



[Oedipussy](#) at [Liverpool Playhouse](#)

Reviewed by [Emma Short](#) March 2012

Potent and provocative – one would expect nothing less when breathing fresh blood into one of the most famous tragedies of the early civilisations. The offbeat European quartet [Spymonkey](#) comprised of Stephen Kreiss, Toby Park, Aitor Basauri and Petra Massey, and their collaboration with Kneehigh's Director Emma Rice and writer Carl Grose have given Sophocles' ***Oedipus***

a literal rebirth through the medium of comedic farce and physical theatre. Teetering on the edge of the absurd as most tragedies do, the extra stride taken by this little performance throws Spymonkey head, breast and heels first into the depths of the conceptually uncanny.

Oedipussy is a 'tragicomedy'. If I'm honest its quite unlike anything I've seen before and what a rib ticklingly terrific experience. The menagerie of mayhem incorporated all the very best of the conventions at the heart of British comedy and pop culture. We were served up a delicate smattering of smuttery in the footsteps of Carry On capers; imaginative interpretations of travel, dances, anecdotes and slipping of wigs that the Monty Python boys, Morecambe and Wise and the two Ronnies would tip their metaphorical hats to; alongside the sultry Jocasta and Sphinx bringing a taste of Austin Powers to the mix and even elements reminiscent of The Mighty Boosh, oh and not to forget the 70's spandex influence of Bowie-esque solos and costume. Sound interesting?! I've not even got to the unicycle riding pederast King, the yet untold back story of Chrisipus or the Cirque du Soleil inspired Oracle at Delphi, I kid you not!

To catch this roller coaster of a retelling at the **Liverpool Playhouse**, the *only surviving* working theatre in Merseyside from the Victorian Era was a real treat indeed. Just like the transformation the story underwent to bring the ancient alive through modern references, the

Playhouse

does much the same as it stands proud and tall in the middle of Williamson Square. The exterior of the Grade II listed Grecian style building boasts beautifully symmetrical pillars, balconies, pediment, cornices and Corinthian pilasters – the perfect venue for a Greek Classic! As it sits in all its beautiful and ornate abstraction next to the 1968 glass barrelled addition, I take a moment to appreciate just how this cylindrical wonder manages to balance quite so elegantly, in structural terms and aesthetically against its elder counterpart.

Inside is just as suited to the show. Under the dark turquoise & gold detailed proscenium arch of the theatre stage, a structure of 6 white pillars representing the columns of ancient Greece sits for the performance thanks to set designer Michael Vale. These pillared fascias made from light weight and therefore moveable wood sit against a white metal framework structure of steps, temporarily hiding them from view. The performance once it commences does so upon, between and around the veritable climbing frame which is the anchor for focus on stage, quite literally in fact as some of the costumes – namely the ravelling and unravelling togas are attached to it which provide for wonderfully farcical shenanigans throughout. This provides, in very practical terms, a multifaceted and variable level performance space which the cast use in every manner conceivable.



Soymonkey