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A CurtainUp Review

The Seven

By Amanda Cooper

He's too soft to be hard Running naked through the forest like the avant-garde --- -Right Hand to King Eteocles, regarding his brother Polynices in *The Seven*



Jamiel Dobson and Benton Greene in *The Seven* (Photo: Carol Rosegg)

If you were stranded on a desert island, which CD would you rather have along for the journey, Liz Phair's indie-rock breakout *Exile in Guyville*, or her first pop-rock album, *Liz Phair?* I find merit in both, but if I were to ever be in the odd and unfortunate position of being deserted, yet able to choose a Liz Phair album for my conveniently available discman, I'd have to go with *Exile* . . . Likewise, given a choice about which Will Power piece of theater I would not bring along the lush and quite satisfying *The Seven* but the older, rawer *Flow* in which he himself performed.

The Seven is an adaptation of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, a lesser-known sequel to the Oedipus tragedy. Taking place a generation later, this play focuses on the continuation of Oedipus' curse, and his declaration that his two sons would grow to become rivals. As in every Greek tragedy there is no twist so that the drama is in seeing the inevitable events unfold.

Will Power brings a modern hip-hop flavor to this Greek world, with many of the characters portrayed in extremes. Oedipus himself is pretty pimped out, and the citizens of the town of Thebes are all dressed like caricatures from the Street. The one character without hip-hop culture qualities, the Right Hand to the king of Thebes, is a middle-aged white man in a suit, with little dancing ability. The two who escape these stereotypes are the feuding brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, played respectively by Benton Greene and Jamiel Dobson. Both do an admirable job and, like the rest of the performers, are fully committed to both the story and the music.

The bright colors and costumes, mixed with the extreme characterizations, the flashing lights, and very specific stage movements and choreography all make for a very polished overall production. The effect is similar to a pop song with a roster of producers and writers. And though I often crave the easy listening of a well-made pop song, it sometimes leaves me wondering if all of the producing may have injured the original energy of the music.

Will Power has come up through the on-the-fringe Hip-Hop Theater scene. *Flow*, which was a solo show, had an Off-Broadway run that was extended multiple times before launching on a national tour. As a performer he is filled with loads of happy energy. As a writer he is fast, clever, and flippant. Together, these qualities created a manic, non-stop good time in *Flow*. In *The Seven*, Power has stepped off stage, and is credited as writer and composer and though the performers are more than stage-worthy, I missed Power's loose-limbed character interpretations and beaming, infectious smile.

None of this is to say that the artistic collaborators in this show are not top-notch. I have been a fan of director Jo Bonney's since *Living Out* a few years back. And I studied Bill T. Jones in college, for crying out loud. But with all this stellar talent, the relaxed, shared-experience vibe prevalent in good hip-hop theater is M.I.A. There are compensations in the end, such as the handling of the expected fighting ending so that it is still surprisingly dramatic and sad as the seven at the gates of Thebes create an unforgettable theatrical moment. But is this adaptation of classic plays the direction Will Power would like to bring his art? Perhaps when he combines the originality and cowboy spirit of *Flow* with the sophistication of *The Seven*, he will be a step closer to creating that perfect choice to take on that desert island.

The Seven

Written and Composed by Will Power

Directed by Jo Bonney

Choreography by Bill T. Jones

Performed by: Amber Efe, Charles Turner, Postell Pringle, Pearl Sun, Shawtane Monroe Bowen, Uzo Aduba, Manuel Herrera, Edwin Lee Gibson, Benton Greene, Jamiel Dobson, Tom Nelis and Flaco Navaja

Set Design by Richard Hoover

Costume Design by Emilio Sosa

Sound Design by Darron L West

Lighting Design by David Weiner

Image Design by Kelly Bray, Reese Hicks, Richard Hoover, Frank Luna and Robin Silvestri

Running time two hours, with one intermission

New York Theatre Workshop, 79 East 4th Street, between Second and Bowery 212 239 6200 www.nytw.org

From 1/18/06; opening 2/12/06

Tuesdays at 7pm, Wednesdays- Saturdays at 8pm, Saturdays at 3pm, Sunday at 2pm and 7pm.

Tickets \$60, Sunday evenings, \$20.

Reviewed by **Amanda Cooper** based on a February 10, 2006 performance.

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