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'Apples' to 'Oranges' :: Williams Short Story Inspires Play & Heads to the Big Easy

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Apples do mix with oranges for once. Witness, the steamy play "Gift of an Orange" inspired by Tennessee Williams's 1936 short story "Gift of an Apple." Now, after two Massachusetts productions, "Orange" is crated up for delivery. Destination? The Tennessee Williams New Orleans Literary Festival.

Says director Jackie Davis about the appeal of the story, in which an older woman lures a young man into a romance using voodoo: "Even though it's a spell, there's true passion by two people for each other." Passion means lust, for sure, but with Williams there is always a lingering flavor of past regrets that also enters the picture. For the voodoo woman, memories about her relationship with her son, now dead, arise to color the affair with a younger man she thought she desired.

The lush outdoor setting of the Wu Garden on Commercial St. in Provincetown, at the 2012 Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival, was as perfect as a Tiffany engagement band for Charlene Donaghy's glistening one-act. The Sept. 20- 23 show was mobbed for every performance. Shortly before, the New Urban Laboratory production had premiered in Boston. Donaghy's one act was published following these productions in "the best American short plays 2011-2012" edited by William W. Demastes by Applause Theatre & Cinema Books in cloth and paperback. The production history is given as well. Davis co-founded New Urban Lab with actors Cliff Odle and Alan White.

The producers of the New Orleans annual event were so impressed by the Wu Garden production they've invited it "as is." So, the New Urban Theatre Lab cast with Davis heads South for its March 21 - 23 performances in the courtyard at the historic Hermann-Grima House. This meticulously restored Federal era 1831 mansion, once home to a prosperous Creole (light skinned African Americans) family is in the French Quarter. (This is the second one act by Williams to be staged recently by a Boston theater in this "immersion" way, with Company One's presentation last year of the playwright's erotic 1970 "Green Eyes" put on in a room at the Ames Hotel in downtown Boston.)

"Gift Of an Orange" should feel at home at the Hermann-Grima as Davis's cast features black characters, which is a departure from the Williams text. The cast features Dayenne C. Byron Walters as the voodoo woman Oshun, Richard B. Caines, III as the young man, and James Brooks as an older lover of Oshun's.

Donaghy, who teaches playwriting and theater at Leslie University in Cambridge, has also transferred Williams' setting from the parched Southwest to the bayou countryside of Buras, Louisiana, and to a time after the devastating flood and other destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina that so damaged nearby New Orleans. The playwright considers New Orleans her

second home, having adopted the Crescent City almost 20 years ago where she frequents the Historic New Orleans Collection library and the clubs, a favorite being the home to harmonica player Johnny Sansone.

That city is referred to by Williams fans as his spiritual hometown since he himself set so many of his stories and plays there, most notably "A Streetcar Named Desire," also about lust and regrets. Williams lived in the city on and off for many years and, in fact, in 1962 bought a house in the French Quarter at 1044 Demaine St., which looked very like the maze of apartments in which Stanley rapes his wife's sister who has taken refuge there. Williams lived there until his demise in 1983. The literary festival offers a guided tour to the house as part of this year's events.

Equity artistic director Jackie Davis of New Urban Rep (which produces the "Annual 5 & Dime" which gives full productions of plays as a company fund raiser) is the director of "Orange," Jackie Davis brings a wealth of experience to this production, including choreographing -- she staged the movement of SpeakEasy's 2006 production of Tony Kushner's "Caroline or Change." Dancing flavors "Gift Of An Orange," with the voodoo woman creating her spells to the music of a Jembe drum, a flute, and a chime (which also represents magic).

She works mainly in the New England area as an actor, director, and producer in tv, film, and theater. She is, as well, a master teacher at Trinity Repertory Theater's YASI Youth Acting Summer Intensive Program. And in addition to belonging to the theater actors union, is a member of SAG/AFRA which represents actors and others in film and tv.

Currently, Davis, who has relocated her residency to Rhode Island, has a production she's directed of "For Colored Girls..." for Mixed Magic Theater in Pawtucket. "I hope to get to direct more here," she said.

The Tennessee Williams New Orleans Literary Festival runs March 19 - 24, 2014. For more on the festival, [visit the Festival's website](#)

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