

OEDIPUS



BY STEVEN BERKOFF

(AFTER SOPHOCLES)

Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse
and Nottingham Playhouse

Education Resource Pack

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Why Oedipus at the Liverpool Playhouse?

We try to programme a wide range of work across both theatres that reflects the broad diversity of our audience. A cornerstone of that programme selection is a response to our schools and colleges. We try to have at least one inventive interpretation of a “classic” text in every season for that very reason.

It is important to us that the selection of that production is a simultaneous and equally weighted choice of text and vision. We want people studying theatre and text to have both the opportunity of experiencing something they are studying as a live experience but we also hope that how it is contextualised and interpreted will challenge and inspire their reading of the text.

No play in theatre history deserves the term “classic” more than *Oedipus*. Since Aristotle used it as his model for playwriting craftsmanship, it has travelled down the millennia as a great play, indeed some would argue THE first GREAT play. Playwrights in the 21st century still use it as a template of how to structure a well-made tragedy. Nor are its themes of pride, loss and fate remote from everyday human experience. How many of us have felt pitted against our own personal history, felt futile in our attempts to change our destiny?

Steven Berkoff is one of the most innovative writers and directors of our time with a theatrical language and directorial style that is very much his own - spare, physical and demotic. His work is visceral and lean and shares an economy of intent that I feel Sophocles would approve of. His writing is poetic but has a contemporary muscularity that makes it accessible with devastating effect.

Steven’s interpretation of this great but ancient play felt like the perfect partnership of text and interpretation. There is no doubt that he will blow the dust from any sense of this being a “museum” piece or dry retelling of an academic text but I have every confidence that it will remain true to the spirit of the original.

Gemma Bodinetz, Artistic Director, Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse.

Giles Croft (Artistic Director at the Nottingham Playhouse)



What words would you use to describe this coming Nottingham Playhouse season?

Varied, adventurous and surprising are the three words that really pull it together. The reasons for that are we have *Forever Young*, which is a revival of a successful show. *Oedipus*, which is going to be directed by Steven Berkoff, which I think will be big and bold and I think will be a very powerful

evening in the theatre. We have the British premiere of an Ibsen, which will surprise everybody, because there aren't very many Ibsen plays that people don't already know and that are premieres in this country. And we have a festival of international work coming up in the summer which I think will be as big and bold and surprising and adventurous as you could possibly be.

Why *Oedipus*? Was it your idea or Steven's?

Steven proposed *Oedipus* to us. He wrote a version some time ago, and it's been done by only one other company, he's never directed it. So, because we have a relationship with Steven here, and we did *On the Waterfront* successfully, we were talking about other possible projects and *Oedipus* was on the list of ideas, so I took it to him, and said this was something that we wanted to do, partly because the play is fantastic and the version is very strong. Also, we did *Antigone* a few years ago, very successfully, which was our version titled *Burial at Thebes*, another Sophocles play, so again, it's a sense of building on the success we had with that.

Why collaborate with Liverpool Playhouse?

Because we have a very good relationship with the people who run the theatre. Personally we get on, which is very nice, and that makes it easy to have artistic conversations as well. Their artistic policy is in keeping with ours so there's a natural connection there. And we co-produced successfully about 18 months – two years ago on *The Price*, which I directed, which opened up in Liverpool then came down here. So it's a combination of good personal relationships, sympathetic artistic policies and a successful experience in co-producing with

them. They also thought the play itself was right for their theatre, which is another very important thing. You can have fantastic ideas, but when you look at what you're doing in the theatre, and how it fits into your season, it just might not be the right project.

How is *Oedipus* relevant to a Nottingham audience?

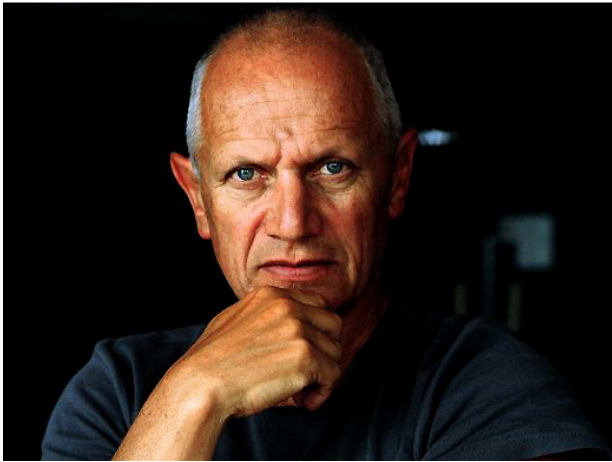
I don't think it's relevant to a Nottingham audience in the sense that people will necessarily see bits of *Oedipus* in their own lives. I think it's relevant to a Nottingham audience in the sense that it's a great drama that reveals something about the human condition. It's a very powerful story about vanity and love and revenge and ambition. And as such, it's a story that all of us can benefit from. So it has no particular Nottingham relevance, it has a universal relevance. This is a theatre which tells a combination of local stories and universal stories, and this is a universal story. The other thing that's important to say is that Steven Berkoff's style of producing is very much in keeping with the style of work that we do here, and I think a lot of people enjoy the way he approaches work and I think there is an additional thing to that which is that Berkoff is studied so, I think, from a school and college and educational point of view, there's just something about seeing the original work of Steven Berkoff, not just filtered through someone else's interpretation, the man himself coming and doing the work which is a privilege for us to be able to see.

Have you any message for the students who are studying Berkoff and likely to come to the production?

I think that the only message I can give is what I've already alluded to. It's pretty rare for people to get the opportunity to see such a major artist work first hand, not filtered through somebody else, so I think for students who are studying or are interested in not just Berkoff, but theatre and Greek literature and tragedy, this is a fantastic opportunity to have direct experience of the work of Steven Berkoff, and that's not to be missed. There won't be very many opportunities to do that. There may never be another opportunity to do that, so take it while it's here.

Liam Butlin

Steven Berkoff



Steven Berkoff was born in Stepney, London 1937. He studied Drama in London and Paris. Performed with repertory companies before forming the London Theatre Group (L.T.G.) in 1968. Their first professional production was In the *Penal Colony*, an adaptation of a short story by Kafka. Berkoff's first original stage play *East*, was presented at the Edinburgh Festival in 1975.

Greek, Kvetch, Acapulco, Harry's Christmas, Lunch, Sink the Belgrano, Massage, Sturm und Drang, Brighton Beach Scumbags, The Secret Love Life of Ophelia, Bow of Ulysses, Ritual in Blood and Messiah.

Berkoff's production of *The Messiah* features an ensemble, - a theatrical device also used in *On the Waterfront* and *Oedipus*



Among the many adaptations Steven Berkoff has created for the stage, directed and toured are Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (see photo) and *The Trial*, *Agamemnon* (after Aeschylus) and Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. His plays and adaptations have been performed in many countries and many languages. He has also directed and toured productions of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and Oscar Wilde's *Salome*. He has directed his plays and adaptations in Japan, Germany and Los Angeles as well as *Richard II* and *Coriolanus* for the New York Shakespeare Festival.

His one-man show has toured Britain, the USA, South Africa, Finland, Italy, Singapore and Australia. He directed and played the title role in *Coriolanus* at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 1995 and at the Mermaid Theatre London in 1996.

