



KING

OEDIPUS

KING OEDIPUS

by Sophocles

translated by Robert Fagles

produced by Jeffrey Shaw

at

WILSON'S SCHOOL

29th 30th 31st March 1990

THE PLAY WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERVAL.

It is about 2 hours 15 minutes long.

KING OEDIPUS

King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes are told by a prophet that their newly-born son is destined to kill his father. In order to prevent this coming true, they entrust the baby to a palace slave with instructions to leave it to die on nearby Mount Cithaeron. But the slave instead of killing the child passes it to another shepherd on the mountain, who gives it to the childless king and queen of neighbouring Corinth, Polybus and Merope. The boy, Oedipus ('swollen-foot' because his ankles had been pinned together), grows up thinking Polybus and Merope are his real parents; indeed they strenuously insist to him that they are after a drunken banqueter one day calls out to Oedipus that he is not his father's son.

Nevertheless Oedipus' curiosity is aroused and he goes to Apollo's oracle at Delphi to ask about his parents. He gets a terrifying and explicit response; not only is he doomed to kill his father, but he will then marry his own mother. Determined not to let this happen he decides never to return to Corinth, and takes the road to Thebes. At a crossroad he has an altercation with a stranger and kills him. On arriving at Thebes he finds the city in a state of despair, being terrorised by the monstrous Sphinx. She asked anyone she found her famous riddle; anyone who could not give the correct answer she destroyed.

"What creature is it that walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon and three in the evening?" Oedipus' great intelligence enables him to solve the riddle and defeat the Sphinx. The grateful Thebans immediately honour him by making him their king; he marries the queen, Jocasta, and together they rule Thebes successfully for many years and raise several children.

Eventually a plague comes and devastates Thebes. Our play starts at the point where Oedipus finds out that the city is still harbouring, after all these years, the murderer of Laius, and the plague will only be averted when the culprit is expelled. He inaugurates a search, unaware of course that he is himself the man he seeks. But Oedipus' persistence and ingenuity is such that, once having started on the quest, he will not stop until he has found out the whole truth.

"I am the land's avenger by all rights,
and Apollo's champion too.
But not to assist some distant kinsman, no,
for my own sake I'll rid us of this corruption.
Whoever killed the king may decide to kill me too,
with the same violent hand - by avenging Laius
I defend myself".

But in the end Oedipus does not kill himself, instead he puts out his eyes. This gives an extra dimension to the scene early in the play between Oedipus and the blind prophet Tiresias. Both men see, but do not see - in opposite ways. Sophocles' exploitation of the irony in such scenes is merciless.

But what is the playwright's meaning? Is it that Oedipus - and mankind in general - are mere puppets in the hands of the all-powerful gods, fit playthings for their arbitrary favour or vindictiveness? Hardly, for Oedipus, though guilty, sinned in ignorance, and has no major defects of character that would make his downfall seem just. On the contrary, he is shown to be a loved and respected ruler, admired for his intelligence and forthrightness. And the only god that crosses his path is Apollo, who only foretells, does not cause, the events of the play. But Jocasta tries to persuade Oedipus that prophets are a fraud and oracles can safely be ignored; the future cannot be foretold. For her, Fate does not exist:

"What should a man fear? It's all chance,
chance rules our lives. Not a man on earth
can see a day ahead, groping through the dark.
Better to live at random, best we can..."

Such a view of the world, in which the gods are at best dismissed as an irrelevance in a mechanical, purposeless universe, was gaining ground in the heady intellectual atmosphere of fifth-century Athens, and the traditional beliefs in divinely sanctioned standards of behaviour were declining. Already coming of age was a generation of politicians who would soon walk into the moral void created by this retreat and push Athens down a cynical and irresponsible road towards destruction. Sophocles' play is a defiant, poetic counter-blast, showing that the gods do not have to reveal themselves directly to men to prove their existence; the purposes of Fate may be inscrutable, but for all that they are there - hidden in the intricate web of events that surround and involve all men. It is this pattern that Apollo and Tiresias see, but Oedipus cannot. For though the chain of circumstances that propel Oedipus towards his doom are truly terrifying in their cumulative effect, no one coincidence is particularly surprising or unlikely. Given a man of Oedipus' personality - and this is where his weaknesses do count, his headstrong, suspicious nature and normally controlled potential for violence - it is somehow inevitable that events cluster about him as they do.

For it is Oedipus himself who sets in motion the train of events that will destroy him. And who is Oedipus? A husband who turns out to be a son; a foreigner, revealed to be a native; an honoured king, yet a murderous usurper; a man with eyes who becomes blind: the detective who dunnit himself. Above all he is a man who thinks he has the reins of destiny in his own control, yet who drives unawares towards catastrophe. Even a man of towering intelligence can be destroyed by such a blind spot, a man sharp enough to solve the Sphinx's riddle but unaware of the irony of the answer; for the answer is himself.

