



ARTS & CULTURE

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Burning Coal's 'The Greeks' speaks to today's politics and greed

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Tragic king Oedipus, made famous by Sophocles' three plays 2,500 years ago, still speaks today. Ian Finley's modern adaptation, "The Greeks," gets creative staging by Burning Coal Theatre Company at CAM Raleigh. Employing compact dialogue and contemporary language, these three one-acts offer universal themes that easily reflect current headlines.

Sophocles urged audiences to consider doing the right thing when life dealt them terrible blows. After Oedipus learns he's committed patricide and incest, he blinds himself and wanders as a beggar until death. His daughter Antigone faithfully accompanies him instead of joining family members fighting for his throne. Antigone later buries her rebel brother, Polynices, against her uncle Creon's revengeful decree, paying for it with her life.

Finley's spare, clear writing makes these plays live by emphasizing clashes over religious law, political power and rampant greed that still rage today. Director Alex Tobey's brisk staging has a vibrant immediacy but also a timeless aura.

ADVERTISING



"Oedipus" plays out in the museum's vast main hall, suitable to the king's press conference in Thebes. "Oedipus at Colonus" shifts to a lower gallery where audience members sit at tables with snacks and drinks, present at sacred ritual. "Antigone" moves to the small basement gallery, its tomb-like atmosphere appropriate for Antigone's fate.

Sean Wellington brings a confident calm to Oedipus at first, replaced by dawning dread at his unintended actions, and finally by cranky irritation in fending off schemers wanting his blessing before he dies. Mark Filiaci's Creon starts out snidely officious but ends helplessly witnessing his newfound power crumble. George Jack makes blind prophet Tiresias darkly witty when confronting Oedipus, while Benjamin Apple impresses in three nicely delineated roles: nervous shepherd, sullen Polynices and loving Haemon, Antigone's intended.

Ellie Barone's fervent outlier Antigone shines; Chloe Apple's timid Ismene, Antigone's sister, amuses; and Freyja Sindemark's desperately lying Jocasta, Oedipus' wife, manages a rather one-note part. Special credit goes to Jonathan Able and Jess Jones as Chorus I and II, their pointed commentary elucidating throughout.

Not all the staging works. The Colonus act is distracting and awkward, with poor sightlines. The third act space is uncomfortably cramped with backless stools for seating. But Finley and Tobey's gripping vision overrides any flaws.

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DETAILS

What: "The Greeks," presented by Burning Coal Theatre Company

Where: Contemporary Art Museum Raleigh, 409 W. Martin St., Raleigh

When: 7 p.m. June 16-17, 23-24; 2 p.m. June 18, 25

Tickets: \$25 for all 3 plays (\$10 if seen separately)

Info: 919-834-4001 or burningcoal.org

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