In 1997 he directed and performed the American premiere of *Massage* at the Odyssey Theatre in Los Angeles. This performance earned him a nomination for Best Actor in the L.A. Weekly Theatre Awards. Steven then brought *Massage* to the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool in preparation for its UK premiere at the Edinburgh Festival in August 1997. He was honoured with a Total Theatre Lifetime Achievement Award at the Festival.

Films

He has acted in films such as: *A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon*, *The Passenger*, *McVicar*, *Outland*, *Octopussy*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Rambo*, *Underworld*, *Revolution*, *Under the Cherry Moon*, *Absolute Beginners*, *Prisoner of Rio*, *The Krays*, *Fair Game*, *Flynn*, *Another 9 1/2 weeks* and *Rancid Aluminium*. He directed and co-starred with Joan Collins in the film version of *Decadence* (see photo).

Television

Television productions include *West*, *Metamorphosis*, *Harry's Christmas*, *Silent Night*, a reworking of *Harry's Christmas* and *The Tell Tale Heart*.

Other television credits include: *Sins*, *Beloved Family*, *Knife Edge*, *The Professionals*, *War and Remembrance*, *Michelangelo - Season of Giants*, *Star Trek - Deep Space Nine*, *La Femme Nikita* and *Jonathan Creek*.

Writing

He has published a variety of books such as *Gross Intrusion and Graft*- collections of short stories; *I Am Hamlet* and *Meditations on Metamorphosis*, *Coriolanus in Deutschland*, *A Prisoner in Rio*- all production journals; *The Theatre of Steven Berkoff* - a photographic history of his productions over the last two decades; *America and Overview* - both travel writing and poetry collections; and his autobiography *Free Association*.

Voiceover

Steven Berkoff has done a variety of voice over work and books on tape including Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial* for Penguin Audiobooks. Radio productions include the title role in *Macbeth* and his musical debut as the MC in *Cabaret*. He recently recorded *An Actor's Tale*, a selection of his short stories, for Radio 4. He can also be heard on the single by the dance group N-Trance... *The Mind of the Machine*.

Information and photographs taken from <http://www.stevenberkoff.com>

Beyond the Waterfront – 2008 onwards

On the Waterfront played at Nottingham Playhouse and the Edinburgh Festival, and then went on to open at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket with Steven Berkoff in the cast.

On the Waterfront was concerned with problems of trade unionism, corruption and racketeering and was set on New York's oppressive waterfront docks in the 1950s. Dock workers struggled for work, dignity, and to make ends meet under the control of hard-knuckled, mob-run labour unions that would force them to submit to daily 'shape-ups' by cruel hiring bosses.

Photo: NOBBY CLARK



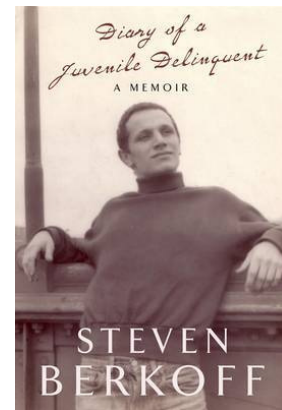
The Waterfront Commission investigated crimes down at the docks and people could be given subpoenas to appear before the commission. They then had to make the decision to appear and testify or to remain "D and D" (Deaf and Dumb), and then suffer the consequences, whatever their decision. *On the Waterfront* told the story of Eddie Molloy ("I could have been a contender") and his struggle to do what he believed was right.

The cast of 10 worked mainly as an ensemble playing all roles including that of a group of pigeons.

Photo: NOBBY CLARK

In the same year as *On the Waterfront* Berkoff filmed a two-minute public-information film advertisement produced by the British Heart Foundation which illustrates how it feels to have a heart attack, *Watch Your Own Heart Attack*. He also went on to make a number of other film appearances including roles in *44 inch chest*, *At World's End* and *Das Jüngste Gericht*.

Berkoff, now 73, is still constantly working. Within the last year he has produced a book of his memoirs, *Diary of a Juvenile Delinquent* and can be seen on screen in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (to be released later this year) and many other films including *The Tourist*, *The Big I am* and *Floriel Street*.



(http://www.amazon.co.uk/Diary-Juvenile-Delinquent-Steven-Berkoff/dp/1907532080/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1294918630&sr=1-1)

Biblical Tales

His latest theatre production *Biblical Tales* explores the stories Bible stories of *Adam and Eve*, *Samson and Delilah*, *David and Goliath* and *Pharaoh and Moses* and highlights modern day parallels such as the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Berkoff says "The Old Testament myths are so mysterious and compelling that they lend themselves to all sorts of interpretations. Working on my adaptations it became obvious how relevant they are to our attitudes and values in modern times. It was the recent "Gaza " war and the appalling flack that Israel received that prompted me to investigate ancient Jewish values".



Matthew Clancy and Mark Frost in *Pharaoh and Moses*. Photo: GETTY

Interview with the Director (Steven Berkoff) and Assistant Director (Matt Cullum)

Why this play at these theatres?

Steven: I've always been drawn to epic stories. Stories that deal with life and death, universal themes that affect all of mankind. Oedipus is the crowning glory for anyone seeking to create theatre, who want to use a theatre as a place to heighten our understanding of the human condition – not a place to sit and see someone standing behind a kitchen sink washing dishes. These two theatres take bold artistic choices in the way they programme their work and consequently their audiences are used to sharing in work that is demanding, unremitting and unique in its foundation. Theatres with such vision make a good home for our work and we enjoy working with them.

Can you tell us a little about the casting process?

Matt: We have spent a great deal of time building an ensemble of actors, a family that we enjoy working with and whom we trust implicitly. When casting we start with this team and see who might work best for the specific needs and vision of the piece. Beyond that we rely on high recommendations from those used to our process and from our casting director Sooki. We look for actors who can withstand the working method and flourish within it – these actors need to be bold in their choices and prepared to commit absolutely to a methodology without discussion and endless debates about interpretation and meaning. We work viscerally and use actors who can begin physically and intellectualise later. A strong trained voice is also a massive requirement for us as the work requires powerful vocal dexterity.

When you first come together as a company, what do you do?

Steven: We get the actors up on the floor and start working. No discussion, no presentations from various departments about design or marketing or whatever. We work wholly with the actors creating a movement through the piece as an ensemble. Within 2 or 3 days the overall shape becomes clear and then we begin refining and re-examining.

Can you tell us a little more about the rehearsal process?

Matt: The ensemble is the most important aspect of this work. They are the engine for everything that happens on stage, they drive the narrative, support and reflect the protagonists emotional and physical journey as well as creating the backdrop against which our story unfolds. So to begin we encourage the ensemble to start moving and trusting each other, using rhythms to create tableaux and to see how they might begin to move through the space, We take the big themes of the piece – desperation, plague, fear, hunger and see where the physical images lead us. This is all backed by strong music choices. With a new piece we will always 'workshop' the text for at least a week with a group of actors and a pile of CD's to try different feels of music and style. During the workshop we try and create a

visual look for the piece which supports the text. We do not seek to solve character motivation or emotional journeys at this point – although the actors will inevitably begin this process for themselves – instead we seek to sculpt the vision which will lead the look and movement of the ensemble. When we begin rehearsals proper, we then have a wealth of material to use which allows us to work quickly and at performance level all the time. We tend to only work for 4 or 5 hours a day as we want all the actors to always work at full commitment.

