldly, chaste, haughty, especially around females, yet utterly smitten by ARICIA, intensely loyal to THESEUS, seeming antagonist of PHÈDRE, though he is eventually revealed as the object of her infatuation, male, playing age 20-30

Note: HIPPOLYTUS and THÉRAMÈNE will likely have a choreographed fight with swords at the beginning of Act 1; a fight coordinator will lead on stage combat

Note: The actor playing HIPPOLYTUS will also play the MINOTAUR during a dream sequence with PHÈDRE at the beginning of Act 3

ISMÈNE: friend and confidante of ARICIA, loyal, playful, teasing, whimsical, rebellious, dances, worships VENUS, female, playing age 20-30

Note: ARICIA and ISMÈNE will likely sing a song and dance playfully together accompanied by music at the beginning of Act 2

MINOTAUR: monstrous offspring of PASIPHAË, mother of PHÈDRE, and a magnificent white bull, half-brother of PHÈDRE, penned in a Labyrinth, fed on human flesh, was eventually slain by THESEUS, returns in a dream sequence

Note: The actor playing HIPPOLYTUS will also play the MINOTAUR during a dream sequence with PHÈDRE at the beginning of Act 3

OENONE: nurse and confidante of PHÈDRE, devoted, intensely loyal to PHÈDRE, caring, calculating, complex, deceptive, expedient, schooled in the politics of the Court, Machiavellian, will likely harbour a dramatic secret, female, playing age 30-60

PANOPE: Court Official, advises both PHÈDRE and THESEUS, measured, professional, at times sardonic, and humorous, observing extraordinary events with disbelief, male/female, playing age 20-60

PHÈDRE: wife of THESEUS, stepmother of HIPPOLYTUS, Queen of Athens, daughter of Minos and Pasiphae, half-sister to the MINOTAUR, lonely, obsessive, frequently suicidal, self-pitying, intensely passionate yet terribly conflicted by her sense of duty, devoted to her children, victim of a neglectful philandering husband, suffers dream-like visions of love, hallucinations, possibly at the hand of VENUS, with whom she has a troubled and in some ways transcendent relationship, seeming antagonist of HIPPOLYTUS, her stepson, though he is eventually revealed as the object of her infatuation, female, playing age 30-50

THÉRAMÈNE: friend and confidante of HIPPOLYTUS, loyal, combative, wise, honourable, noble, worships VENUS and NEPTUNE, male, playing age 20-60

Note: HIPPOLYTUS and THÉRAMÈNE will likely have a choreographed fight with swords at the beginning of Act 1; a fight coordinator will lead on stage combat

Note: The actor playing THÉRAMÈNE will be the lead on a 'show within the show' with music and lights as he recounts the events leading to the savage death of HIPPOLYTUS; this 'show within the show' based on a 4-page speech given by THÉRAMÈNE, is a unique acting challenge, and will likely have the feel of opera

THESEUS: husband of PHÈDRE, father of HIPPOLYTUS, King of Athens, heroic, courageous, legendary adventurer, slayer of monsters, yet tyrannical, kidnapped his wife, neglectful of hearth and home, serial seducer, myopic, vengeful, worships NEPTUNE, eventually humbled, male, playing age 40-60

AUDITION SIDES

Actors do not have to be off book for auditions. We may audition actors together. Alternatively a member of the creative team will read for the other role. We recommend reading the play prior to audition.

