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# The Curse of Oedipus at The Antaeus Theater

Written by Alice-Denise Walker

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Theater is like a rollercoaster. There are productions that thrill and propel the audience to great heights and twirl it upside down. Then there are rides like a carousel that meander slowly around, up and down, in a repetitive circle and come to a stop. The Antaeus Theater production of *The Curse of Oedipus* is like an amusement park full of different rides.



The Thebes cast of Antaeus Company's "The Curse of Oedipus"  
Photo by facetphotography.com

Written by Kenneth Cavander it began as collaboration with director Casey Stangl to condense the massive two-part *Legend Of Oedipus* story into one evening. It has been an ongoing, evolving labor of love for three years for Stangl, Cavander and the Antaeus Theater troupe, bringing them to the culmination of this final production.

The Antaeus tradition practices "partner casting," where two actors share every role. It is an ubiquitous concept in theater. Each brings a different interpretation to the work.

When entering the theatre the set radiates an eerie mood of primal darkness. A thick mist of fog hangs above the stage. The drummer beats out an overture of an ancient tribal call. Then the drums slowly decrease to slow, pulsating taps. The set design and lightening by Francois-Pierre Couture is imaginative and palatial. Thebes and Mount Olympus were sharing the same dimension but were unique in their own realm. Every part of the space was utilized effectively. The Sphinx design was pure art.

*The Curse of Oedipus* is set in the city of Thebes and on Mt. Olympus. It began with the playful banter between brothers Apollo the god of light (Mark Bramhall who looks remarkably like a younger James Coburn) and Dionysus (John Apicella) the god of wine and good times. They contemplate and debate the fate of the children of Thebes.

The chorus of dancers rush the stage with lively staccato movements, entranced in a holy dance of sacrifice. They moan, sway and turn in unison in heightened anticipation of the apocalypse to befall Thebes.

Oedipus, the mythical King of Thebes fulfills a generational curse by the Oracle of Apollo. The prophecy states that he will kill his father King Laius and marry his mother and thereby bringing destruction to Thebes and his family. The king sends Oedipus away to be killed when he is born. But instead of killing the baby the shepherd allows him to be adopted by another king. Oedipus unknowingly kills his father in self-defense. He arrives in Thebes and solves the riddle of the Sphinx and becomes a

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Chad Borden, Ramón de Ocampo, Lily Nicksay

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hero. Creon (Josh Clark) rewards him the kingdom and Jocasta the Queen as his bride for his valor.

Ramon de Ocampo as Oedipus exudes energy and enthusiasm. Rhonda Aldrich perfects Jocasta's thoughtfulness and wisdom. Ocampo and Aldrich have a steamy sexual camaraderie and demonstrate the genuine love and affection that Oedipus and Jocasta have for each other. Oedipus painfully discovers that Jocasta is his mother/wife. She hangs herself, and in his anguish he blinds himself with her brooches. The Greeks were 2000 years ahead of the *Game of Thrones*' bloodlust and incestuous family drama.

The most compelling performance of the evening was from an actor who had but a few lines--Fran Bennett as Teiresias, the blind soothsayer. It was genius casting because it defined Teiresias as an androgynous and imposing presence. Teiresias stood tall, regal and obviously blind. In fact, it wasn't until I viewed her picture in the playbill that I saw that she is, in fact, sighted. Costuming and make-up were pristine in this production.

As the play proceeded I attempted to concentrate on the other actors in the performance. It was difficult because of Teiresias' silent and frozen figure. I had to remind myself that *this is a play, I am in a roomful of people, and I'm safe*. Yet, I dared not look directly at Teiresias out of absolute fear. That feeling is the thrill and majesty of theatre. It should be entertaining, dynamic, and inspiring.

Performances of *The Curse of Oedipus* take place Thursday and Friday from June 21 through August 10. There are Saturday performances at 2pm and 8pm and Sundays performances are at 2pm. Talk back Thursdays begin June 26 and the audience can stay after the performance and discuss the play with the cast.

Tickets are \$30 on Thursdays and Fridays and \$34 on Saturdays and Sundays. The Antaeus Company is located at 5112 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood, CA 91601. Parking is \$7 in the lot located at 5125 Lankershim Blvd. (on the west side of the street), just south of Magnolia.

The theater is air-conditioned and wheelchair accessible. For reservations and information, call (818) 506-1983 or go to [www.antaeus.org](http://www.antaeus.org).

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