What is the most challenging part of this project?

Steven: Oedipus is an immensely tough and challenging text. The actor who plays Oedipus must bring great boldness to his performance but also connect with the audience so that we follow his descent into despair. This is tough for the actor and the piece as it is all too easy to rant and rave and roam about the stage needlessly. The key is find stillness and focus and trust the audience to come with you.

What do you most enjoy and why?

Steven: Working with a great team of actors to create something new and exciting is immensely enjoyable – My home is the theatre and sharing ideas and innovations with this team feeds the soul and stops the rot and canker of mundanity setting in.

Matt: I completely agree – there is nothing quite as creatively demanding as working at the pace and energy that we all bring to the rehearsal process – It's exhilarating!

With such a well known story, how do you keep this fresh and keep the audience guessing?

Matt: This isn't a concern – although there is a murder mystery that needs to be solved for the people of Thebes, we the audience already know who the murderer is – there is no point pretending otherwise. The tension comes as we await the revelations that we know are coming – how will they be revealed – when will they be revealed - for both Jocasta and Oedipus – Oedipus drive to search out the truth at all costs brings him closer and closer to the precipice of fate – till he finally falls... and this is the journey we are taking the audience on.

How is this piece relevant for audiences of today?

Steven: The human condition seeks knowledge, truth, understanding and ultimately power. We seek to control and avoid our own fate at all costs. What drives this desire and our need to solve it is as relevant today as ever. Oedipus is the great experiment in the attempt to control our destiny – he failed – but we continue to try.

Oedipus Cast (and composer)



CREON

Vincenzo Nicoli



JOCASTA

Louise Jameson



OEDIPUS

Simon Merrells



TIRESIAS

Ian Drysdale



ENSEMBLE

Anthony Ofoegbu



ENSEMBLE

Mark Frost



MESSENGER/ ENSEMBLE

Anthony Barclay



COMPOSER

John Chambers



ENSEMBLE

Sean Buckley



Shepherd/ENSEMBLE

Alex McSweeney



ENSEMBLE

Eoin McCarthy



ENSEMBLE

Christopher Hogben

Simon Merrells (who plays Oedipus) talks about his experience so far...



How does playing the iconic Oedipus compare to your previous acting experience?

It is challenging, not uniquely so, as I have played iconic characters before, but it's up there. He's like a sword, thrusting, he's relentless. You have to start with perfection, he is a supreme leader. There's no time for a build. He is already there and he goes down through the play. Achieving that level instantly is challenging. This is very much in contrast with the last character I played, Terry Malloy, in *On the Waterfront*, who starts very low in confidence and stature and builds up throughout the process.

What is your opinion of Oedipus? Do you admire him? Why?

How could you not admire someone of his drive, his confidence, his courage? He's saved a city, and been a ruler. He has fled his beloved parents to save himself and them from the terrible prophecy he received at Delphi. When faced with the task of saving Thebes again, he does so almost single-handedly and his insistence on justice, on discovering the truth about his own birth and background no matter what the consequences is admirable. Everyone, at some point, tells him to stop, but he won't - he will *'crawl on hands and knees through broken glass to find the truth.'* He is, however, guilty of arrogance. When he gets the idea that Creon has betrayed him, nothing can convince him otherwise.



What is most challenging aspect of this job and how do you rise to this?

Technically, the voice gets very tired, never has my voice been more tired. You are tempted to shout all the time and this can be dangerous. You have to try and give the voice colour.

Describe how it feels to play the lead role in such an iconic piece with such a prestigious director.

It is an honour to be entrusted. I have worked with Steven before, he is very loyal. And I feel a responsibility...because it is an iconic lead role and I don't want to get it wrong. I want to do justice to Steven and his assistant, Matt.



Interview with Louise Jameson (playing Jocasta)

How does playing the iconic Jocasta compare to your previous acting experience?

I've played a lot of classical roles – but nothing Greek – mainly Shakespeare. She compares as I would expect – but with the 'Berkoff' spin – that is working 'outside in and this has been/is very challenging!

What is your opinion of your character? Do you admire her?

Admire...no, she's in denial! Empathise, yes. All women do the best they can under extreme conditions. To have a new born baby taken from you and to wish yourself dead, how can you recover from that?

How are you putting your own spin on your interpretation of Jocasta?

I draw on my maternal love very strongly. As a single parent, my kids have taken a huge part of my emotional life. I also come with my own unique life experience as we all do, which inevitably gets used, almost subliminally.

Do you find it challenging being as you are the only female in the cast?

The cast are fantastic. I couldn't wish for a more caring, supportive lot. I get my own dressing room and my bags get carried everywhere! Not a challenge, rather a joy.

Describe how it feels to prepare to play one of the lead roles in such an iconic piece with such a prestigious director.

I feel out of my comfort zone, I feel restricted by the style. It's a learning curve, and feels a bit of a battle between instinct and technique.

Interview with the ensemble

Christopher Hogben, Antony Ofoegbu, Vincenzo Nicoli and Eoin McCarthy describe the experience of acting in Oedipus

Describe your journey to becoming a professional actor

Christopher: When I was 10 I played Oliver at my local theatre in Somerset. A man there recommended that I audition for a company called the National Youth Music Theatre, and I got in and toured around the UK for a couple of years with that. That made me think about going into acting professionally, so I got involved with more shows locally and worked really hard at school to get some decent grades, especially in subjects like English, History and languages, which I find come in very useful – and then during A-levels auditioned for drama schools – I was lucky enough to get into one of my first choices – Central School of Speech and Drama, got an agent after they came and watched me in a show in my third year, and now I've been doing it for three years! I owe it all to the guy from the Somerset theatre really – unfortunately he passed away last year, and I never really got the chance to properly thank him, so I'll be thinking of him during these performances.

Anthony : I got hooked at college at about the age of 18, joining a dance theatre troupe and was with them for about 10 years after which I performed in my first non dance influenced drama at the 503 then known as the Latchmere above a pub in Battersea and landed my first agent who saw me in that production.

Eoin: I don't come from any kind of artistic background so acting was never an obvious choice. I trained and worked as a carpenter for a long time, always feeling there was something missing from my working life. I did a lot of other things too. I joined the merchant navy at 16 and worked as a roadie and a barman. After a while I realised all the people I liked to hang out with best were creative and I started to think maybe I was too.

Vincenzo: I started acting in plays at school in Worcester. My first play was *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and I played several small parts. One was a servant and I had to swear, which, back in the 70's, at age 14, was incredibly daring! I fell in love with acting and performed in lots of school plays thereafter. Later, as teacher said to me; "You shouldn't go to university, you should go to Drama School". It was like someone had turned on a light. I applied to several drama schools and got into LAMDA, where I trained.

What appealed to you most about taking part in Oedipus?

Eoin: Obviously the chance to work with Steven Berkoff was a big attraction. He's an inspiring character and one of the few genuinely extraordinary talents of his generation. I was intrigued by the prospect of being part of an ensemble and of doing physical theatre – both totally new challenges for me.

Vincenzo: Working, once again, with Steven Berkoff and Matt Cullum. Their non-literal and unconventional approach is always exciting.

