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Dublin Theatre Festival 2015: blinded by the light in an excellent 'Oedipus'

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Wayne Jordan's new version of Sophocles' Oedipus

Rating: ★★★★★

In the beleaguered city of Thebes, what the Gods decree will be, no matter what men do to make it otherwise. Here a king must find the killer of a king, who slew his own father and slept with his mother, and render justice to the Gods to save his city from plague. In Wayne Jordan's new version of Sophocles' "Oedipus," focus shifts from themes of incest and the unfathomable nature of the Gods to exploring the old axiom "know thyself." Or rather, not knowing thyself. Blindness isn't just confined to blind prophets. Oedipus and his wife Jocasta suffer from it too. As does the Chorus, each choosing to ignore what lies right before their eyes. As secrets and self-delusions are shattered, self-knowledge comes at a terrible price where the blind follow the blind in a brave and powerful new production.

With re-imaginings of "Oedipus" ranging from the forgettable to the sublime, Jordan steps into

decidedly risky territory. Like African playwright, Ola Rotimi's excellent re-imagining "The Gods Are Not To Blame," Jordan fashions "Oedipus" after his own design and strikes a rich vein. Jordan's sharp script and astute direction transposes the action to a modern context and places responsibility squarely on human shoulders. Rather than dress it up, he dresses it down, asking questions about who, and how, we are and who and how we follow.

Inspired by Yeats' desire to make "Oedipus" accessible to everybody, Jordan renders "Oedipus" into language both simple and direct. Minimalism and simplicity also define staging, lighting and costumes. It's all pared back in an excellent set design by Cíarán O'Melia, with wooden chairs scattered in a circle around a table, the stage looking like a committee meeting in a local community hall. The community gather in the shape of a Chorus, shifting uneasily about, like a game of musical chairs, as they plead with Oedipus for salvation.

While it all looks sparse and simple, its sparseness has depth and its simplicity disguises a monumental rigour. Choral music by composer, musical director and sound designer Tom Lane is richly layered, embodying the cries of the mob with a liturgical intensity excellently performed by a twelve strong chorus comprised of Karen Adriff, Muiris Crowley, Hilda Fay, Rachel Gleeson, Esosa Ighodaro, Nicola Kavanagh, Damien Kearney, Ger Kelly, Pat Nolan, Helen Norton, Robert O'Connor and Shane O'Reilly. With a wonderful ensemble performance from Barry John O'Connor as Oedipus, Fiona Bell as Jocasta, Mark Huberman as Creon, Peter Gowen as Tiresias, Malcom Adams as The Shepherd and Ronan Leahy as The Messenger, Jordan crafts something powerfully evocative, striving for emotional directness.

If Jordan's "Oedipus" feels at times less like a new version and more like a simplification, it only reflects Jordan's striving for purity. Granted, it loses some of the original's poetic richness, which won't appeal to everyone's taste. But there's a trade-off here, and the directness and simplicity of Jordan's pared back production is well worth the price. For Jordan's fresh, new version confirms that when everything is stripped down, "Oedipus" still has something relevant to say, can still take your breath away and still packs a pretty powerful punch.

"Oedipus" by Wayne Jordan runs at [The Abbey Theatre](#) as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival until October 31st

For information on dates, times and tickets visit [Dublin Theatre Festival](#) or [The Abbey Theatre](#)



Chris O'Rourke
Theatre Examiner

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