

# World Theatre's "Oedipus Rex"

IT'S an open question how many people nowadays would think of Freud and how many of Sophocles in any free-association chain starting with Oedipus. But (for the record) it is a fact that Sophocles wrote about Oedipus quite some time before Freud linked that name with one of his most important discoveries about the human mind, and anyone who knows anything about drama will tell you that the Theban plays are still good theatre. A year or two ago the BBC produced the best-known of them, *Oedipus Rex*, in its *World Theatre*, and a transcription of this is to be heard from YC stations during the coming fortnight. The first broadcast will be from 2YC at 8.30 p.m. on Sunday, August 8.

*Oedipus Rex* is the story of a man who kills his father and marries his mother—a disaster which more than one primitive people regarded as the most appalling that can happen to a man. This disaster, of which Oedipus has been warned, comes upon him through his efforts to escape it. After he has become ruler of the land whose king he had killed and whose queen he had married—not knowing they were his parents—the gods send a plague

which brings the story to its crisis—and there the play begins. Oedipus is a good king and the father of a grateful people. Told of the crime that pollutes the land he rules, and commanded by Apollo to cleanse Thebes of the murder of her king, he searches for the criminal and makes the terrible discovery that he is searching for himself.

The version of *Oedipus Rex* which listeners are to hear was translated into English in verse form by two Americans, Dudley Pitts and Robert Fitzgerald. It conveys in a most moving way the essential nobility of Oedipus and captures and sustains the spirit of this great play. Principal parts are taken by the late Sir Godfrey Tearle (Oedipus), Fay Compton (Iocasta), Leon Quartermaine (a priest), Cecil Truncer (Teiresias), and James McKechnie (Creon). Music specially composed and conducted by Anthony Bernard makes an important contribution to the production, which is by Raymond Raikes.

When the play was first broadcast in the BBC Third Programme the critic J. C. Trewin wrote in the *English Listener* that Greek tragedy, in the modern theatre, looks uncomfortable—the conventions and formalism trouble us. But on the air, he said, we could summon for ourselves the sun and the marble and the occasion that should be



CECIL TRUNCER

"Sophocles wrote about Oedipus quite some time before Freud"



BBC photograph

FAY COMPTON

## The Greek Way of Life

IMAGINE yourself back in time in some 2500 years. It's a mild spring day in Athens, and you're one of a crowd of about 20,000 in the theatre of Dionysus. You notice that the stage is very wide but quite shallow. The actors stand quite still and even at a

larger than life; and there was no need for the squeamish to turn their heads from the sight of Oedipus in ultimate grief. Of the *World Theatre* production he said: "The broadcast revival had unflinching nobility. Godfrey Tearle, as the haunted king, and Fay Compton as Iocasta, were always on the height." And he described the Pitts and Fitzgerald translation as a "strong and speakable" one which avoided such a mouthful as "divine prognosticators."

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