Christopher: Ten years ago I was doing Theatre Studies A-level and we were taken to see a Steven Berkoff production of 'Messiah' in Salisbury. I was absolutely transfixed and couldn't stop scribbling notes – it just made most things I'd seen on stage seem two dimensional – there was so much information and detail and power and lyricism. It was like entering a totally bizarre new world that you felt you already knew somehow. So I jumped at the chance to work with the man himself. That and also on a superb adaptation of a play that is so timeless –even after 2500 years, and even though you already know what will happen, the final revelation and the climax still have the power to horrify. The dramatic irony throughout is unbearable.

What are you finding interesting about this process? What have you learnt?

Christopher: Every job I take as an actor I learn something from and hopefully improve as a result of it. I have a notebook of things that I find out over the course of a show. I've learnt a lot about minimalism, about how sometimes, if the audience's focus is right, how the smallest movements can be a thousand times more effective than big ones. I've experimented with a lot of new ways of using my voice, and how to better portray attitudes or emotions using my whole body. And also, with the amount of slow-motion movement we do, you need to be constantly engaged to make it work – in the rehearsal room, Steven said: 'Think Kabuki – it's as if every single moment is your last'. I thought that was pretty phenomenal advice.

Eoin: The whole process has been interesting. Having made it through the 'boot camp' of the initial workshops, the rehearsals have given me a chance to work in total unison with other actors. What have I learned? That even after nearly twenty years in the business there's always something new to master.

Practically speaking, what is the most challenging aspect of the rehearsal process?

Vincenzo: Delivering and remembering the beautifully written language of the text. To rise to this, I am going over it again and again, each day. It requires the utmost concentration when we rehearse.

Eoin: The extreme concentration needed to be part of the chorus ... We echo the story as it unfolds, which means we have to be totally tuned into all the main characters' thoughts and feelings *all* of the time. In practical terms, this means listening really, *really* hard. I am working very hard to try and master this.

Christopher: Remembering what we'd done last time you did the scene when it worked! In our rehearsal room, it was a case of throwing loads of ideas around, never doing it the same way twice.

Also the immense concentration required! Thankfully Steven generally chooses to work short rehearsal days. To be locked into such heavy emotions all day - being distraught, being angry, being fearful, being horrified – it takes a lot out of you. I counteract this by listening to some really awful music as soon as I come out of the rehearsal room, just to break the mood. Justin Bieber is pretty horrendous, that usually brings a smile to my face!

What thrills you most about your job and specifically this project?

Antony: You can be playing anyone, anywhere at any one time. The challenge is the most frightening and yet exhilarating experience and even though I feel as though I was thrown in at the deep end of this project with lead boots on, I'm kicking with absurd delirium!

Christopher: Every day is different. Some people would hate the instability and uncertainty of what we do, but I love it. Before I started on Oedipus, I'd spent early January doing a show in Bulgaria's National Theatre, of all places. I remember standing in the wings waiting to come on with a toilet seat around my head, toilet roll all over me, soaking wet with a huge axe in my hand, thinking 'what am I doing, I'm in Bulgaria, I love my job'.

With Oedipus, there's a real culture in the rehearsal room of coming to work to create a work of art. You really feel like you're creating a very special and unusual baby – which I know hasn't been the case for a lot of the actors who work in more commercial theatre. There's a real sense of absolute passion and dedication for the work – which flows from Steve at the top really - about teasing out the excellent bits, about making it work, the joy that comes from having a brilliant idea that brings a section alive and the sense of satisfaction when it starts to flow and you can see something emerging that has a life all of its own.

In rehearsal... (Photos by Helen Warner)



Louise Jameson
(who plays Jocasta)



Simon Merrells
(who plays Oedipus)



Simon Merrells and the ensemble



Christopher Hogben, Antony Ofoegbu and Eoin McCarthy (ensemble)



Steven Berkoff (Director)

Did you know?

Some fascinating facts about the history of the Oedipus myth....

1. The story was well known by the Ancient Greeks. Homer refers to *Oedipus* in both *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*.
 2. The poet **Cinaethon of Sparta** wrote an epic called the ***The Story of Oedipus*** (*Oedipodea*). Though the piece itself has not survived, a few commentaries on the epic have. The story seems to tell of a merged Oedipus and Sphinx story, but details are unclear.
- Aeschylus, an Athenian playwright presented an entire trilogy based upon the Oedipus myth in 467 BC, winning the first prize at the City Dionysia. The First play was ***Laius***, the second was ***Oedipus***, and the third was ***Seven against Thebes***. Only the third play survives, in which Oedipus' sons Eteocles and Polynices kill each other warring over the throne.
 - Sophocles' play *Oedipus the King* (in the original Greek Οἰδίπους τύραννος, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, or "Oedipus the Tyrant") was **first performed in 429 BC** as part of the Annual play competition.
 - Sophocles wrote **three plays** concerned with Oedipus and his family, known as the Theban play cycle. Sophocles did not, however, produce them as a trilogy, starting with *Antigone* in 442 BC, followed by *Oedipus Tyrannus* in 429 BC and finally *Oedipus at Colonus* in 405 BC. Chronologically speaking the plays should run beginning with *Oedipus Tyrannus* and ending with *Antigone*.
 - There have been **numerous adaptations** of *Oedipus Tyrannus* since the Sophocles play, including *Nie Yuan Baoad* (*Retribution on a Sinful Affair*) an adaptation of Oedipus the King that premiered in Taiwan in 1994 by Heibei Bangzi Theatre, a film *Oedipus the King* in 1984, silent film adaptations, an opera by Igor Stravinsky and Jean Cocteau and a satirical Western-themed oratorio by P. D. Q. Bach that follows the adventures of Oedipus Tex ("you may have heard of my brother Rex") in Thebes Gulch!
 - Berkoff himself has written **two versions** of the Oedipus myth. ***Greek***, first produced in 1980 and published in 1982, is a re-telling of the myth complete with plague, sphinx and propheet but Londoner Eddie's (the protagonist) reaction is somewhat different to that of the Greek hero! *Oedipus* was published in 2000 and has been performed once before. This is the first time it has been directed by Berkoff.

The prequel

Before we even begin, know this...

The start of our play, and indeed Sophocles' play, is, unusually, not the beginning of the story. Prior to all of the action in *Oedipus* this is what happens....

King Laius and Queen Jocasta of Thebes learn from *The Oracle at Delphi* that Laius is doomed to be killed by his own son. Laius, horrified by the prophecy, orders a shepherd to kill his baby son. Instead, the shepherd pins the child's feet together and abandons him on a mountainside between Thebes and Corinth. The baby is then rescued by another shepherd and given to the childless King and Queen of Corinth, who name him Oedipus (swollen foot) and raise him as their own.

As a young man, Oedipus hears a rumour that he is an illegitimate child – not the biological son of Polybus and Merope. He confronts them and they tell him he is their son, but Oedipus remains suspicious and decides to consult the Oracle at Delphi. When he asks who his real parents are the oracle seemingly ignores the question saying he is destined to mate with his mother and shed the blood of his father!

So, to avoid this terrible fate Oedipus leaves Corinth, thinking Polybus and Merope are his real parents. The Oracle hasn't specifically told him otherwise so why should he think any different? The oracle simply told him if he kills a man, that man will be his father and if he mates, his mate will be his mother!