Man.

J M Shaw

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Produced and directed by	Jeffrey Shaw
Music written and directed by	Jeremy Roberts
Scenery	Alan Smith Kevin Hemmings
Lighting	Stephen Furnell Matthew Brunton
Costumes	Christine Beer
Masks	Niklas Lusser Matthew Todd David Saraga Nigel Coutts Peter Rhodes
Stage Managers	
Stage Crew	Tom Billing Matthew Draper Ivan Hall Sean Guy Thomas Hensman Stephen Lockyer Matthew Sparkes Neil Porter Adrian Shrubsall Chris Sampson
Props	Matthew Preston
Lighting	Steven Fayers James Griffin
Electricians	Stephen Furnell Andrew Scott-Evans Alistair Stroud
Art Work	Barnaby Philps Paul Hirschfield Shami Senth Pascal Lillford
Musicians: Keyboards	Jeremy Roberts
Percussion	Patrick Troopiz Tim Page Matthew Todd

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OEDIPUS ON VIDEO

Saturday's performance will be recorded. Details in the main foyer.

CAST

OEDIPUS, KING OF THEBES	Jonathan Howard
PRIEST	Daniel Holmes
CREON, BROTHER OF JOCASTA	Niklas Lusser
CHORUS OF THEBAN CITIZENS	Denys James Vusi Siphika Craig Hamilton Alistair Harper Steven Fayers Matthew Watkinson Russell Ogden Pascal Lillford
TIRESIAS, A BLIND PROPHET	John Humber
JOCASTA, THE QUEEN, WIFE OF OEDIPUS	David Saraga
CORINTHIAN MESSENGER	Christian Hay
SHEPHERD	John Humber
PALACE MESSENGER	Joe Foulsham

with

OEDIPUS' DAUGHTERS	Gregory Dodds Robert Watkinson
CITIZENS, CHILDREN, GUARDS ETC.	Richard Morgan, Sean Guy, Joe Foulsham Simon Marks, John Thynne, John Barton, Ian Courtman, Marcus Hiseman, Tom Vosa, Nicholas Eaves, Alan Bell, Matthew Gates, Tim Briley, Alex Palmer, Ian Goodwin, Christopher Sansom

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PRODUCTIONS AT WILSON'S SCHOOL, WALLINGTON

SCHOOL PLAYS

The Life of Galileo	(Bertolt Brecht)	Dec 1975
Androcles and the Lion	(Bernard Shaw)	March 1976
Sweeney Todd	(George Dibdin Pitt)	Dec 1976
Oliver!	(Lionel Bart)	March 1977
Birds	(Aristophanes)	Dec 1977
Twelfth Night	(Wm Shakespeare)	Feb 1979
The Importance of Being Earnest	(Oscar Wilde)	Dec 1979
Antonio's Revenge	(John Marston)	Dec 1980
The Devil's Disciple	(Bernard Shaw)	Dec 1981
Chips with Everything	(Arnold Wesker)	Dec 1982
The Golden Masque of Agamemnon	(John Wiles)	Feb 1983
Toad of Toad Hall	(A A Milne)	July 1983
The Royal Hunt of the Sun	(Peter Shaffer)	Dec 1983
Hubert and the Firework	(Martin Knight)	Dec 1984
Smoking is Bad for You/ A Tragic Role/ Out At Sea/ Medea	(Anton Chekov) (Slavomir Mrozek) (Euripides)	March 1985
The Sport of My Mad Mother	(Ann Jellicoe)	July 1985
Frogs	(Aristophanes)	March 1987
The Comedy of Errors	(Wm Shakespeare)	Dec 1987
The Thwarting of Baron Bolligrew	(Robert Bolt)	July 1988
The Injustice Done to Tou Ngo / After Magritte	(Kuan Han Ch'ing) (Tom Stoppard)	March 1989

SIXTH FORM PLAYS

Accidental Death of an Anarchist	(Dario Fo)	March 1984
Beyond a Joke	(Derek Benfield)	Nov 1984
My Fair Lady	(A J Lerner/ F Lowe)	May 1986
Jack and the Beanstalk		Jan 1987

Ad Lib Players Productions

Enter a Free Man	(Tom Stoppard)	July 1982
The Real Inspector Hound	(Tom Stoppard)	July 1984
White Liars/Black Comedy	(Peter Shaffer)	July 1985
Cinderella	(John Morley)	Dec 1988

