



Tennessee Williams fest to explore 'friends' theme in P'town

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Friendship will be the focus for the ninth annual Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, which will take place Sept. 25-28. The "Circle of Friends" theme announced at the festival's annual benefit dinner last night includes plays by Williams that involve friendship, as well as plays by close friends of his.

The announcement promised a four-day program that will feature humor, love, disappointment and healing related to friendships with plays and dance by Wellfleet Harbor Actors Theater, companies from around the country and from South Africa. They will perform three works by Williams and two dances inspired by his plays, as well as plays by Carson McCullers, Yukio Mishima, Jane Bowles and William Inge.

"Williams orbited within a constellation of writers who were stars," said festival curator David Kaplan in a related press release. "They shared a view of the world, ideas about the value of art, and secrets. Our audience will also, I hope, share those ideas and secrets while discovering Williams' affinity to the writings of his friends."

At the dinner at Provincetown Town Hall, Kaplan noted that all the writers were gay, and kept that secret among friends, but their homosexuality "did not define them" or the products of their creativity. The plays to be done in September by Inge, best known for "Picnic" and "Bus Stop," contain homoerotic themes and didn't surface until after the writer's death.

The season announcement came at an evening that raised tens of thousands of dollars via tickets and an auction to finance the festival and featured actor Zachary Quinto as special guest at the reception and dinner. Quinto, most widely recognized for the "Star Trek" movies and "American Horror Story" and "Heroes" on TV, also did a Q&A interview after dinner. He talked with Kaplan about his experiences playing Tom Wingfield — Williams' most semi-autobiographical character — in a revival last year of "The Glass Menagerie" that premiered at American Repertory Theater in Cambridge and then played Broadway for six months.

The season announcement came during the dinner, with Kaplan noting that the festival will involve several venues in town, including beachside. Williams spent four summers living and writing in town. Besides the performances, audiences will be able to learn more about the playwright through a talk by John Lahr, former theater critic for The New Yorker and author of the newest biography on Williams; a "Williams 101" program; and, for graduate-level students, seminars with scholars and other immersion opportunities.

The program will include these plays by Williams:

— WHAT's "Period of Adjustment," a 1960 comedy about two Korean War buddies who meet up after the war, with issues addressed including treatment of veterans, unemployment and sexual dysfunction

—"A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur," a play set in the 1930s about a circle of women friends who strive to protect each other from disappointments in love, but not always successfully. The 1979 play became the basis for the TV series "The Golden Girls," according to a press release; it will be presented by the Gremlin Theater in St. Paul, Minnesota and directed by festival executive director Jef Hall-Flavin.

—"Vieux Carré," about a young writer who moves into a New Orleans boardinghouse in the French Quarter and is befriended by his lonesome landlady and is surrounded by eccentric characters desperately seeking connection. The play was again based on Williams' own experiences, and he worked on it from 1939 to 1977, Kaplan said. Performing will be KNOW Theater from Binghamton, New York, directed by Brandt Reiter, and the production will star New Orleans-based Desiree Ledet as the sharp-tongued Mrs. Wire.

—"I Wish You'd Keep Still," two dances choreographed by Carson Efirm that were inspired by two of Williams' one-act plays, "Why Do You Smoke So Much, Lily (1935)" and "Something Unspoken (1951)." Efirm is known for

interpreting theatrical texts through non-verbal narratives. Her dance, "The Road to Paradise" — based on Williams' letters, poems and diaries — was the first performance of the first season of the Williams festival in 2005.

The plays on the schedule written by friends of Williams:

— "Member of the Wedding," which, according to the press release, Carson McCullers wrote sitting at the same table when she and Williams rented a house together on Nantucket during the summer of 1946. He was writing "Summer and Smoke." According to the release, Williams said of the time that "she was the only person I have ever been able to work with in the same room, and we got along beautifully."

In this play, 12-year-old tomboy Frankie wants to go along on her brother's honeymoon, while Berenice, the family's housekeeper, offers her counsel. The show will be produced by Boston's New Urban Theatre Laboratory, which staged "Gift of An Orange" at the 2012 festival and the New Orleans Literary Festival in 2013. Kaplan said the 2014 production will be staged as a radio play, with an all-black cast playing even traditionally white characters.

— "In the Summer House," by Jane Bowles, which she was working on when she and husband Paul Bowles first met Williams in Acapulco in 1940. Williams was fleeing his doomed romance in Provincetown. The play is about a possessive mother who threatens to send her brooding daughter to business school. Williams helped arrange a grant so Bowles could take time to create a second act, according to festival information. In 1956, he traveled to Ann Arbor, Michigan to see it performed, and gave it consistent praise in interviews and in his memoirs.

Act 2 of the rarely performed cult classic was performed last year around the pool at the Boatslip, directed by Kaplan, with the audience not knowing what happened to the daughter. The festival promises this production of both acts — again at the Boatslip, in its pool and in Provincetown Bay — will answer the question. Actors from past year — Irene Glezos, Brenda Currin and Beth Bartley — will star, and Kaplan promised the live chicken will be back.

— "The Lady Aoi" by Yukio Mishima, whom Williams met in 1957 on the street and asked to stop by for tea and martinis. The next day, the writers were formally introduced to each other at the offices of New Directions, which published them both. Described by the festival as Japan's most powerful 20th century author, Mishima wrote several modern Noh plays that inspired Williams' "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore," "In a Bar in a Tokyo Hotel," and "The Day on Which a Man Dies."

In Mishima's play, a ghostly apparition appears in a hospital room and unleashes a jealous fury. The South African performers of Abrahamse-Meyer Productions will be presenting this year's version as a puppet play. The team has played at the festival before with "Kingdom of Earth" in 2012 and "The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore" (2013).

— "An Otherwise Hopeless Evening in the Theater," four plays by William Inge, who was a theater critic from Williams' hometown of St. Louis who traveled to Chicago to watch "The Glass Menagerie" in its 1944 pre-Broadway run. Williams introduced Inge to his agent and helped launch his career as a playwright.

The production by a company called A Hiddle Splendor working at The Jewel Box Lounge in Kansas City, Missouri puts together four short recently published Inge plays ("The Tiny Closet," "The Killing," "The Boy in the Basement" and "The Love Death"). The release says the plays are four outrageous stories of extraordinary men struggling to be themselves and reveal Inge's struggle to reconcile his homosexuality with his conservative Midwestern upbringing.

The plays will be performed by an all-male cast with veteran drag queen De De Deville from Kansas City. They will be directed by Travis Chamberlain and underscored on a vintage 1950s organ. An installation of art by Joseph Keehn II exploring the relationship between Inge and Williams will accompany the show.

More information on the festival: www.twptown.org.

- See more at: <http://blogs.capecodonline.com/cape-cod-theater/#sthash.FRXD5OX5.dpuf>

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