

Francis Sanders

The season that I am creating is titled Family Ties. All of the plays in my season are all linked with the theme of family. The relationships with those in our families are the ones that can give us the most joy or cause us the most pain. It is our family ties that assist us in becoming the people we are. All of the plays have a combination of tragedy and comedy in a down to earth applicable kind of way and the audience finds out things about each of the families that perhaps if they had a choice they would not share with non family members. My season looks at six plays that are all centered on family relationships.

The first play in my season is Oedipus. Oedipus is an ancient story of family dysfunction and the skeletons we prefer to keep in the closet. Sophocles wrote this play from ancient Greek myth and in the process became one of the earliest and best known dramatists. Oedipus struggles with who he is and to whom he belongs. He does not believe that Polybus and his wife Merope are his real parents. He asks the Oracle for help and instead the Oracle tells him that he will “*mate with [his] own mother, and shed/with [his] own hands the blood of [his] own sire*”. What transpires after that is an amazing story of more family betrayal and loss.

The second play in my season is Hamlet. Oedipus took his own father's life while Hamlet is being haunted by the ghost of his own father. Hamlet's father's ghost convinces him to kill King Claudius, the king's brother who has married his mother Gertrude. Hamlet struggles with what he is being asked to do. The ghost of his father and his dealings with it are not beneficial for Hamlet and yet he cannot escape it. Even in death his father has a strong grasp on his son. The ghost of the king urges his son Hamlet to be kind to Gertrude but reminding him to kill Claudius.

(Act 3 Scene 4) Hamlet is in my opinion the logical progression in my season after Oedipus.

The stories have similarities in tone and therefore work well at the beginning of the season.

Hedda Gabler is the third play in my season. This play by Henrik Ibsen and is set in Norway.

The main character in the play is Hedda Gabler. She is the daughter of an aristocrat and is a difficult woman to live with and please. She has returned from a six month honeymoon and is not really in love with the man she has just married. She begins to try to unravel a relationship between her husband academic rival whom she previously loved and the woman he is currently in a relationship with. Hedda Gabler has been called the female Hamlet. She struggles with loyalty and love and she too pays a heavy price for her deeds.

Death of a Salesman is the fourth play in the season. Arthur Miller's tale of an American family and their dysfunction continues my season. The Loman family is dealing with Willy's inability to be a successful salesman and the broken dreams for their sons. Willy dreams about the times when things were happier in the family only to be reminded of his failures. Willy Loman is the everyman who is much like the main characters in our other plays, even though they were either royalty or well bred and a part of polite society. The story of Willy Loman and his family is again tragic in the sense that often families don't listen to each other and the consequences can be tragic.

The fifth production in my season is Trifles. Trifles was written by Susan Glaspell in 1916. It is based on the murder of John Hossack in Des Moines. The play isn't so much about Mr. and Mrs. Wright the victim of the murder and his wife who has been accused, but the relationships between Sheriff Peters, Lewis Hale a neighbor and their wives. The men especially govern this time period and the standards of how men and women related to each other are convinced that

Mrs. Wright has committed this crime and don't need to look for any evidence to the contrary.

Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Wright on the other hand look for small bits, the things the men would consider "trifles" or not important to actually solve the case. Like the other plays in my season it is the relationships with in the families that make this and the others plays work.

My final play of the season is August: Osage County. August: Osage County is a Tony and Pulitzer Prize winning play by Tracy Letts. The story set in Oklahoma is around the middle class Weston family. The family gathers at their home when the father, Beverly mysteriously disappears and it later found dead in a lake. Violet Weston is joined at her home by her three daughters, her sister and the family members that come with them for the funeral. The family reunion is a scene for the inevitable disaster and tragedy. What follows is sharp dialogue in which the family simultaneously supports and assaults each other. The family in this play needs each other and often can't stand each other. The dynamic makes for very good theater and as seen in comparison with the other plays in my season family dynamics and dysfunction is something we have been wrestling with since the very beginning.

The plays in my season deal with the collapse of family and the aftermath. The station of the families isn't important, what is key is how easily things can fall apart regardless of whether the family is well of or not.

References

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