



“Oedipus” for All Seasons

Alex Grantham
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It's right there in the program: “art is rarely ever what it appears to be.”

It is Friday night in Salisbury Theatre and I'm looking at the stage for “Oedipus Rex.” On it, there sits an unlikely hybrid of razor wire, duct-tape, and “the biggest staircase created in Fairbanks, Alaska.” It is framed by a screen projecting images of the blind, of the indigent, of the indistinct. It is Friday night in Salisbury Theatre and art appears to be severely plagued.

Fortunately for Theatre UAF, this is exactly how it is supposed to be. Thebes is a city under siege and a new king, Oedipus, is tasked with

its salvation. For the next two and nary hour, I was assaulted with the rashness of a young man, enthralled by the murmurings of a soothsayer, and again surprised by those gifted minds and hands behind UAF's premiere spring show.

Levi Ben-Israel, playing Oedipus, is coming along nicely since his last spotlight in Theatre UAF's “Taming of the Shrew.” Oedipus, the man, was never written with excessive depth. Rather, he is an elaborate metaphor for the imperceptibility of human nature. Still, it would have been nice to see more range from Ben-Israel who went from yelling to crying to yelling louder.

Matthew Krell as Creon is an inspired choice and

Teiresias' Jon-Kiefer Bowne reminds us why his colorful characters find reliable hospice within Bowne's immaculate performances. I only pray Bowne strays from complacency considering his roles' often-unique nature - he is meant for grander, more protagonist-oriented accomplishments.

The stand-out role, however, for me, came in the form of the queen's messenger portrayed by Jenny Schlotfeldt. Although brief, Schlotfeldt's part beamed with engaging energy and appropriate flourish; an absolute joy to watch.

Although the main set never changes (seeing as the play takes place solely in the city of Thebes), the layout is properly regal with details of destruction going unmissed. And while the background images have, in the past, often been used to the detriment of the events onstage, the revolving set of blind and anguished faces compliments the plotting well without overt distraction.

It is suggested in the program and in director Antohin's discussion of “Oedipus” that the play serves a basic analogy for America and, perhaps more pointedly, America's method of government. While mirrors can be erected for concepts such as divine rule, the belief in one's own righteousness, and slap-dash finger-pointing in times

of grief, it is obvious that the stage direction was pushed too strongly in this direction. “Oedipus Rex” would have perhaps been better served on a more abstract platter (something the play eventually fell into within the latter half) rather than dragged along stringent metaphors.

I have always considered “Oedipus Rex” to be a story about man's doom. That no matter how much we attempt to understand ourselves and our nature, humanity's gears are set and the ship is destined to sink. Being in that state of mind, the production expertly transfers a constant state of confusion as the characters desperately try to understand the forces that work within/out themselves.

Another well-orchestrated collection of talents. Another notch on the belt. Theatre UAF has shown longevity integral to the program in lean times. And with it, art appears to be alive and pseudo-well at UAF.

“Oedipus Rex” will be performing Friday, April 8 (8:15pm), Saturday, April 9 (8:15pm), and Sunday, April 10 (2:00pm) in the Salisbury Theatre. Tickets can be purchased at the Box Office in the Great Hall for \$5.



Photographs by Kade Mendelowitz