



Scottish Opera's Oedipus Rex: A Guide from Director Roxana Haines

Welcome to this world of rituals, Greek theatre, the creativity of Igor Stravinsky and the surrealism of Jean Cocteau, librettist of this extraordinary piece. In joining us tonight, you are playing an important role, transforming it into a living, breathing performance. Thank you for being here.

As you enter the museum gallery, you'll see our principal characters, including Creon, Jocasta, Oedipus and Tiresias, as if they are permanent exhibits alongside the other objects in the gallery – the Buddha, the stag, the lighthouse. Feel free to weave amongst them. We have split the characters in this story into three societal groups: the Gods (who are mentioned in the original piece, but not usually seen on stage), Royals, and Society. You can stand upstairs and watch the story from on high like the Gods, or you can be inside the drama and mingle with the Society and the Royals on the ground floor. A full who's who is below.

We have added upper voices to the chorus for this production – a first for this piece – bringing the female voice into a story where women have not traditionally had agency, both in the historical context of Ancient Greek theatre, where the actors were all male, and in the context of the opera itself, where the only female character Stravinsky uses is silenced by the men around her.

Our Speaker, who will guide you through the story tonight, is played as a cleaner in the museum. Much like Ben Stiller's security guard in the 2006 film *Night at the Museum*, she watches the place come to life each night and invites us in because she wants to share the chaos, the blood and the drama. She is your key to following the story. The narration is in English, and the singing is in Latin. Stravinsky intended the music to wash over the audience but if you would like to follow along more closely, a copy of the libretto is available. Otherwise, please feel free to embrace Stravinsky and Cocteau's storytelling style!

My advice is to be open and be curious. I hope this story provides you with a space for reflection and hope.

Roxana Haines, Director

The Gods

Zeus

The ruler of the gods, Zeus (Jupiter to the Romans) is a son of the Titans Cronus and Rhea. After a ferocious struggle for power with his brothers, he became supreme god of heaven and earth, as well as god of the sky, lightning, fate and kingship.

Poseidon

Poseidon (Neptune to the Romans) is a brother of Zeus. He is the god of the seas and waters, as well as of horses and earthquakes.

Apollo

Apollo is the god of music, poetry, light, prophecy and medicine. He is also the god of herds and crops – the patron of shepherds and herdsmen. His twin sister is Artemis.

Artemis

The goddess Artemis (Diana to the Romans) is a daughter of Leto and Zeus. As goddess of the hunt, Artemis lives in the forest with her companions, the nymphs. She is also the goddess of forests, hills, wild animals, chastity, childbirth and the moon.

Athena

The goddess Athena (Minerva to the Romans) was born from the skull of Zeus. She is the goddess of wisdom, war, heroism and crafts. Tiresias accidentally came across the goddess Athena as she was bathing, and he was struck blind. To compensate him for his loss, the goddess made him a great seer (psychic).

Ares

Ares (Mars to the Romans) is the god of war. He embodies physicality, brutality and bloodlust. This contrasts with his sister Athena who wins wars with strategy and intelligence.

Aphrodite

Aphrodite (Venus to the Romans) is the goddess of love and fertility. Aphrodite is a daughter of Zeus and is said to have been born from the sea after her father's genitals were removed and thrown into the sea foam.

Dionysus

Dionysus (Bacchus to the Romans) was originally known as the god of fertility. Later, he came to be known chiefly as the god of wine and pleasure, as well as drunkenness, parties and theatre. A son of Zeus he journeys far and wide. Everywhere he goes he plants vines and teaches the people viticulture.

The Royals

Oedipus

Oedipus is the son of Queen Jocasta and King Laius. When he was born an oracle prophesied that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother, so his father ordered a Shepherd to take him into the mountains and kill him. Instead, the Shepherd gave him to a Messenger from Corinth who delivered him to the King and Queen there.

They brought Oedipus up as their own. Twenty years later, after hearing the prophecy about himself and none the wiser about his true parents, Oedipus leaves Corinth to protect them and escape his horrific fate. He encounters a man at a crossroads who refuses to make room to let him pass. A fight breaks out and Oedipus kills the man (who he much later discovers to be King Laius). Oedipus continues onwards towards Thebes, defeating a sphynx who has taken hold of the city following the recent death of their King.

As a reward for conquering the Sphynx, he claims the throne and the hand of the widowed Queen Jocasta. They have four children together and many years pass... thus begins the story of Oedipus Rex.

Tiresias

The blind prophet Tiresias is seven generations old and a fixture in several Greek dramas based around Thebes. Many believe he receives information by interpreting smoke, communing with the dead and listening to birdsong. Tiresias's prophecies are often cryptic but never wrong.

Jocasta

Queen Jocasta was the wife of King Laius and is now the wife of Oedipus. She does not know that Oedipus is her son. She has four children with Oedipus: Antigone, Eteocles, Polynices and Ismene.

Creon

Creon is the brother of Jocasta. In Sophocles' next Theban play, Antigone, Creon becomes King of Thebes after Oedipus' sons, Eteocles and Polynices, kill each other.

The Society

Shepherd

The only surviving witness of the attack on King Laius by Oedipus – also, a witness to Oedipus' abandonment on the mountain as an infant.

Messenger

A man from Corinth who delivers the message that Polybus, who raised Oedipus as his son, has died. Decades earlier, he had found Oedipus abandoned on the mountain.

The People

The chorus of Oedipus Rex represents the people of Thebes, many of whom are suffering from the plague. They always seem to know things they shouldn't. They comment on the action from a distance, obsessively repeating key words such as 'trivium' – 'crossroads' – as Jocasta insists that oracles lie. In the end, the chorus narrates the downfall of Jocasta and Oedipus, describing the violence taking place offstage.

A sphynx is a legendary beast with the head and breasts of a woman, the body of a lioness, and the wings of an eagle. The Sphynx was perched on a hill, devouring the Thebans and travellers one by one if they could not solve her riddle. Oedipus correctly solved the riddle, thus defeating her. According to the most widely regarded version of the riddle, the Sphynx asks 'what is the creature that walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three in the evening?'

Can you solve it?