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Oedipus the King, Mama!

(Falcon Theater, Burbank; 130 seats; \$40 top) A Troubadour Theater Company presentation of a musical in one act. Directed by Matt Walker. Choreography, Ameenah Kaplan. Musical director, Eric Heinly.

Oedipus - Matt Walker

Jocasta - Beth Kennedy

Young Elvis - James Snyder

Creon - Rick Batalla

By [BOB VERINI](#)

Improv/sketch/musical troupe the Troubadours has grafted many a contempo songbook onto such classic tales as "As U2 Like It" and "It's a Stevie Wonderful Life." But there's no more snappy synergy than using Elvis' music to tell Oedipus' story: two Kings with prodigious appetites, demanding that the women who bore them "Love Me Tender." If you're foolish enough to pass up the dazzling "Oedipus the King, Mama!," you ain't nothin' but a hound dog and you ain't no friend of mine.

The frank carnality, maudlin sentiment and anguished self-doubt dominating the Elvis jukebox are perfectly suited to the King of Thebes (here shifted to the Valley), forced by destiny and circumstance to confront his sins. A couple of numbers are sung verbatim, but most lyrics are twisted in a kind of "Forbidden Burbank," bringing out delightful new subtext in tunes from "Teddy Bear" to "Roustabout."

Amusingly, Oedipus' legendary pierced ankles are used to explain Elvis' oddly lunging poses, gleefully embodied by helmer-topliner Matt Walker as a vision from the Vegas white-jumpsuit period. Walker leers like Groucho and grouches like Lear, nuzzling at the breast of Mama Jocasta (the incomparable Beth Kennedy in Tammy Wynette wig, rubber mammaries at the ready).

Two other Troubie Elvises (Elvi?) are on hand. Mike Sulprizio offers glimpses of the graying junk-food junkie, while flashbacks to the early days feature James Snyder, an impressive slice of beefcake wielding his Broadway "Cry-Baby" charisma and comic chops. Had the ancient Greeks realized the fun of restaging Laius' murder or Oedipus' mountainside abandonment (swaddled baby treated as football), maybe they'd have varied those Sophoclean monologues some.

But the monologues are there, however truncated and interrupted by zaniness. The Troubies know they need to peg their antics to the original narrative for maximum hilarity. Their comedy keeps spiraling away into riffs on today's headlines and modern absurdity, but it's always and decisively brought back by the troupe's respect for the underlying material. It's an amazing act.

Equally impressive are the circus and musical comedy skills making any Troubie tuner an immersive total-theater experience. Ameenah Kaplan's choreography stunningly takes us from the ancient world to ours and back again, accompanied by Eric Heinly's foursome, the hottest rock/rockabilly/blues combo this side of the Sunset Strip.

Don't dare leave immediately after Oedipus' blind stagger into exile -- over the bodies of the center-section patrons, natch -- lest you miss an epilogue tribute to another King, itself worth the admission price. **With:** Joseph Keane, James Michael Lambert, Andy Lopez, Jill Morrison, Breanna Pine, Jen Seifert, Mike Sulprizio, Danielle Thorpe, Lisa Valenzuela, Kimberly Wood.

Sets, Mike Jespersen; costumes, Sharon McGunigle; lighting, Jeremy Pivnick; sound, Robert Ramirez; stage manager, Corey Womack. Opened, reviewed Aug. 21, 2009. Runs through Sept. 27. Running time: 1 HOUR, 45 MIN.

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