Note that there are a few versions of the printed play where the page numbers are different

ARICIA: p68-69, p72-73

HIPPOLYTUS: p58-59, p68-69

ISMÈNE: p22-23

OENONE: p12-13

PANOPE: p74-75

PHÈDRE: p12-13, p42-43

THÉRAMÈNE: p8-9

THESEUS: p58-59, p72-73

Théramène

My lord, once love has picked its man
The gods cancel all his protestations.
Theseus, trying to seal Aricia
From the eyes of every man,
Opened yours.
Theseus' hatred for Aricia
Surprised in you the opposite emotion.
Aricia
Has become irresistible – to you.
But why shy from this passion?
If you feel it – embrace it.
Why forever tangle yourself, my lord,
In these timid scruples?
Hercules never hesitated.
No heart ever begrudged the touch of Venus.
You reject love
But where would Hippolytus be
If Antiope, your indomitable mother,
Had not nursed that flame for your father?
In any case,
This pride which has given you such a name,
What does it amount to?
Admit it, things have changed.
You are not seen much lately, my lord,
Unperturbed, untouched, untouchable,
Hurling along the sands in your chariot.
Or imitating the god of the ocean
Breaking a wild horse to amuse yourself.
And why are you heard so rarely these days
Scouring the woods with your hounds?
In your eye there's a new kind of fire –
Secretive, heavy, like an ailment.
You try to hide it. But it is killing you.
There is no hiding it. You are in love.
Is this Aricia?

Hippolytus

I am going. The King must be found.

Théramène

Will you see Phèdre before you leave?

Hippolytus

Since it is my duty I cannot avoid it.
But here comes Oenone. Something has happened.

Enter Oenone.

Oenone

My lord, I can't think how I can bear it.
The Queen is slipping away. She cannot last.
Day and night I watch her, but it's no use,
She is dying of some disease she hides from me.
Her soul is in turmoil. Her entire body
Is convulsed with anguish. She flings out of her bed
Desperate to see the day,
At the same time she orders me
To shut the whole world from her sight.
Her suffering frightens me. She is coming.

Hippolytus

And I am going. At the very least
I will spare her the sight of a face she hates.

Exeunt Hippolytus and Théramène. Enter Phèdre.

Phèdre

No further, Oenone. I stop here.
That last scrap of strength has left me suddenly.
The sun's light is too painful.
My wretched, trembling legs cannot support me.

Oenone

O you gods, look at her tears!

Oenone

Yes, let your rage blaze out. Curse that name!
I am glad to see you shudder at it.
Live. Renew yourself
With love, with duty. Live –
If only to prevent this sprig of a Scythian
From crushing your sons and all the noble blood
Of Greece, and the gods, under his arrogant throne.

Hurry!

Every moment takes a little life.
You have damaged your strength. You can repair it.
Your flame has burned low, but it burns.
It will grow if you will nourish it.

Phèdre

I have lived too guilty for too long.

Oenone

Guilty of what? What is all this remorse?
What crime could be so awful?
You never stained your hands in innocent blood.

Phèdre

I thank heaven, my hands are clean enough.
I wish to God my heart resembled them.

Oenone

I think you have plotted something dreadful –
Something so evil you have frightened yourself.
What is it?

Phèdre

I have said too much. Let us leave it.
Let me die before I do something worse.

Oenone

Then die – and take your monstrous secret with you.
But find somebody else to close your eyes.

Your flame may have shrunk to next to nothing
But mine will be out before it.
Among the thousand roads to the land of the dead
Mine will be the shortest and the quickest.
Madam, when did I ever betray your trust?
When you dropped from the womb my arms caught
you.

You know I gave up everything for you –
Country, children, everything. And now
You repay my loyalty with this.

Phèdre

What do you hope to gain by such anger?
If I were to say what I could say
You would be struck dumb.

Oenone

What could be worse than standing here
Helpless – watching you kill yourself.

Phèdre

When you know my crime, when you know
The fate that has broken me,
My death will be no lighter. But my guilt
Will be by that much heavier.

Oenone

Madam,
By all the tears I have shed throughout your life,
For your sake, let me know. What is it?

Phèdre

Very well.

Oenone

Open your heart. Let me hear it.

Phèdre

What can I tell her? Where can I begin?

He went with his friend Pirithous
Down into the underworld.
If it can be believed
He strolled along the banks of Hell's river
Letting the dead gaze at his living body.
Then found himself trapped in that black land
From which nothing emerges.
All Greece is buzzing with it.

