

Williams and O'Neill go 'Beyond Success'

By Susan Rand Brown
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Provincetown has long been recognized as a haven for creative artists. Eugene O'Neill's first play was produced here in 1916. He stayed, writing more than half his voluminous output, until the mid-1920s. Tennessee Williams first arrived in the early 1940s; he too was touched by this village surrounded by sand and sea. Eager swimmers, each spent time on the backshore and in town, creating autobiographical characters whose language mixes poetic rhythms with ordinary speech. Each was shaped by his time in Provincetown.

O'Neill and Williams did not meet but corresponded, supporting the other's more experimental, under-appreciated work. While O'Neill and Williams are now regarded as America's most significant, productive playwrights whose legacy continues to inform theater on the global stage, this was not always so. For 11 years, Provincetown's Tennessee Williams Theater Festival has been an incubator for Williams' unknown or seldom produced work, expanding the canon beyond "The Glass Menagerie" and "A Streetcar Named Desire" by inviting productions



Tatiana Korovina and Aleksei Mezhenyi in "Tango Christie," an adaption of O'Neill's "Anna Christie."

PHOTO COURTESY JEFFREY MOORE

from contemporary innovators.

The theme of the 2016 festival, "Beyond Success," was to do something similar for O'Neill, exploring the experimental potential of the restless playwright revered for the poetic naturalism of "Long Day's Journey Into Night" and "The Iceman Cometh," yet ignored for earlier work.

Offering everything from O'Neill's melodramatic "Desire Under the Elms," produced by the South African team and festival favorites Fred Abrahamse and Marcel Meyer, to Williams' uproariously bawdy "Kirche Kuche Kinder," given a kinky post-modern spin by Texas Tech University, this year's



Rachel Hirshorn and Robertson Dean take emotion to extremes in a post-modern production of Williams' "Kirche Kuche Kinder" at Riley's T-shirt Shop. PHOTO COURTESY JEFFREY MOORE

festival offered bon-bons (and lots of skin) for a multitude of tastes. What follows is an overview of additional highlights.

Abrahamse and Meyer also brought Williams' "A Perfect Analysis Given by a Parrot," paired with a scene recast from O'Neill's "Welded." In both plays, "good time girls," revealed

as sensitive and wise, are played in drag. From feathered boas and trash talk to an illuminating vision of an overlooked O'Neill, this yin-yang duo was perfect Provincetown.

O'Neill's "The Hairy Ape," produced in a dance-like style by Philadelphia's EgoPo Classic Theater, revealed O'Neill's

fierce left of center leanings and shortcomings as a political philosopher: the Ape's rapid descent to the bottom was more puzzling than tragic. Strong performances and O'Neill's poetic language drew a standing ovation.

Williams' "Small Craft Warnings," first produced in 1972 on Manhattan's Lower East Side with Warhol superstar Candy Darling as Violet, was another gem. Playing barflies who gradually face inner fears, the locally connected cast, directed by the festival's Patrick Falco, included a heart-wrenching Sarah MacDonnell as Violet, Gail Phaneuf as an inexhaustible, comedic Leona, Ian Leahy as Steve, Runn Shayo as Tony and Stuard Derrick as Quentin, whose cri de coeur drew from Williams' life. The link to O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh" was perfect.

Adapted from O'Neill's sea play "Anna Christie," the music, dance and puppet "Tango Christie," produced by Dr. Chekhov's Theater Ensemble from Samara, Russia, was smoothly sophisticated despite a language barrier (subtitles helped). A highlight of the playwright's centennial in Provincetown, this multimedia, lyrical production transported O'Neill into our still young century. En Avant!

Get inspired this weekend through music & more

The third annual Provincetown Inspiration Weekend, an immersive, connected experience using music, lyric and spoken word for personal and spiritual development, will be held from Friday, Sept. 30 to Sunday, Oct. 2. This year's theme is surrendering to inner wisdom and accepting that the highest and best guidance is within each individual.

There are five main sessions: Friday night, Saturday Morning, Saturday afternoon, Saturday night and Sunday morning, held in various locations in and around Provincetown. Workshop registrants may also attend a gallery reception, yoga class, beach walk and cleanup, Taize service and community acupuncture session or workshops on grief and loss, journaling from the heart or essential oils and health.

Assisting in the program is the Inspiration Team, which includes musicians, poets and writers who provide wisdom for daily life. Their talents range from soul, pop, instrumentals, ballads, world music, indie rock, spoken word, poetry and creative writing. Team members include

jazz vocalist Lisa Ferraro, Rev. Andy Anderson, Aaron Anderson, Bonnie Anderson, Jennifer DiMeo, Jack Fowler, Reggie Gibson, Roxanne Layton, Zoe Lewis, Ericka Luckett, Lucy J. Madison, Jennifer Shannon, Amy Steinberg, John Thomas and the Rev. Kate Wilkinson.

In conjunction with the Provincetown Film Society, the weekend will feature a special screening of "Love Thy Nature," narrated by Liam Neeson, at 4 p.m. on Sunday at Waters Edge Cinema. The film is a cinematic journey through the human relationship with the natural world and shows that a renewed connection with nature is key not only to individual well-being but also to solving the planet's climate and environmental crises.

Throughout the weekend, individuals and local community groups will be honored for their work to inspire positivity. On Friday evening, Tracey Primavera and Lynette Molnar will be honored. Primavera, a Provincetown resident, will be honored for her "Peace Flag Movement," which has given away or sold

over 3,300 peace flags since 2006. Molnar is the force behind Girl Power Productions and has promoted hundreds of Provincetown events, including Women of Color Weekend. The Racial Justice Group and the Rev. Brenda Haywood will be honored on Saturday morning for their ongoing work to raise awareness about racism and effecting social change through programs, education, forums and discussions. During the main Saturday evening session, the Gay Men of Wisdom Group will be recognized for its work to promote awareness and understanding of the value of gay men's differences and gifts. In the same evening session, the "Ask What Matters?" movement and founders Paul Sherman and David Garten will be recognized for their work in providing resources to individuals in order to gain clarity, reduce stress and increase overall well-being.

Daily and weekend passes are available and range from \$30 to \$100. Visit inspirationgatherings.org or call (650) 743-0953 to register or for more information.



The Rev. Christie Hardwick, who created Inspiration Gatherings, sings at the UU Meeting House.