

A Family Affair

SITI Company takes a stab at *Antigone*

By [Gerry Visco](#)



SITI's *Antigone* by Michal Daniel

Let me ask you a question. What would you do if your daddy killed his own daddy and then fucked his mommy by mistake? OK, he didn't know they were flesh and blood, but that's rather careless, don't you think?

Then what if dear old dad and his own mom—your grandmother—had you and three other kids. After discovering incest ain't best, mom ties a noose around her neck and dad pokes out his eyes with a piece of mom's bling. You and sis stay on with dad, but your brothers all kill each other while trying to take over the family business (ruling Thebes). Your shithhead uncle, now King, deems one of the boys a traitor and denies him a burial. That's where you step in. You may be a girl, but your name is *Antigone* and you'll defy even a king to bury your brother. You're Oedipus' kid and you're a chick with a mission. Your uncle is pissed and sentences you to life in a cave without a morsel of food. Like mother like daughter—you take matters into your own hands and hang yourself. When your uncle finally realizes he's made a mistake, it's too late and your fiancé, his son, kills himself and then his wife kills herself too. That's what I love about Greek tragedy—it's way over the top and chock-full of murder, suicide and heartache. The uncle may still be king, but he's one sorry asshole.

Antigone is the title character of Sophocles' masterpiece, performed umpteen times for the last 2,500 years. Writers like Euripides, Bertolt Brecht, Jean Anouilh, Cocteau, Athol Fugard and Seamus Heaney liked the play so much that they each penned their own version. The play has been extolled by a very diverse group of smitten fans ranging from Nelson Mandela, who read it in prison, to the Nazis. Another admirer was Irish dramaturge and playwright Jocelyn Clarke, who no doubt woke up one morning saying, "Yo, that *Antigone* play's got a damned good story line. I got

nothing to lose—lemme give it a shot!" But, as Clarke recently confided on a phone call from Dublin, rewriting *Antigone* was daunting. "Who the fuck are you to write this?" I thought, but he went ahead anyway.

Clarke's starkly contemporary version will have its world premiere at Dance Theater Workshop on Oct. 28. The director is the controversial and innovative Anne Bogart, Artistic Director of SITI Company, which she founded in 1992 with Japanese director Tadashi Suzuki. Until now, SITI has been mostly a touring company playing at international festivals and performance venues around the country, but during the upcoming year it will be in residence at the Dance Theater Workshop, producing *Antigone* this fall and, in the spring, a four-week revival of SITI's resident playwright Charles L. Mee's critically acclaimed *bobrauschenbergamerica*, described as a scrappy, ambitious and weird road trip through the American landscape, complete with a manic pizza delivery guy, square dancing, a roller girl and a human martini, all infused by Rauschenberg's rollicking improvisational style.

Back to their upcoming production, Bogart tells me over a bowl of butternut squash soup, "I don't usually do things like *Antigone*. But it's a story with a lot of resonance and is shockingly relevant to our present cultural and historic moment." A professor at Columbia University where she runs the graduate directing program, Bogart's a gutsy original who's put on a dozens of productions exploring the edge. "To be a great director, you need to be able to juggle a lot, be open to a lot of different influences happening at once, letting accidents happen because they create energy, let people do what they do, allow their tastes and talents be present," Bogart confides.

A Navy brat who started directing plays at the age of 8, Bogart incorporates dance, art and music into her shows, describing them as "visceral."

Bogart had never seen *Antigone* produced and wasn't particularly interested in the play. "I always wondered why all the most brilliant philosophers, thinkers and classicists said it's the greatest play ever written. I thought 'Why? It's just this girl screaming at her stupid uncle.'" She quickly changed her mind when she read Clarke's version. "It's so straight-forward and direct. It doesn't feel ancient at all. Once I got into it, I realized it is the greatest play ever written."

And as for the performance, we'll just have to wait and see. But when you go see the new and improved version of *Antigone*, don't you dare kill the messenger.

>Antigone

Oct. 28 through Nov. 1, Dance Theater Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. betw. 7th & 8th Aves), 212-924-0077; times vary, \$20 and up