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PROVINCE TOWN TENNESSEE WILLIAMS THEATER FESTIVAL
AND TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY
PRESENT THE GNÄDIGES FRÄULEIN

March 21, 2017 — (Provincetown, MA) The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival and the Department of Theatre and Dance at Texas Tech University (TTU) are pleased to announce a co-production of the Tennessee Williams play The Gnädiges Fräulein as part of the 12th-annual Festival this September.

The new production, directed by Festival Executive Director Jef Hall-Flavin, will be presented at The Provincetown Theater at 238 Bradford Street in Provincetown. This year’s Festival, to be held in Provincetown Sept. 21-24, will celebrate connections between Tennessee Williams and William Shakespeare.

Festival Curator David Kaplan sees the show as a doorway into the sensibility of a season in which Tennessee Williams plays will be paired thematically with Shakespeare plays. It is, Kaplan says, “a head-turning play in which Williams sets out strategies for survival, simultaneously poignant and ridiculous.”

About the Play:

Published in 1965, The Gnädiges Fräulein (pronounced “ga-NEH-de-gus FRAH-line”) was first produced as one of two plays under the title Slapstick Tragedy, alongside The Mutilated (produced by the Festival in 2013).

The play depicts the inhabitants of a rooming house in a place called Cocaloony Key. The titular character — now grown old, but still known as the “gracious young woman” — must support herself by competing for fish with the mythical cocaloony birds that hover threateningly overhead.

In the opening stage directions for The Gnädiges Fräulein, Williams describes the set as “a totally unrealistic arrangement … I mean like Picasso designed it.” It only gets stranger from there. As Williams wrote in his preface to the play for Esquire: “The style of the play is kin to vaudeville, burlesque and slapstick, with a dash of pop art thrown in.”

The style and tone of The Gnädiges Fräulein departs from the poetic realism of earlier Williams plays. Williams has described the style of his plays from the 1960s onwards as “less naturalistic” and part of a new theater “where everything is very free and different.” In 1975, Williams commented that “I’m quite through with the kind of play that established my early and popular reputation. I’m doing a different thing, which is altogether my own.”
About the Production:

*The Gnädiges Fräulein* marks the second co-production between the Festival and TTU following last September’s successful production of the Williams play *Kirche, Küche, Kinder (An Outrage for the Stage)*, which the visiting *New York Times* reviewed as “superb” and “entrancingly bizarre.”

*The Gnädiges Fräulein* will feature performers Rachel Hirshorn and Randall Rapstine, both of whom appeared in *Kirche, Küche, Kinder*, as well as South African actress Anthea Thompson, last seen at the Festival in *Kingdom of Earth* in 2012 and 2013.

The play, Hall-Flavin says, is “a refracted view on Key West as a metaphor. While the subject matter of delicate souls trapped in a cruel world is at the core of so many of Williams’ plays, he was blending forms at this point in his career. So, you’ll find the pathos of tragedy as well as farcical comic moments, all rolled into an absurdist drama.”

“I am decidedly outside my comfort zone, and thrilled to be there,” says Hall-Flavin, who will travel to Lubbock, TX to rehearse the show in June. “All Williams plays are poetic and nonrealistic in certain ways, but this one seems more like something out of a surrealist painting than a poet’s notebook.” It is a nice fit, he adds, for a season that will explore “what happens to a writer later in life when they don’t feel constrained by form.”

A Growing Relationship with Texas Tech:

The Festival’s collaborative ties with TTU date back to the founding of the Festival 12 years ago. This growing relationship led Mark Charney, Director of the university’s Department of Theatre and Dance, to join with the Festival’s Literary Director Thomas Keith and Producing Director Charlene Donaghy in 2012 to develop and launch the *Tennessee Williams Institute* (TWI).

TWI is an immersive university-level symposium for graduate and doctorate level students offered in conjunction with the Festival. Several alumni of the TWI program, including Rapstine, will be involved in this year’s production of *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, as will Hirshorn, a faculty member at TTU who teaches Voice and Speech.

Charney sees such opportunities, borne of the TWI program, as central to the experiential education mission of TTU’s School of Theatre and Dance. “Not only do we have the pleasure of seeing all productions, meeting artists, and discussing our research with the best scholars in the business,” he says, “but we also are privileged to be among the select few collaborating on productions that break new ground and establish exciting contexts for Williams’ plays too often ignored.”
“The challenge is great,” Charney says, “but the fulfillment well worth it,” and credits the TWI team with “helping establish a connection that has grown in its influence and importance to our MFA and doctoral programs. I can’t imagine not attending the festival annually.”

Kaplan sees last year’s co-production with TTU, Kirche, Küche, Kinder, as “a completely successful show, which realized the weirdly discordant beauty of that piece.”

“Our hope with TWI,” Kaplan explains, “is that as students come out of that program, some will direct and some will design and some will lead programming. That’s exactly what is happening. The school is developing a collection of people with the sensibility to handle late Williams.”

“It takes time to develop that understanding,” Kaplan adds. “But these are the relationships that the Festival is here to cultivate.”

**About the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival:**

The Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival was founded in 2006 in Provincetown — the birthplace of modern American theater — where Williams worked on many of his major plays during the 1940s. The TW Festival is the nation’s largest performing arts festival dedicated to celebrating and expanding an understanding of the full breadth of the work of America’s great playwright. Each year, theater artists from around the globe perform classic and innovative productions to celebrate Williams’ enduring influence in the 21st century, hosted by venues throughout the seaside village. For more details, visit [twptown.org](http://twptown.org) and follow the Festival on Facebook.

This Festival is funded in part by the Provincetown Tourism Fund, and is presented by Sage Inn & Lounge.