

Entertainment

THEATER REVIEW: Funny if not twisted 'Oedipus'

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By Lisa Dupuy

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It's a mystery. The Troubadour Theatre Company players should be mega-stars. They should have their own TV show. I shouldn't even be able to get tickets to see them — they're that good. Luckily, you can see them in beautiful downtown Burbank.

Not only are they funny down to their DNA, but they're good singers, dancers, writers and storytellers. And they are brave provocateurs, messing with members of the audience without having any idea where a prank will lead. (Note to self: Do NOT fall asleep in the audience. You will be ruthlessly teased.)

More than just entertaining, these guys are fascinating to watch perform their unique brand of physical comedy. The whole thing makes you feel good for a couple of hours.

For those of you who haven't heard of them, the Troubies, as they're affectionately called, are a group of artists that writes and performs their own mash-ups of classic theater and pop music.

Past shows have been "Much A Doobie Brothers About Nothing," "A Christmas Carol King," "OthE.L.O." — you get the idea. They perform not only at the Falcon Theatre, but all over Southern California, the United States and even in Australia.

And they are good souls too, as evidenced by the fact that their not-for-profit troupe does many of these performances for charity.

The show currently running, "Oedipus the King, Mama!" does not disappoint.

In fact, it's one of their best. It's got all the gags we've come to love, the silly reworked songs (this time by Elvis Presley) and of course the audience interaction.

But I particularly like this one because it sticks to the original story, which is a juicy one, pretty faithfully.

Everyone knows the outcome of Oedipus — the Grecian king comes to realize that he's killed his father and slept with his mother.

But the power of the play is in his slow realization of this fact. We, as listeners, begin to realize the horror of it as well.



Young Elvis (James Snyder) and his adoring fans in the Troubadour Theater Company's "Oedipus the King, Mama!" at the Falcon Theatre. (Photo by Chelsea Sutton)

But of course, when things get bad, the Troubies make us howl with laughter and squirm in our seats. They wring every possible lewd joke out of the mother-son love thing.

In the end, this play even has a touch of poignancy, which I've never experienced in a Troubadour production. Oedipus pulls on a few heartstrings as he croons to his dead wife/mother "Are You Lonesome Tonight?" and her ghost sings back "Love Me Tender."

Incidentally, even though the Troubadours market themselves to "theatergoers of any age" this is not exactly child-friendly material.

Matt Walker, artistic director for the Troubies as well as director of "Oedipus," plays one of three incarnations of Elvis/Oedipus.

He's got a crazy knee-jerking, pelvic-thrusting walk that never grows old and an amazing ability to get things back on track when they've gone horribly and hilariously astray.

The other two Elvises represent the King as a hunky young sexpot (played by the dreamy James Snyder), and as a chunky old has-been (played by the also dreamy Mike Sulprizio).

The younger Elvis/Oedipus was necessary for the flashbacks but I wasn't clear on the reason for the presence of the old Elvis/Oedipus. Just for laughs, I guess. Always reason enough for the Troubies.

The portrayal of Jocasta, Oedipus's wife/mother, is pure Beth Kennedy. Kennedy has funniness oozing out of her pores. She clearly loves wearing the brilliantly designed costume (by Sharon McGunigle) that makes her look like a cross between English singer-songwriter Amy Winehouse and Marie Antoinette, had she lived long enough to be a "cougar."

She exudes a Southern brand of sexuality and seems always on the verge of cracking up but keeps it together to deliver her lines.

Naturally, there is a Greek chorus, and they are used to great effect. They build tension with well-placed sound effects and break into song and dance at the drop of a Grecian headpiece.

The live band is awesome. They must know every pop song ever written. Music Director Eric Heinly and his band give great musical cues and the players respond. It's as if the band and the actors are of one mind.

Going to see the Troubies at the Falcon is a unique experience from beginning to end. Even the guy who helps you park your car is funny. The performance you see may be very different from the one I saw.

But I can guarantee irreverent and unpredictable antics. That's a lot of pressure on a performer to be consistently funny and unpredictable.

But the Troubies always live up to it. In fact, I think they thrive on it. Come ready to laugh and maybe be laughed at.

It's always fresh, always funny and in the case of "Oedipus the King, Mama!" kind of twisted.

LISA DUPUY is a freelance writer and a fan of pop music, classical theater and laughter. She suggests a couple of new show titles to the Troubies — "Don Juan Bon Jovi," "Taming of the Cher" and "Cat Stevens on a Hot Tin Roof." LISA DUPUY is a freelance writer and a fan of pop music, classical theater and

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