

Pensacola Little Theatre stages rare Tennessee Williams play, then heads north to festival

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Paxton McCaghren and Leslee Young portray two rivals in Pensacola Little Theatre's adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play "Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?"
Photo by: Photo: Tony Giberson/tgiberson@pnj.com

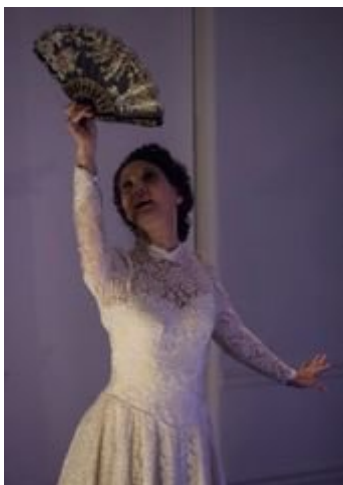
Pensacola Little Theatre will present a rarely produced Tennessee Williams play — “Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?” — Thursday and Friday in the company’s studio space. According to Jeff Glickman, who is both director and a cast member for the production, the play has been produced only “five or six times” since Williams wrote it in 1969.

This week’s performances, however, are only the beginning as PLT’s production will next travel to the Provincetown, Massachusetts, Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival, Sept. 27-30, to present five additional performances. Now in its 13th year, the Provincetown event is the oldest and most prestigious of the five festivals held each year to honor Williams’ work.

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“It’s an international festival that features theater companies from all over the world,” Glickman said. “It gets bigger and bigger every year and has been featured in such prominent publications as the New York Times, the Boston Globe and the National Review.”

Other Tennessee Williams festivals are held in New Orleans, St. Louis, and two Mississippi towns — Clarksdale and Columbus. Glickman and PLT have been to the Provincetown event once before, performing “27 Wagons Full of Cotton” there in 2009 after having presented the play at the Clarksdale event in 2007, and in New Orleans in 2008.



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Laura Sebastian portrays “Louise” in the Pensacola Little Theatre's adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play "Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?"

Glickman said that PLT’s production of “Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?” will be presented in a meeting hall at the Provincetown Inn.

“The venues are often site specific with choices made based on what best suits the play,” he said. “They’re very creative with the way they use space and how they produce the plays.”

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“Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?” represents something a bit different from Mr. Williams’ pen. Presented in 12 scenes, it has been described as “a play without boundaries” that incorporates Williams’ wonderfully lyrical language, heartbreaking drama and broad comedy.

“It embraces the paranormal and supernatural in a very wonderful way,” Glickman said. “There aren’t many ghosts in Williams’ plays and this one has some famous ones, including Vincent van Gogh, and the poets Arthur and Isabelle Rimbaud.”



The cast of Pensacola Little Theatre's adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play "Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?" prepares for opening night with a final dress rehearsal Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2018.

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According to Glickman, he didn't so much pick the play as it picked him.

"David Kaplan, co-founder and curator of the Provincetown festival, wanted to bring the play to his event this year and the first thing he asked me was if I played the banjo. This is because a banjo player is a very prominent force in the play. He doesn't have any words, but he has something to do with the outcome. He's a symbol, as in much of Tennessee Williams' work where you have symbols to deal with. I told David that I do play the banjo and that led to him asking me if I'd be interested in reading the play in the hopes that maybe we could get it together."



Jeff Glickman takes on multiple roles in Pensacola Little Theatre's adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play "Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?" Glickman is the director of the production and also plays Crone #1, and is the banjo player in the show.

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Glickman was captivated when he read "Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?"

"It was the weirdest, oddest, and most strangely beautiful and compelling thing I've looked at in a really long time," he said. "It's experimental and non-linear, yet has so much passion, love and hope, plus wonderful characters in the oddest situations. There are two spinster women who raise spirits from the dead. While one pines away for her man — Mr. Merriwether, who went to Memphis — the other pines away for her dead husband. Together they find this common bond through spiritualism."



Leslee Young and Laura Sebastian portray “Nora,” and “Louise” in the Pensacola Little Theatre's adaptation of Tennessee Williams play "Will Mr. Merriwether Return from Memphis."

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Glickman also described a kind of bond that exists between Pensacola and Provincetown.

“Provincetown feels like Pensacola, even though you’re way up north,” he said. “It has a long history and it’s also on the water. It’s this quaint old fishing village that’s become a resort and you know the place is going to be filled with Tennessee Williams freaks during the festival. It’s just a wonderful place to be. You also have the chance to see other people do their plays. The best part about it is, for that week, the festival is what you’re there for.”

Provincetown will also have a presence at the Pensacola performances as David Kaplan will be in attendance both nights.

Joining Glickman in PLT’s cast are Gregory Bond, Yasmine Cobbett, David Jones, Paxton Burroughs, Meg Peltier, Laura Sebastian, Silvia Seltzer and Leslee Young.

Assisting Glickman on the production side are Sue-Sue Harris Sherrill, costumes; Roxie Alyssa Smith, choreography; and Amanda Lauck Glickman, stage manager.

Andy Metzger is a freelance writer for the News Journal.

Want to go?

What: “Will Mr. Merriwether Return From Memphis?”

When: 7:30 p.m. Thursday and Friday, Sept. 13-14

Where: Pensacola Little Theatre, 400 S. Jefferson St.

Tickets: \$15

Details: 850-432-2042 or pensacolalittletheatre.com. For more information on the Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theatre Festival, visit twptown.org.