

Outcast at the Gate

Scene Synopsis

Prologue. (Electronic)

The voices of the Furies are heard from every direction, telling of Oedipus, former king of Thebes, who has unknowingly killed his father and married his mother; and how, after he himself uncovers his crime, Oedipus blinds himself and is forced by his sons to leave Thebes, a blind beggar, supported by his daughter Antigone.

4'

Scene 1. Arrival at Colonus

Oedipus, bass
Antigone, soprano
Stranger, tenor

12'

Decades later, the old blind Oedipus and his daughter Antigone arrive at a verdant grove, immediately sensing that this is a sacred place. A stranger enters and insists that they leave, for the grove is dedicated to the wrathful Furies. The refugees ask where they are and the stranger tells them that they have arrived at Colonus, near Athens. Oedipus declares that he will never leave, for the oracles have proclaimed that this sacred grove will be his final home and that his presence will be a blessing for Athens. The stranger leaves to tell the elders of the city, and Oedipus prays, thanking the Furies for the “great consummation” he knows is at hand—his miraculous death.

Scene 2. The Elders and the Refugees

Oedipus, bass
Antigone, soprano
Chorus Leader, baritone
Chorus, SATB

12'

The elders of Colonus arrive, searching for the imposter who has violated the grove. Oedipus comes forward and is forced to reveal who he is. He is ordered out, but both

Antigone and then Oedipus plead for refuge and the elders agree to send for Theseus, the King of Athens.

Scene 3. Ismene Scene

Oedipus, bass
Antigone, soprano
Ismene, mezzo-soprano
Chorus Leader, baritone
Chorus, SATB

18'

The remaining daughter of Oedipus, Ismene, arrives with dreadful news from Thebes: the old man's younger son has deposed and exiled his brother Polynices, who is now preparing to invade his homeland. But the oracle also declares that Oedipus now has power over the fate of Thebes, and that all the combatants will ask for his aid. The elders tell Oedipus that he must purify himself for violating the grove. Ismene leaves to perform the needed rites, and the elders force Oedipus to recount his dreadful story.

Scene 4. Theseus Scene

Oedipus, bass
Theseus, baritone
Chorus Leader, baritone
Chorus, SATB
(Antigone, silent)

11'

Theseus arrives, and Oedipus tells him of the gift he is bringing—great blessings for Athens after his death and burial. But Oedipus also warns Theseus that the Thebans will try to force Theseus to return him to Thebes. Theseus doubts this, saying that the two cities are friends, but Oedipus reminds him of the transience of all things. Moved, Theseus declares Oedipus a citizen of Athens and invites him to return with him to his palace, but Oedipus says he must remain at Colonus. Theseus departs promising his protection, and the refugees remain as the chorus sing of the beauty of Colonus.

Scene 5: Creon Scene

Oedipus, bass
Creon, baritone
Theseus, baritone
Antigone, soprano
Ismene, mezzo-soprano
Chorus Leader, baritone
Chorus, SATB

18'

The leader of Thebes, Creon, arrives and tries to persuade Oedipus to return to Thebes, but Oedipus refuses. Creon seizes Antigone and his soldiers take her off. Creon then seizes Oedipus, saying that he has also already taken his other daughter, Ismene. The elders try to block Creon and call for the return of the king. Theseus arrives and saves Oedipus, then leading his army against the invading Thebans. The chorus describes the battle they are witnessing.

Theseus returns with Antigone and Ismene, who are reunited with Oedipus. Oedipus approaches Theseus to embrace him in thanks, but draws back, saying that he is too polluted to touch the king: only his daughters can share his agony. Then Theseus tells Oedipus that a stranger has asked to be allowed to speak to him. Oedipus immediately knows that it is his hated son, Polynices, coming to ask for aid against Eteocles. At first Oedipus refuses to see his son, but Antigone finally persuades him. The chorus sings of the sadness of old age.

Scene 6. Polynices Scene

Oedipus, bass
Polynices, tenor
Antigone, soprano
Chorus Leader, baritone
(Ismene, silent)
(Chorus, silent)

12'

Polynices comes and pleads for help from Oedipus. Oedipus refuses to respond but the leader of the elders begs him to speak. Oedipus then curses Polynices and his brother: his sons will kill each other before the walls of Thebes. Polynices leaves, asking his sisters to see to his funeral.

Scene 7. The Death of Oedipus.

Oedipus, bass
Theseus, baritone
Chorus Leader, baritone
Chorus, SATB
(Antigone, silent)
(Ismene, silent)

22'

A tremendous storm breaks; the elders are terrified, and Oedipus declares that it is the sign of his approaching death. He asks for Theseus, who arrives as the storm dies down. Oedipus tells Theseus of the coming miracle: Oedipus himself will lead the king and his daughters to where he must die, but that final moment must be witnessed by Theseus alone in order to fulfill the promised blessings.

Oedipus leads Theseus and his daughters up the rocky slope at the rear of the stage as the chorus prays for him. Antigone and Ismene clothe Oedipus in clean garments, and he bids them farewell. Suddenly, voices are heard: it is the God, calling for Oedipus to come and join them. Oedipus asks Theseus to guard Antigone and Ismene, and asks his daughters to leave. When they are gone, Theseus watches as Oedipus disappears into emptiness. The chorus sings of the miracle of Oedipus's passing.

Scene 8. Threnody

Antigone, soprano
Ismene, mezzo-soprano
Theseus, baritone
Chorus Leader, baritone
Chorus, SATB

6'

Antigone and Ismene reappear, mourning Oedipus's death. Theseus arrives and Antigone asks to be sent to Thebes to try to save her brothers. Theseus agrees, the two sisters leave, and then the chorus reminds us solemnly that all this story must come to its appointed end.

Total Timing: 1'55"