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The Curse of Oedipus

The Antaeus Company

Reviewed by Neal Weaver



Chad Borden, Ramón de Ocampo, and Lily Nicksay

Photo by facetphotography.com

The dark and bloody legend of King Oedipus inspired the ancient Greek dramatists to create many plays recounting his fate. In Sophocles's tragedy *Oedipus the King*, we learn how he fled his home city, Corinth, to escape a terrible prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother. But instead of evading his fate, he runs headlong into it, unwittingly fulfilling the prophecy. Told by an oracle of the gods that he must find and punish an evildoer to save his city from a plague, his search reveals to him that the evil-doer is himself. In shame and horror at his unknowing incest, he puts out his eyes.

In Euripides's *The Phoenicians*, as much a blood-and-thunder melodrama as a tragedy, we see how the blinded, guilt-ridden Oedipus confers joint kingship of Thebes on his two sons, Eteocles and Polyneices, proposing that they should reign in alternate years. Instead, they become murderous rivals, launch a war over the throne, and slay each other in single, fratricidal combat. Oedipus is driven into exile by the people of Thebes.

In Sophocles's elegiac *Oedipus in Colonos*, we see him led by his daughter Antigone to a sacred precinct in Athens

Dixie's Tupperware Party

Audrey Skirball Kenis Theater at Geffen Playhouse

Reviewed by Bob Verini



Dixie Longate

Photo by Bradford Rogne

The good graces of the Geffen Playhouse are responsible for Los Angeles' introduction to one Dixie Longate: Alabama native, single mom, social critic, and, above all, housewares entrepreneur in the unveiling of *Dixie's Tupperware Party*. This 100-minute interactive theatrical experience—having already cut a successful swath through New York City and numerous other venues—encompasses audience participation and liberal doses of Dixie's unique brand of Southern-fried personal reminiscence.

Oh my baby Jesus, does she talk, as the taffeta-clad, bouffant-haired lady herself might put it: yarns about how her parole officer got her started in the Tupperware dodge, her three deceased exes, and the thrill of going to an annual salesladies' corporate jubilee to celebrate the past year's biggest earners.

Make no mistake, by the way: This is a for-real sales event, no foolin'. The chairs of the Geffen's intimate Audrey space are preset with catalogues, order forms, and complimentary pens (thanks, Dixie!). Before you're granted exit, you will have seen a couple dozen items paraded before your eyes, stock numbers and all, and just try to get past Dixie and her beaming minions as they

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where, under the protection of King Theseus, he at last finds peace, humility, and his final apotheosis.

Now, in a daring move, writer-translator Kenneth Cavender has taken up these three plays—and other ancient sources—and blended them into a single, epic drama. His concise, direct, athletic renderings rescue the plays from the fustian and bombast of the older translations and present them new-minted, with a curiously modern thrust. And director Casey Stangl gives them a faithful and dynamic staging, with a sterling cast of terrific actors.

As Oedipus, Ramon de Ocampo eloquently captures the unfortunate monarch's strength, hot temper, and arrogance, as well as his transition to faltering, guilt-ridden, fallen hero. He gives us a man, imperfect and suffering, rather than a monument carved of stone. Equally effective, in a very different way, is Josh Clark as Oedipus's wily brother-in-law Creon, who nurses secret ambitions to capture the throne for himself. He struggles to take it, and when he briefly succeeds, he can't hold onto it. In a futile effort to restore order to his troubled city, he tells the people over and over, "Go home. The danger is over." But the danger is never over.

Fran Bennett, in a piece of inspired gender-blind casting, gives us an iconic rendition of the blind prophet Tiresias, who senses the tragedies looming, but can do nothing to stop them. Eve Gordon is a passionate, thwarted Jocasta, the mother/wife of Oedipus; and Kwana Martinez is a courageously obstinate Antigone. Mark Bramhall and Stony Westmoreland are the rival gods Apollo and Dionysus, who preside over the action and seek to impose their own meanings on it.