Aricia

Can you believe that a man before his death
Would visit the land of the dead? Why should he?
What could be the attraction?

Ismène

The King is dead. Nobody doubts that.
Except you. Athens is in mourning.
Troezen confirms his death
By crowning Hippolytus.
Phèdre is frightened for her son.
She has summoned her anxious friends to advise her.

Aricia

You think Hippolytus will treat me kindlier
Than his father did? A longer chain?
Will he pity me, do you think?

Ismène

Madam, he will.

Aricia

Haven't you heard? Hippolytus is bronze –
Dangerous and hard, without feeling.
To think he will pity me
And exempt me alone
From the revulsion he feels for all our sex
Ignores the reality. Have you not noticed
The lengths he goes to – simply to avoid me?

How carefully he limits all his movements
To my absence?

Ismène

Of course I know what others say about him,
But I have also watched him in your presence.
That awesome, inflexible hauteur,
The very fame of it, as I observed him,
Doubled my curiosity. Madam,
What I had heard of him and what I saw
Were nothing like each other. Your first glance
Reduced him to total confusion.
I saw he could not take his eyes off you –
He tried to, but he could not. Those eyes, madam,
Were painful with longing – helpless longing.
The name of lover, perhaps, hurts his pride.
His words, maybe, protect his reputation.
But those eyes told everything.

Aricia

Ismène,
What you say you might have imagined
But I am famished for it, I devour it.
You know my life –
You know how Fate has used me,
Like the toy of a cruel child.
Whatever feeling I had
Was what could survive on grief,
Nourished only by tears.
What can I know about love?
What can I know about the follies,
The luxury, the anguish?
How could I possibly know it?
Among all Erechtheus' descendants
I am the last.
Of all my family, war spared only me.
The sword cut off our name.

Phèdre

In that case I need never fear a rival.
It is too late for this kind of discussion.
Serve my madness now, not my reason.
If his heart is walled up against me
We must find some other unguarded spot.
I noticed how the charms of kingship touched him.
Athens excited him. He could not hide it.
His ships were on the leash – ready to dash
Across the seas to pluck the Athenian crown.
Oenone, go now, work on him cleverly.
Dangle the crown until it dazzles him.
Let him understand – it can be his.
And tell him, Phèdre asks no other favour
Than to set that royal jewel on him.
I cede him all my power. I cannot defend it.
And he can teach my son how to command.
Perhaps be like a father to the boy.
I put both mother and son under his ward.
Go to any limit to persuade him.
Words from you will enter where mine cannot.
Be shameless, weep, groan, anything. Describe me
Close to death. Prostrate yourself. Implore him.
I grant you total licence. Oenone, quickly,
You are my only hope. I shall wait
Here till you return with my fate.

Exit Oenone.

You great goddess Venus, are you watching?
Are you happy
To see just how far I have fallen?
It is impossible
To humiliate me any further.
Your victory is complete. Your every stroke
Has gone home.
Goddess of pure remorseless cruelty,

If you still seek for fame
Choose a harder target.
Hippolytus mocks you. He laughs at your furies.
He never uttered one prayer at your altar.
Your very name offends him.
He waves it aside like some polluted fly.
Why not choose him?
He pours the same derision
On you as on me. Avenge yourself.
Make him love.

Enter Oenone.

Oenone, why are you back so quickly?
Wouldn't he listen? Is he still adamant?

Oenone

Madam,
Now you need your former fortitude.
Forget your great love: you can bury it.

Phèdre

What did he say?

Oenone

I could not find Hippolytus. Madam,
All those rumours, that seemed so credible,
That convinced everybody, have betrayed us.
Do you hear the roar of the people?
They are welcoming their King.
Theseus is coming from the harbour. Any moment
He will be here.

Phèdre

Theseus is alive?
Oenone, it's finished.
I have confessed
An appetite that is unspeakable.
With a few greedy words

Theseus

Blasphemy is child's play to a liar.
Stop! Spare me the babbling. You insult me.
Your posturing virtue is incredible.

