

## Williams festival goes on tour

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The production of “Orpheus Descending” that audiences saw during the last two years of the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival will tour three cities in Mississippi later this winter as the guest of the state’s cultural leaders.

The show, co-produced with The Infinite Theatre and directed by Nick Potenzieri, will play Columbus, Oxford, and Jackson, Feb 23 - March 3, 2012. “Orpheus Descending” takes place in the Mississippi Delta, where the acclaimed playwright lived until age 7.

The Mississippi Division of Tourism recently became a sponsor of the Provincetown festival as a way to reach a new audience, according to a press release from the festival. Arts, cultural and political leaders were so impressed with “Orpheus” last fall that a coalition of supporters formed and raised funds for the Infinite Theatre and 20 people involved to create the tour.

“We in Mississippi have a special capacity to understand the people in this play,” said Sarah McCullough, manager of Cultural and Heritage Development for Mississippi Tourism.

All three productions will take place in churches because the production is conceived as a morality play to be performed in a house of worship. The imagery in the text comes not only from the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus, but from Williams’ Episcopal upbringing in small-town Mississippi, according to the release.

The story focuses on handsome, guitar-playing Val Xavier as he tries to turn his back on corruption. He arrives mysteriously in a small-town dry goods store run by an Italian immigrant named Lady Torrance, who is married to an old, dying man but desires Val. She takes Val in, his arrival stirs up the townspeople, and a local misfit haunts the store. “Broken, brazen and defiant, these three tragic heroes are the ultimate outsiders,” the festival description says. “Yet their ordinary weaknesses reveal extraordinary zeal.”

In Columbus, the production is hosted by the Tennessee Williams Tribute, an annual celebration of the playwright led by Brenda Caradine that has presented several shows first done at the Provincetown festival. “Orpheus” is the largest. The Oxford host is Yoknapatawpha Arts Council, and in Jackson, it’s the Greater Jackson Arts Council.

“The outpouring of support has been phenomenal,” Jef Hall-Flavin, executive director of the Provincetown festival said in the release. “I couldn’t be more pleased at how this stunning production is connecting people through the genius of our great American playwright.”

Meanwhile, local officials are already readying the 7th Annual Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, which is due to take place Thursday, Sept. 20 through Sunday, Sept. 23 with the theme of “Tennessee Williams And Music.” The festival will use various venues in town for International live performances celebrating “the pleasures of music” in Williams’ work.