At the point where the three roads meet, Oedipus meets a stranger (King Laius – his Father!) who rudely edges his wagon off the road. They argue about who has right of way (an ancient incident of road rage). Oedipus' pride leads him to kill not only Laius, but Laius' entire retinue, apart from the groom who he allows to escape.

Further along the road he meets the Sphinx, who has been terrorising Thebes, killing and eating anyone unable to answer the riddle "Which creature in the morning goes on four feet, at noon on two, and in the evening upon three?"

Oedipus (who is often depicted to walk with a stick because of his lame foot) answers, correctly, 'A Man' - he crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and walks with a cane in old age. Bested at last, the Sphinx throws herself from her high rock and dies. Oedipus's reward for beating the Sphinx is the kingship of Thebes and the hand of the Queen, Jocasta, in marriage. Thus, after unwittingly killing his father and marrying his mother, Oedipus fulfils the Delphic Oracle's Prophecy.

Years later our play begins...

Synopsis...



As our play begins, Oedipus has been King of Thebes for many years, living with his loving wife Jocasta by whom he has had two sons and two daughters.

The Chorus (who throughout the play have multiple roles as commentators and crowd) and the priests of Thebes cry out to Oedipus for salvation from a terrible plague sent by the gods.



Oedipus sends Creon, his wife Jocasta's brother to the oracle at Delphi to find out what can be done and Creon returns saying the city must expel the '*splinter in its flesh*', '*The criminal who shed the precious blood/Of great King Laius, slaughtered like a dog.*' Oedipus searches for Laius' murderer and swears to exile the man responsible for it, even if it should be someone close to him.

The blind prophet, Tiresias, is called to aid Oedipus in his search; the prophet warns Oedipus that he should not continue his investigation. The prophet reveals that Oedipus himself is the man he is looking for. Oedipus is enraged and accuses Creon of plotting to overthrow him as he believes Tiresias is on league with Creon.



?

In what ways can you relate the story and themes of Oedipus to modern life?



Oedipus reveals the prophet's proclamation to Jocasta – that he is Laius' murderer! Jocasta tells him that she can prove he is not the killer as an Oracle predicted '*Laius would meet his fate/ At the hands of our own precious child, no less!*' and because Laius was killed by bandits, the oracle has been proven wrong – thus Tiresias can also be proven wrong. This only serves to worry Oedipus further as he recalls the man he killed at the places where the 3 roads meet.

Oedipus calls for Laius' former servant, a shepherd, the only surviving witness of the murder, who fled the city when Oedipus became king to avoid being the one to reveal the truth. A messenger from Corinth also arrives to inform Oedipus of the death of Polybus, whom Oedipus still believes is his real father. Jocasta and Oedipus are relieved that there is no longer any chance of Oedipus fulfilling his prophecy. At this point the messenger informs him that he was in fact adopted and his real parentage is unknown. Laius' former servant, the shepherd, and is immediately recognised as the messenger who gave him the infant.



In the subsequent discussions between Oedipus, Jocasta, the shepherd and the messenger, Jocasta is the first to realise the truth...

Oedipus is horrified to discover he has fulfilled his terrible prophecy and leaves crying that he will defy the gods. A second messenger arrives and reveals that Jocasta has hanged herself and Oedipus, upon discovering her body, blinds himself with the golden brooch on her dress. The play ends with Oedipus, blinded and distraught entrusting his children to Creon and declaring his intent to leave in exile. Creon, as the new king, banishes Oedipus, finally 'cleansing' the city.



The key characters...

Defiant

Oedipus

Willful

Proud

Street Wise

Played by Simon
Merrells



Passionate

"Oedipus is a hero". Do
you agree? Why? Discuss
this with your peers?

Intelligent

Jocasta

Powerful

Slightly vain



Self assured

Played by Louise
Jameson

Brother of
Jocasta

Creon

Businesslike



Outspoken

Played by
Vincenzo Nicoli

Assured

Is Creon loyal? Or
is he manipulating
the situation?

A blind man
who sees all

Wise



Tiresias

Honest

Played by Ian
Drysdale

Greek theatre

Why do you think this story has stood the test of time?

How *Oedipus* was staged the first time round

The plays of Ancient Greece were always performed in outdoor theatres. Early Greek theatres were probably little more than open areas in city centres or next to hillsides where the audience, standing or sitting, could watch and listen to the chorus singing about the exploits of a god or hero. From the late 6th century BC to the 4th and 3rd centuries BC, there was a gradual evolution towards more elaborate theatre structures, but the basic layout of the Greek theatre remained the same.

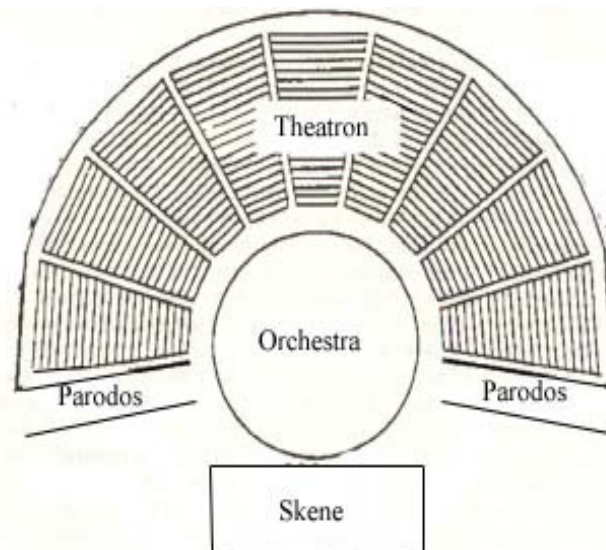
The front row of the Theatron was reserved for the priests, particularly those of Dionysus (from whose rituals theatre developed). In the second rows, VIPs and Greek officials would be seated. Everyone else would sit towards the back, but the higher your social class the closer to the front you were likely to be.

Plays would be performed almost in a festival style. There were many festivals, a notable one being The City Dionysia. The plays would run for a whole day and at the end of the day, the judges would award a prize to the writer of the best play. Sophocles won several times.

Actors were always male and played both male and female parts. There were no women allowed on the stage. Actors wore distinctive costumes and masks to indicate character, as the audience was always quite far away – even those at the front!

The Chorus was a group of actors that chanted and sang as one (like today's Choirs). They commented on the action, told the audience about the characters and the chorus leader could speak to the actors as part of the play. They often represented the common people in the play. The chorus (like the actors) would be all male.

The Greek Stage (bird's eye view)



The Greek Stage

Early stages were wooden platforms; later, they would be made from stone and a *Mekhane* (a kind of wooden crane) was used if actors needed to be hoisted to play gods or flying mythological beings.

Skene - This is where we get the word 'scene' from. A hut/building at the back of the stage, it represented different buildings throughout the play and acted as dressing rooms and entrances and exits for the actors. Sophocles is credited with inventing scenery by painting the outside of the skene building! There was also access to the roof of the skene from behind, so that actors playing gods and other characters could appear on the roof, if needed.