Ultimately the backbone of Greek tragedy is the chorus, and this one is vital, dynamic, and eloquent. Stangl has cast actors of all ages, shapes, and sizes: Philip Proctor, John Achorn, Cameron J. Oro, Chris Clowers, Elizabeth Swain, Susan Boyd Joyce, Belen Greene, and Keri Safran. But this is no abstract unit: they are rather a cross-section of confused, striving individuals, attempting to understand what is happening around them, what it means, and how it affects their lives.

Drummer Geno Monteiro provides electrifying percussion to punctuate and heighten the action, while François-Pierre Couture's semi-abstract set features criss-crossing cords that suggest a web the characters are caught in—until the end, when the web snaps. The story may be archaic, but, without striving, it achieves contemporary

pounce to take your order before you can make it out onto LeConte Avenue again. A lot of "the crap," as Dixie is fond of referring to her wares, needs to be shipped from Tupperware Central, though on opening night there was quite a run on all sorts of bowls, canisters, and gadgets available cash and carry. The lady is, without a doubt, persuasive.

The provenance of the merchandise is assuredly official Tupperware, but that of the show is couched in some mystery. Director Patrick Richwood makes his presence known through a beaming photo in the program, but the writing is credited to some guy named Kris Andersson, who appears to have something of the same relationship to Dixie that that Australian fellow Barry Humphries has to the celebrated (and frequent visitor to our county) Dame Edna Everage.

In both cases, you don't want to sniff around too closely; just sit back and wallow in the situation. And there's plenty to wallow in.

Dame Edna and Miss Dixie share a good deal more than a certain ambiguity beneath the pantyhose. Both greet their audience members with tender condescension, and both are rampant narcissists exuding self-love at every conceivable opportunity. "Where are you from, darlin'?" Dixie will ask a flustered patron. "London." "Oh!" the star exclaims, "*Hola!*"—clearly indicating that in her eyes one furriner is jes' lak t'other, and, never mind that, can I interest you in this container for marinating meat?

Speaking of meat, while Edna is no slouch in the naughtiness department, Dixie has her beat by a country mile, with allusions to sexuality that go so far beyond *double entendres*, they're just *entendres*. It starts with the pronunciation of her name (when you say it out loud slowly, the only possible response is, "Why, yes, they certainly do"); followed by rapid-fire references to private parts and demonstrations to boot.

Prudes will be made uncomfortable by her verbal and visual antics even as they're drawn to the deep-dish salad crisper, though Dixie clearly couldn't care less about any ol' stick-in-the-muds who are bothered. Indeed, one senses she has a wicked evil eye for anyone squirming; bless their hearts, they better watch out.

Most important, divas Edna and Dixie share an ability to perfectly play their spectators like a musical instrument in order to extract the maximum amount of embarrassed hilarity. When four audience members are placed on stage, one is immediately identified as "lesbian" simply to be the butt of Doc Martens humor, while a young man down front is chosen to stand in for everyone of the male gender who dismisses Tupperware as all about mere bowls. "Ain't that right, Patrick? Just bow-els, bow-els," she draws with frosty hostility.

And say this for Dixie, she picks her targets extremely well: The putative lesbian took it all with good humor, and when poor Patrick took the stage to show how easily the Tupperware can opener works, his 10-minute display of ineptitude justified every bit of skepticism about male

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For the Record: Tarantino

DBA

Reviewed by Bob Verini



Quentin Tarantino in background
Photo by Rony Alwin

For the record, *For the Record: Tarantino* has safely made the transition from the small and cramped Rockwell's in Los Feliz Village to the larger but also cramped DBA, former site of the Peanuts nitery, in WeHo. The sightlines are better, but the booze is still flowing and the fun is no less infectious.

The "For the Record" series formula begins with the selection of a noted filmmaker whose work leans heavily on distinctive pop music. (As examples, auteurs previously honored to date include Baz Luhrmann, Martin Scorsese, the Coen brothers, and Garry Marshall.) The chosen oeuvre is pored over for iconic speeches and scenes, which are then spliced 'n'