

# OBERLIN Theater News

Oberlin College  
Theater and Dance Program  
67 North Main Street  
Oberlin, Ohio 44074-1191

November 27, 1995  
For Immediate Release

Media contact:  
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8:00 p.m.  
Friday, Dec. 8  
Saturday, Dec. 9  
2:00 p.m.  
Sunday, Dec. 10

Hall Auditorium  
Located on Rte. 58 next  
door to the Oberlin Inn.

## Tickets:

\$8 general public  
\$6 Senior Citizens  
\$6 Oberlin College  
staff  
\$4 children under 18  
\$4 Oberlin College  
students

Reserved seating in  
Hall Auditorium.

## Central

### Ticket Service

24-hour reservation  
line, (216) 775-8169  
Located in the lobby of Hall  
Auditorium, 67 N. Main St.  
between the Oberlin Inn  
and the Allen Art Museum.  
Open 12 to 5 p.m.  
Monday - Friday.

## THE GOSPEL AT COLONUS TO UNITE MUSIC AND TRAGEDY AT OBERLIN COLLEGE

Guest Artist Tony Sias featured as Preacher Oedipus

Photos and complimentary media tickets available: 216-775-8171

OBERLIN, OH—The Oberlin College Theater and Dance Program will present *The Gospel at Colonus*; an Afrocentric adaptation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, conceived and adapted by Lee Breuer and composed by Bob Telson. Under the direction of Associate Professor of Theater and African-American Studies, Caroline Jackson Smith, the production will feature Cleveland actor Tony Sias in the role of Preacher Oedipus.

*The Gospel at Colonus* tells the final chapter of the Oedipus story through the setting of a Pentecostal church service. Gospel music, directed by Cathy Elliott ('97), and Afro-Christian spiritual dance, choreographed by Anna Glass ('96) and Funmilayo Jack ('97), are combined with preaching and narrative. Several characters are realized through double portrayal, with singing and narrative versions, such as Preacher Oedipus (Sias) and Singer Oedipus (Alexander Elisa, '99). *The San Francisco Chronicle* writes that the Pentecostal telling amplifies "the tension and cathartic releases of Oedipus' painful but redemptive course. The music and the tragedy enlarge each other, in a cumulative crescendo." The company of singer/actors is complemented by a live music ensemble.

The play opens with Oedipus in isolated, blind exile. On the last day of his life, Oedipus enters Colonus, a city barred to him, yet ordained by the gods as his final resting place. "Here I stand a wanderer/ On life's journey," he sings, "Won't you give me shelter/ All I need is a resting place." His utter dislocation is the result of a lifelong, god-given curse that has led him to unwittingly marry his mother and kill his father, and fathering his own siblings. Oedipus is sent on his dislocated path after learning of the incest, witnessing his mother's suicide, and finally gouging out his own eyes with guilt and remorse. *The Gospel at Colonus* witnesses a gradual sanctification process, where Oedipus' determined perseverance through the trials life has thrown at him transform him from pariah to hero.

Oedipus and daughters Antigone and Ismene are realized through several representations. Sias, Keisha Smith ('96), and Brian Salter ('98) play Preacher Oedipus, Evangelist Antigone, and Pastor Theseus, narrating the drama in a church setting. First-year students

Elisa, Claudine Henderson and Monique Mozee are featured in the singing roles of Oedipus, Antigone and Ismene. Singers and dancers together comprise the Greek chorus, propelling the drama with constant spirituality and tying *The Gospel at Colonus* to its roots of participatory, ritual-based tragedy.

Sias's Preacher Oedipus leads the Pentecostal congregation with sermons and call-and-response, allowing worshippers to testify as participants in the Greek story. Sias was recently featured as guest artist in *Fences* at Cuyahoga Community College. Other recent accomplishments include creating the role of Ndolo in the world premiere of *Jungle Rot* at the Cleveland Playhouse and appearing in *Oak and Ivy* and *Black Eagles* at Karamu House. Sias is currently Dramatic Services Coordinator for the Center for Families and Children.

Jackson Smith was drawn to the production by its vision of transcendence. "Its echoes of people searching for place and a reprieve of suffering are very appealing to African American people, for whom the displacement of slavery is not far off." The pursuit of a resting place, and the wish for a better life for one's children are other universal themes she found resonant in *The Gospel at Colonus*. Jackson Smith is also excited about the collaborative aspect of the project; in addition to Elliott, Glass, and Jack, she is working with several members of the Oberlin community, including Assistant Director Brenda Grier Miller, who has an extensive background in the Pentecostal church. The company also includes Oberlin residents Louis "Skip" Pollard and Raheem Todd as the Choragus and Polyneices. Professor of Classics Tom Van Nortwick and Assistant Professor of Religion A. G. Miller are the academic advisors for *The Gospel at Colonus*.

Playwright Breuer aims to recreate catharsis through the marriage of Greek tragedy and music. "The Pentecostal church is perhaps the one institution that is truly, classically cathartic in America," he noted, and can be used to strip away intellectualizations of the theater, to "go back to the beginnings, when most dramatic parts were said in unison, resurrecting the true experience of catharsis... a certain kind of ecstatic point where you have to dance is probably the beginning of the Greek chorus." Oedipus' salvation is then a release for the audience participating in the music and ceremony.

Breuer's vision is echoed in the play's reception; *Newsweek* calls *The Gospel at Colonus* "one of the most marvelous shows of the decade, based on one of the most inspired ideas of any time...a triumph of reconciliation, bringing together black and white, pagan and Christian, ancient and modern in a sunburst of joy that seems to touch the secret heart of civilization itself."

Production and design team includes Set Designer and Associate Professor of Theater Michael Grube, Costume Designer and Associate Professor of Theater Chris Flaharty, Lighting designer Erin Herlihy ('96), Assistant Director Sibi Lawson ('96), Production Stage Manager Julianne Keenan ('98), and Assistant Stage Managers Sati Gibson ('99) and Odette Gregory ('96).

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