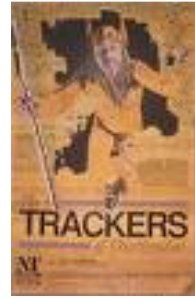
The Orchestra – This the lower area in front of the stage (very different to the modern day "Orchestra pit"). The orchestra (literally, "dancing space") was normally circular. It was a level space where the chorus would dance, sing, and interact with the actors who were on the stage near the skene. Because plays were originally part of the feast of Dionysus, there would often be an altar on this part of the stage and hymns would be sung here. The earliest orchestras were simply made of hard earth, but in the Classical period, some orchestras began to be paved with marble and other materials. The orchestra of the theatre of Dionysus in Athens was about 60 feet in diameter.

Theatron - The theatron (literally, "viewing-place") is where the spectators sat. The theatron was usually part of hillside overlooking the orchestra, and often wrapped around a large portion of the orchestra (see the diagram above). Spectators in the fifth century BC probably sat on cushions or boards that they brought with them from home (much like modern concerts in parks!), but by the fourth century the theatron of many Greek theatres had marble seats.

The Parodoi (literally, "passageways") are the paths by which the chorus and some actors (such as those representing messengers or people returning from abroad) made their entrances and exits. The audience also used them to enter and exit the theatre before and after the performance.

Tragedy, Comedy, and the Satyrs

Tragedy and comedy were viewed as completely separate genres, and no plays ever merged aspects of the two. Satyr plays dealt with the mythological subject matter of the tragedies, but in a purely comedic manner. Fragments of a Sophocles' satyr play *Ichneutae* (*Tracking Satyrs*), still remain. This was developed into a full production at the national theatre in 1990 by Tony Robinson entitled *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus*.



The comedy and tragedy masks have their origin in the theatre of ancient Greece. The masks were used to show the emotions of the characters in a play, and also to allow actors to switch between roles and play characters of a different gender.

Physical Theatre

What do you think of when you hear the term 'Physical Theatre'?

Physical theatre is a unique dramatic form in which the performers focus upon the movement of their bodies to create meaning. Physical theatre is often visually powerful, and sometimes relies upon the power of symbolism to achieve dramatic effect. For example, a group of performers stand in a circle and surround an individual performer. This might symbolise 'isolation'.

Whilst the previous statement is accurate, there is no all encompassing definition of *Physical Theatre*. It can take on many forms and work within a range of theatrical genres. Some types of Physical Theatre include...

- Contemporary dance
- Stylised movement to tell a story
- Tableaux
- Physical Comedy
- Clowning
- Acrobatics



Where does it originate from?

Physical Theatre is thought to originate from a variety of places. Because it has now become a widely defined art form, its specific influences are hard to pin down. Mime and clowning are thought to have had a major part in igniting the development of what we now call Physical Theatre and Steven Berkoff was actually trained at a mime and clowning school in Paris called; L'École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq.

If we go back even further, Commedia Dell Arte and the emergence of 'stock' character (in terms of physicality) is probably the earliest influence that can be attributed to Physical Theatre as we know it today.

Who does it now?

There are several of Physical Theatre Companies in the UK and all over the world. Below are some of the most well known companies in the UK. It's important to remember though, that each of these companies has their own particular style and the term 'physical theatre' is very much an umbrella description.



Clockwise from Top Left;
Hoipolloi, Horse and Bamboo,
DV8 and Theatre de Complicite.



Iambic Pentameter

'I can barely shape the maniacs words/ Between my lips.'

Oedipus is written in iambic pentameter, a rhythmic form of language most often associated with Shakespeare. Berkoff says in his introduction 'I have chosen to attempt my version in iambic pentameter for the main characters since I feel they must have the sweep, the flow of verse.' Shakespeare's aristocratic, highborn characters would speak in this way, so perhaps it is particularly appropriate for *Oedipus the King*! Below is a simple explanation of the iambic rhythm.

An iambic foot is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. We could write the rhythm like this:

da	DUM
----	-----

A line of iambic pentameter is five iambic feet in a row:

da	DUM	da	DUM	da	DUM	da	DUM	da	DUM
----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----	----	-----

We can notate this with a '˘' mark representing an unstressed syllable and a '/' mark representing a stressed syllable. In this notation a line of iambic pentameter would look like this:

˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

The following line from John Keats' ode *To Autumn* is a straightforward example:

"To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells"

We can notate the scansion of this as follows:

˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	˘	/
To	swell	the	gourd,	and	plump	the	ha-	zel	shells

We can mark the divisions between feet with a |, and the caesura (a pause) with a double vertical bar ||.

˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ / ˘ /

To swell | the gourd, || And plump | the ha- | zel shells

The Translation of E.F. Watling

OEDIPUS:

I grieve for you, my children. Believe me, I know
All that you desire of me, all that you suffer;
And while you suffer, none suffers more than I.
You have your several griefs, each for himself;
But my heart bears the weight of my own, and yours
And all my people's sorrows. I am not asleep.
I weep; and walk through endless ways of thought.
But I have not been idle; one thing I have already done .
The only thing that promised hope. My kinsman
Creon, the son of Menoeceus, has been sent
To the Pythian house of Apollo, to learn what act
Or word of mine could help you. This is the day
I reckoned he should return. It troubles me
That he is not already here. But when he comes,
Whatever the god requires, upon my honour
It shall be done



The Translation of Robert Fagles

OEDIPUS:

My children
I pity you. I see . how could I fail to see
what longings bring you here? Well I know
you are sick to death, all of you,
but sick as you are, not one is sick as I.
Your pain strikes each of you alone, each
in the confines of himself, no other. But my spirit
grieves for the city, for myself and all of you.
I wasn't asleep, dreaming. You haven't wakened me .
I've wept through the nights, you must know that,
groping, laboring over many paths of thought.
After a painful search I found one cure:
I acted at once. I sent Creon
My wife's own brother, to Delphi .
Apollo the Prophet's oracle . to learn
what I might do or say to save our city.
Today's the day. When I count the days gone by
it torments me . what is he doing?
Strange, he's late, he's gone too long.
But once he returns, then, then I'll be a traitor
if I do not do all the god makes clear.

**Three translations of lines 58 – 77
of Sophocles' King Oedipus**

**How does Berkoff's version differ
from the other two well known
translations?**

The Translation of Steven Berkoff

OEDIPUS:

Grim news, my children... yet not new to me.
From my own bed I heard your nightly cries,
I could not pull the sweet blanket of sleep
Over my head, nor sink into oblivion
Since each new cry would pierce my heart.
You did not wake a dozing man, my friends!
Our city's cursed with some noxious malaise
Yet none so cursed and sick as I, who bleed
For you, the city, and myself.
So tortured in mind and soul, my wife Jocasta,
My great Queen and I did clutch at straws,
Anything to find some answers here,
Come on! Let's put some strong wind in our sail.
We'll navigate these troubled seas my friend
And find safe harbour soon, I promise you...
Yes, easy to mouth metaphors I know,
They're only words to put some stiffness in our
spine,
Some oars to row us when we are becalmed.
So now I've sent for Creon, my Queen's own
brother
To sniff the ground where great Apollo roams
At Delphi, home of oracles, he'll find some clues,
Who knows, some angry god's bearing a grudge,
Or someone here forgot to pay his dues.
No matter what the cost we'll make it up,
OK? Appease the gods, wipe clean the slate.
When Creon comes, the instant he arrives,
Whatever the demands are from the boss
I'll to it straight, no fear, no compromise,
Or 'Can we please negotiate the deal,'
Renege on words that have been stamped and
sealed.
It's peace we want, security for our state!

