

Williams' play to open Mississippi tour in Columbus

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Planning is under way for the Mississippi tour opening of Tennessee Williams' play "Orpheus Descending" in Columbus from Feb. 23-25 by the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival in Massachusetts and Infinite Theater Co. of New York. Discussing details Monday at First United Methodist Church in Columbus are, from left (seated), Elizabeth Simpson (press liaison), James Allen (FUMC, Mississippi University for Women), Brenda Caradine (Tennessee Williams Tribute chair), Laura Beth Berry (drama workshop chair, FUMC) and Claude Simpson (technical and set assistance). Standing, from left, are Barbara Bigelow (Y Community Relations), Steve Kuykendall (technical liaison), Donna Forrester (technical assistance), Marthalie Porter (TWT) and Kay Manzolillo (costume and hospitality assistance). / Courtesy Photo

As the birthplace of Tennessee Williams, it is appropriate that Columbus has been selected as the first of three cities in Mississippi to host the renowned writer's powerful play, "Orpheus Descending," Feb. 23-25. The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival in Massachusetts and Infinite Theatre Co. of New York have teamed to bring the production to the playwright's home state.

The announcement was made by the Tennessee Williams Tribute Committee of volunteers and First United Methodist Church, where the performances will be presented in the Artz Performance/Conference Center at 602 College St. at 7 p.m. each evening. After beginning the state tour in Columbus, the play will go to Oxford and Jackson.

"The Tennessee Williams Tribute is proud to be selected by Provincetown and the Infinite Theatre Co. to premiere this professional production in Mississippi," said Brenda Caradine, chairwoman of the local committee. The plays are a recipient of a performance grant arranged by the Provincetown Festival and the theater company.

"The TWT, Mississippi University for Women and the Columbus Arts Council have a long-standing relationship with Provincetown, having produced other plays with them in Columbus over the past six years," Caradine added.

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' own Episcopal upbringing in Mississippi.

An advance team from the Provincetown Festival visited Columbus in December to research church venues.

"We are grateful to Rev. Sam Morris and the First United Methodist Church Council for their willingness to make their facilities available for the performances for the Columbus community and the region," Caradine said.

A drama workshop with the actors will be offered for the church drama group and other interested participants. Details will be released soon by Caradine and Laura Beth Berry, a member of FUMC and workshop coordinator.

State recognition

Sarah McCullough manages cultural and heritage development for the Mississippi Development Authority's Division of Tourism. She attended the 2011 Provincetown Festival and was impressed by the production there.

"Given the richness of our literary heritage, having a New York theater company of this caliber bringing Williams' work home to Mississippi is not only an incredible opportunity for inspiration, but it is indicative of how far Williams' legacy reaches," McCullough remarked.

The technical crew and cast of 16 will arrive in Columbus beginning Feb. 21. Three Columbus residents will join the cast: Caroline Hintz, Shane Tubbs and Philip Barnett. Other volunteers working on the production, in addition to those pictured, include George Courington (financial chair, TWT), Marleen Hansen (regional and national publicity), Mary Margaret Roberts (MUW), Beverly Norris (props liaison) and John Brady (legal counsel).

How to go

A special preview performance Feb. 23 for high school and college students, teachers and seniors will begin at 7 p.m. Tickets for the preview are \$5. Tickets for 7 p.m. performances Feb. 24-25 are \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors and military personnel and \$5 for students.

An opening night reception for advance ticket holders is planned Feb. 24 at the home of MUW President Dr. James B. Borsig.

All tickets are available at the Columbus Arts Council's Rosenzweig Arts Center at 501 Main St., Columbus. For more information, contact Caradine at 662-574-4275 or the CAC at 662-328-ARTS (2787).

Jan Swoope is the Lifestyles Editor for The Commercial Dispatch.

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