Hippolytus

Only to you while you believe the lie.
Phèdre knows the truth. I am not guilty.

Theseus

Ah! Your insolence is intolerable.

Hippolytus

If I am to be banished – where and when?

Theseus

Beyond Atlas, far out in the Atlantic –
You would still be much too close to me.

Hippolytus

Once you have branded my name as a felon
Who in the world will befriend me? If Theseus
Casts me out, who dare take me in?

Theseus

Find friends among men debauched enough
To approve adultery and relish incest.
Thankless, treacherous men, without laws or honour.
The kind who will welcome such as you.

Hippolytus

Adultery and incest! You are obsessed
With adultery and incest. Shall I say it?
Phèdre had a mother.
Remember Phèdre's mother.
Phèdre bears the blood of a lineage
Far more heavily charged with such crimes
Than mine ever was and you know it.

Theseus

What? You are mad!
Get out. For the last time – get out.
Must you wait till I'm speechless?
Do you have to be flung out bodily?

Exit Hippolytus.

Yes, go, you filth. You will not escape.
Destruction is hurrying towards you.
The god of the oceans
Swore on that river in Hell
To give me satisfaction.
A god of vengeance out of the seas pursues you.
And yet in spite of your nature,
So strangely diseased,
I loved you. My bowels are twisting
With a horrible foreboding.
You forced me to curse you.
How many fathers have known this?
You gods, you see what I suffer.
How did I sire this deformity?

Enter Phèdre.

Phèdre

My lord, your voice rings through the palace.
I could not help but hear it.
I am terrified. O my lord,
What if your prayers are answered?
Is it too late to save him?
He is your own blood – rescue him!
Your own sacred blood – cherish it
Before it is too late. I beg you
Save me, Theseus,
From having to hear his screams.
Save me from a life
Haunted by the screams of Hippolytus.

Act Five

Hippolytus, Aricia, Ismène.

Aricia

You have to speak out.
The danger you are in numbs my mind.
Your father loves you.
You cannot let misapprehension craze him
Against you.
Speak, and save yourself from it. Save us.
You are forgetting us.
Are my tears meaningless? Can you accept
Our separation for ever
Without a word? Then go. Leave me hopeless.
But at least, if you must go, save your life.
Save your name, your fame
From this scandal and this preposterous lie.
Though the truth is vile, force him to face it.
Make him reverse the curse. There is still time.
What nicety of honour
Creeps off speechless leaving all the credit
With an unscrupulous liar? Tell your father,
Tell him everything.

Hippolytus

Ah God, what haven't I said?
You want me to disclose
The shame of his bedchamber
For the mere relief of feeling truthful?
Can I humiliate my own father
And make him laughable? Nobody
Has looked into this secret

Except you and the gods.
See now how I love you. I have shown you
What I tried to hide even from myself.
Aricia, forget you ever heard it.
I opened this to you in confidence.
Never mention it. It's too filthy a business.
It would contaminate your mouth.
But if the gods can be trusted,
If they want justice, they must favour me.
The situation can be left to them,
And I need fear nothing.
Sooner or later Phèdre and her great lie
Must meet their judgement, which is immovable.
Only for this I beg you to be patient.
But for everything else – I have done with patience.
Aricia, your prison
Need no longer hold you. Come with me.
Gather your courage. We can leave together.
Everything about this place is abhorrent.
The very air corrodes honesty.
Your disappearance now will pass unnoticed.
My sudden disgrace and banishment
Has turned the whole palace upside down.
We can use the confusion.
All that you require, I can give you.
Your guards are my men.
Across the sea our allies are powerful.
Argos calls us. Sparta welcomes us.
Our interests are theirs.
Phèdre shall never dethrone you or me.
She shall never build her empire
Out of our absence,
Or give what is ours to her son.
What now? You hold back?
This is the moment and we have to seize it.