The Oedipus Challenge: Role of the Designer

One of Michael Vale's greatest challenges is turning up to rehearsal and finding out how the play has progressed and how his designs will have progressed with it.

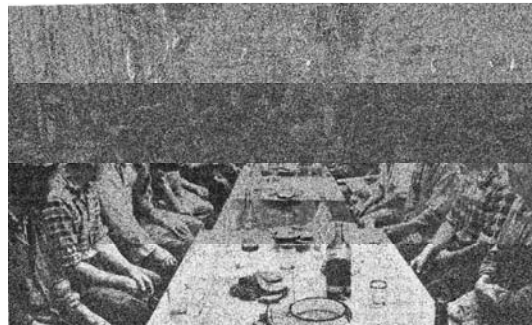
It's a different way of designing. Many designers produce a design at the beginning of the process and expect everyone to fit in to that idea. When working alongside Berkoff the design process evolves as much as the play does. With one original idea of the chorus being in traditional dress, then the idea that the cast wear togas with elements of modern dress on top. And now the dress code has evolved in a new and exciting way and all characters including the chorus are now in modern European peasant dress, inspired by the photograph below, and all the chorus are wearing flat caps. Will it evolve again from the time of this pack going to print, to the actual production? Wait and see!



Idea one



Idea two



Idea three

"I think it's important that actors feel happy in their costume", he says. "I've brought in a set of costumes and let them choose costumes that they would feel comfortable in, that match their character."



Vale discusses Jocasta's costume design with Louise Jameson



Since leaving the Theatre Design Course at the Riverside Studios (now the Motley Design Course), Michael has designed the sets and costumes for over 130 theatre and opera productions both in the UK and abroad. Companies he has worked with include: The Royal Shakespeare Company; The Royal National Theatre; Manchester Royal Exchange; West Yorkshire Playhouse; The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield; Bristol Old Vic; The Royal Opera House; English National Opera; Glyndebourne Festival Opera; English Touring Opera; Almeida Opera; Antwerp de Vlaamse Opera and Los Angeles Opera. He also works as a director. Michael was the designer for Kneehigh's 'Cymbeline' and 'Rapunzel'.

It is the first time Michael has designed for Berkoff. So how does he feel about it?

“There is always some kind of challenge when working with a director for the first time, which is the case in this production. It always takes a while for both of you to find the best way to express and exchange ideas in pursuit of a common language. The path is rarely straightforward and there is no rule book for this.”



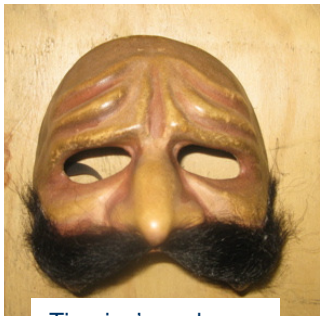
The path is rarely straightforward: Michael Vale in discussion with Assistant Director Matt Cullum



1st messenger mask

As is traditional, masks are being used for the production but only for the external characters, such as the shepherd. The chorus will remain unmasked but when external characters come out of the ensemble they will appear in a mask to remove them from the ensemble/chorus. Oedipus appears in a mask at the point he gouges out his eyes, but otherwise he remains unmasked.

Some masks are being made, some are borrowed and used as they are and some are adapted.



Tiresias' mask

Question:

If you were directing Oedipus, what decision would you make about masks?

For the set design Berkoff drew Vale to the work of Salvadore Dali.

“I am sure it has something to do with the way in which the earth and the sky evoke something of a classical Greek landscape but expressed in a non-naturalistic, even psychological, manner.” says Michael.

The Greek landscape has been combined with traditional Greek theatre elements to create large door frames in the set.

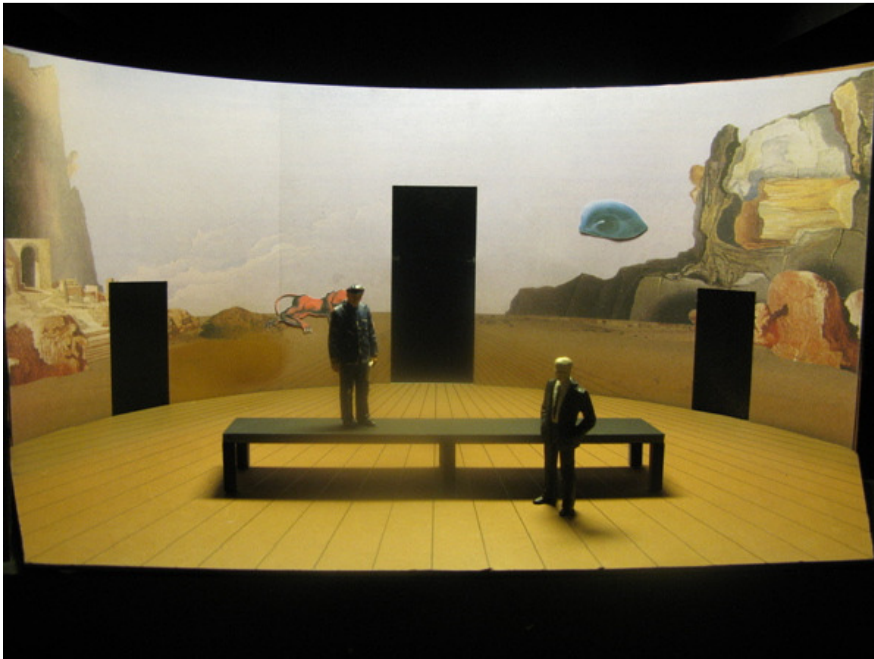
“Ancient Greek theatre stage always had an upstage central entrance, often through large doors, often representing the doors of a palace and thereby emphasising its importance. We were sure this would be as useful now as it was then.”

Vale’s design also focuses a great deal on the use of one long table.

“The table is in the first instance a focal point for a meeting/conference to discuss and attempt to solve the situation which the play opens with, i.e. the plague and famine afflicting the city. It also serves as an excellent stage/platform for the story to be played out on in an expressionistic way.”

But why the raked stage?

“A raked stage is often very useful in lifting the actors a little towards the audience. It also helps in the dynamic of upstage and downstage positions and grouping. Sometimes it is a response to the 'flatness' of the original stage in its relationship to the auditorium seating.”



Set design for Oedipus – can you work out which painting inspired Berkoff and Vale?

Activities for before the show...

1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS...

Before you even think about working with and dramatising the text, you should think about what goes before. In this production, a great deal happens before even a word of the text is uttered. Why do you think this is the case?

What do you think is important to communicate to the audience before Oedipus' opening speech? How could you do this?

Read Oedipus's opening statement, as follows.