Aricia

If that is true I shall not deny it.
One thing he has not inherited from you
Is your hatred for me.
He never saw me as a threat to the state.

Theseus

Of course not. He was too busy
Swearing eternal love.
Do not depend, girl, on that facile mouth.
He has sworn the same to others.

Aricia

He has?

Theseus

You should have restrained him.
How can you entertain such a pretender?

Aricia

And how can you let that rotten libel
Pollute his life – a current like sunlight!
Do you know your own son's heart so little?
Can't you distinguish between good and evil?
The whole world can see what he is.
Must you – his father – be the only one
Blundering about in the dark?
I can't leave him and his name
To the tongues and fangs of vipers.
Stop now: halt your homicidal curse
And beg the gods to forgive you for it.
Has it occurred to you
They may hate you enough to grant it?
Sometimes the gods accept our prayers
Just for the opportunity it gives them
To punish us in full, at our own request.

Theseus

Enough. You have scolded enough.
You cannot change the nature of his crime.
Love has blinded you to his ugliness.
I have witnesses – impeccable.
I have seen tears that were incorruptible.
And I believe them.

Aricia

Be careful, my lord. Your hands
May have eradicated many monsters
And never once failed. But let me say:
Not every monster has been accounted for.
There is one monster you have not recognised –
Your son, my lord, forbids me to say more.
He is concerned for you.
And his concern for you must also be mine.
If I told all I know – he too would be injured.
My lord, let me share his reticence.
And rather than be forced by you to break it
Allow me to withdraw.

Exit Aricia.

Theseus

What's in her mind? What is this woman hiding?
She seems to be trying to tell me
Something she dare not tell me. Starting and stopping.
Going straight at it – then dodging past it.
Maybe the pair have put their heads together
To trick me, and lead me by the nose
Into some fresh maze of new clues –
And new darkness. At the same time,
In spite of my determination,
And in spite of my anger,
A voice –
Somewhere, beneath all this, a voice,

A pleading voice, inexplicable:
Pity – surprising and painful.
Oenone has to be questioned again – more thoroughly.
I need to know more about what happened.
Guards, bring Oenone. Here, alone.

Enter Panope.

Panope

I dare not guess what is in Queen Phèdre's mind
But her agitation, my lord,
Puts her life in danger.
If despair can be fatal
And if we can recognise its signs,
I see it in her face. She is white as death.
As for Oenone – everything is too late.
She abandoned Phèdre and ran from the palace.
My lord, she leapt from the cliff-head –
And if that drop to the sea did not kill her
The sea did. Whatever her reasons
The waves that are now pounding her body on the
rocks
Have washed them away, beyond recovery.

Theseus

What?

Panope

This death has not quieted the Queen.
Only made her worse – if anything could.
She rushes to her children, like a mother
Seeking her own consolation,
Embracing them and sobbing over them,
But then she thrusts them away, with shrieks of horror,
As if maternal love were some contagion,
And staggers about the palace,
Falling on the stairs, colliding with walls
Like a blind madwoman.

She stares at everybody and sees nobody.
Three times she started a letter –
Each time changed her mind and tore it up.
You must see her, my lord. And perhaps help her.

Theseus

Oh God – Oenone dead?
And Phèdre wanting to die?
Call my son back.
Let me hear my son defend himself.
Let him tell me all he has to tell me.
I will listen. Tell him I will listen.

Exit Panope.

O Neptune,
If you heard my prayer, if you heard my curse,
Hear me. Withhold your favour to me
Perhaps I believed the wrong story,
Perhaps I based my judgement on lies –
Too credulous and too precipitous.
Perhaps my berserk rage, that called on you
To destroy my son, was mistaken!
Oh God, God, if I am too late –

Enter Théràmène.

Where is Hippolytus? What have you done with him?
I gave him into your care, Théràmène,
When he was only a child.
Where is my son?

Théràmène

Ah – so much concern
Coming so late and so superfluously.
Such paternal love. And all so useless.
Hippolytus is dead.

Theseus

Aaah!