*Children, children, flesh of my flesh, blood of my blood,
Speak your hearts to me that overflow.
You cling around my feet like creeping vines,
As if I could protect you from your woes.
The city groans like some poor wounded beast
That I'd pick up and stroke and heal its wounds,
And could I not do so much more for you.
With mine own eyes I came to get the facts,
No messengers to tell me second hand,
While I sit back behind my desk and nod,
And scratch my head and pass a few more laws.
I'm out here on the streets and face to face,
So speak old greyhair, you are the wise man here,
And fill my ears with your dread tales of grief.
Your eyes have shrunk to sunken holes, poor man.
So let me, King, chief and head of state,
Blow away those ragged clouds of fear
With one great puff of regal power, so
Tell me man, let's hear the rattle of your throat!*

This is the first dialogue we hear from the main character and so gives us lots of clues and information about what is to come. Think about the following questions:

- What sort of language does Oedipus use?
- What are the key words/phrases? Which words interest or stand out to you?

- What does this extract tell us about Oedipus?
- What does this extract tell us about the story? The themes?

Now....

- Establish a minimum of three key facts from the extract.
- In groups of 3-5, find an interesting, theatrical way to present those facts back to the rest of the class.

Extension...

In the same groups, find an interesting way to present the entire extract theatrically. How could you present Oedipus here? Could you develop/add anything? How could you use the chorus? How could you make it physical? Think about your audience. Everyone must be involved in some way.

2. A PLAY IN A FLASH!

Using the synopsis at the beginning of this pack, in groups of 5/6, create between 8/10 tableaux to tell the story succinctly. Then...

- Move each tableau physically – bring the happening to life.
- Add one/two lines of dialogue to each
- Add narration
- Present your 'condensed' Oedipus plays back to the group (it can last no longer than 3 minutes)

3. THE WORLD OF THE PLAY

You have now had a very brief introduction to *Oedipus*. As a large group, you can now begin to explore the world of this play. *Oedipus* is an ensemble piece (this is a group of performers who all contribute to a single effect).

- Begin to walk around the room – remaining focused – and 'keeping the space alive' (if you see an empty space, walk into it). This, in itself, should begin to create some energy in the room.
- Working as an ensemble (and without communicating) create different shapes; a circle, a square, the number 4 etc.
- Using the same idea as the last exercise but you will now be creating places/events, 'The Houses of Parliament', 'The Empire State Building' etc. You will either 'see it' or 'be it' (key aspects of storytelling).
- Now see/be the following (related to Oedipus):

Places

- The plagued city of Thebes
- The place where the three roads meet
- Oedipus the King's living quarters

Events

- Oedipus meeting the Prophet
- Jocasta learning that she is Oedipus' mother
- Oedipus' banishment from the city

Make sure you think about the fact that this play is set in Greece. How does this change your approach? Try creating a tableau which shows first the British then Greek examples of the following:

- Celebration
- Mourning
- Eating
- Drinking
- Worshipping

What does this force you to think about? How is your interpretation altered?

Discuss what you discovered about the world of Oedipus. Which words spring to mind when describing it? Can you explain what you picture in your imagination?

Further activities for the classroom

THE CHORUS

What are the similarities and difference in the use of Sophocles's and Berkoff's chorus, to those of Brecht's?

Excerpt one:

SINGER: AS GRUSHA VAKHNADZE WALKED THE
HIGHWAYS OF GRUSINIA
LEAVING TOWN
HEADING FOR THE MOUNTAINS OF THE NORTH
SHE SANG A SONG
AND SHE BOUGHT MILK.

MUSICIANS: HOW WILL THIS PERSON ESCAPE
THE BLOODHOUNDS AND THE TRAPPERS?
TOWARDS THE BARE MOUNTAINS SHE WALKED

Excerpt two:

SINGER: WHY SO HAPPY?
WHY SO HAPPY TO BE HEADING HOME?

MUSICIANS: BECAUSE THE HELPLESS CHILD
 HAS SMILED ITS WAY
 TO SAFETY AND NEW PARENTS
 I'M HAPPY.
 AND I AM HAPPY
 TO BE FREE AGAIN.

SINGER: AND WHY SO SAD?

MUSICIANS: BECAUSE I'M FREE AND SINGLE
 I AM SAD.
 AS IF I HAVE BEEN ROBBED
 AS IF I'M POORER THAN BEFORE.
 ALONG THE HIGHWAY SHE WALKED

(Caucasian Chalk Circle, translated by Alistair Beaton)

Read through the following script excerpt. How can the chorus be used most beneficially in this scene? How many ways can you find to stage it? How can this piece be physicalised?

CHORUS:
'Poor man accursed
Kills his father
His creator,
Returns to the womb,
The womb of his maker
Where he exits
He enters
His progeny accursed.'

OEDIPUS:
'Why, why must this be, why choose me!'

CHORUS:
You were not chosen,
It is luck,
A game of dice.
Some are accursed,
Some born to suffer,
Some live long lives,
Some children die,
Some are afflicted,
Some, perfect blooms,
Some are born rich,
Some born to poor,
Who is to say?

Now try using the chorus physically during Oedipus' lines as well.

OEDIPUS:

Certain things are best left in the head,
Bad seeds will always find a fertile earth.
Words once out, spread like the canker,
They need no compost, just foul men's breath.

JOCASTA:

But me! Cannot you trust your words to me?

OEDIPUS:

Oh yes, my darling, for I will need your strength
To help me climb from out this hellish pit.
So share with me the story I shall tell.
My father Polybus and my mother Merope
Were the foundation of my youthful life.
They showered me with love unquenchable,
Through them I grew into the city's foremost man.
One day a loudmouthed drunk was overheard
To say that I was not King Polybus' son!
His royal blood did not course through my veins.
I fretted all that day but dared to ask...
'Tell me, tell me the truth of who I am,
Am I the true and only issue of your love?'
Yes! Yes! and Yes! again they said,
Each yes a hammer blow upon my doubts.
But still a tiny worm of doubt remained
For me to kill, to stamp on for all days.
I fled to Delphi, to the Oracle.
'Tell me what I need to know,' I cried,
'I beg you lay the truth down at my feet.'

CHORUS:

'Poor man accursed
Kills his father
His creator,
Returns to the womb,
The womb of his maker
Where he exits
He enters
His progeny accursed.'

OEDIPUS:

'Why, why must this be, why choose me!'

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Some live long lives,
Some children die,
Some are afflicted,
Some, perfect blooms,
Some are born rich,
Some born to poor,
Who is to say?

OEDIPUS:

Why, why must this be, what have I done?
Determined to avoid this destiny I fled,
A year did pass before I stopped my feet,
Before I dared to shake the dust from off my feet.
I stood, the very spot where three roads meet,
And as I stopped and wondered which to take,
I heard a shout... 'Out of my way!'
Imperious, like a blow it stung my ears.
I turned to face the owner of that sound,
A man like you described, tall, silver-haired,
A horse-drawn chariot, stomped and reared.
The groom, he tried to run me off the road.
I threw him to the ground with his own whip
With which he tried to inflict on me his master's wrath.
Silence - only the panting horses and this man
With silver hair who stares, and even now
Recall the way he fixed me with his eye,
As if to fit a piece of jigsaw into place.
'No, don't, old man, I do not wish to hurt,'
But he, rising, raises a double-pointed club
And brings it crashing down upon my head.
A glancing blow but then I felt a flow
Of blood, a trickle curling down my cheeks.
Silence - he smiles, his guards, now they smile too.
Why, why don't you go, we've traded one for one,
But no, a second time, he lifts his arm!
Oh no! Not twice, old man... I broke his skull
With one swing of my stick he fell,
And where he fell... there... he... lay... down... dead!