

# Stage legend Everett Quinton returns to Provincetown Tennessee Williams Theater Festival, Sept. 26–29

By **Loren King** - SEPTEMBER 18, 2019



Everett Quinton (right) with fellow actor Marcel Meyer (center) in rehearsal. Photo by Ride Hamilton

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Through new interpretations of his plays and by pairing him with notable literary masters spanning continents and time periods, the annual **Provincetown Tennessee Williams Festival**, running September 26–29, keeps the great American playwright in his rightful place at the literary and theatrical center.

That continuity is also provided by the diverse group of theater artists who gather to celebrate the continued relevance of Williams' famous and more obscure works. Many have had close ties to productions of his around the globe for years. Some, like festival veteran Everett Quinton who stars in this year's production "The Night of the Iguana," even have personal stories that keep Williams, who died in 1983, very much

"Back in the day when we were bad kids, Charles [Ludlam] and I got shit-faced and we were supposed to have breakfast with Tennessee Williams the next day. We were 45 minutes late and he was furious, as he should have been. But he calmed down and we had a lovely time," says Quinton, a longtime member of Ludlam's legendary Ridiculous Theater Company in New York City and his partner until Ludlam died in 1987 at age 67.

"We started drinking again and Charles said he wanted to play Blanche. I think Williams was flirting with me. He said to Charles, 'I will not allow you to make a travesty of Blanche.' Then he pointed to me and said you could play her."

Quinton never did play her ("Blanche is too scary. I don't have the chops," he says), but he has starred in Williams' plays in Provincetown starting with "And Now the Cats with Jeweled Claws" in 2011, his first visit to Provincetown. He directed Regina Bartkoff and Charlie Schick in the two-person "In the Bar of the Hotel" in 2016. The following year, which paired Williams and Shakespeare, Quinton was among the cast for "Antony and Cleopatra" along with Marcel Meyer.

"The Night of the Iguana," which premiered on Broadway in 1961, is part of this season's pairing of Williams and Yukio Mishima, one of Japan's most celebrated authors who died by suicide in 1970. Mishima's "Confessions of a Mask," his semi-autobiographical account of a young homosexual who must hide behind a mask to fit into society, made him a literary sensation at age 24. Williams and Mishima became good friends in the late 1950s, according to the festival's web site.

"The Night of the Iguana," which will be staged at the Provincetown Theater, is set at a hotel at the edge of a Mexican cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The hotel becomes a sanctuary for the defrocked Reverend Shannon (Meyer) who is tormented by his loss of faith. Quinton plays Nonno, a 97-year-old grandfatherly "the world's oldest living and practicing poet" who is cared for by the self-described New England spirit and traveling artist Hannah Jelkes. The play will be directed by Fred Abrahamse who with Meyer heads Cape Town, South Africa-based Abrahamse and Meyer Productions, a company that has become a fixture of the Williams festival. This season, Abrahamse and Meyer Productions will also stage Mishima's "The Last Days of a Clown."

Quinton says that since Nonno "doesn't have much dialogue to hide in," he's doing research to "find out who he is."

"I was a young queer in the pre-Stonewall days," he says. "Queers have had it worse because what we've been denied is access to God. We've been told God hated us and we'd pay for this. I think that's what I'm relating to [with Shannon]."

The Williams festival was launched in 2006 with the mission not just to celebrate Williams' connection to Cape Cod but also his evolving international importance and his avant-garde spirit.

No one embodied the avant-garde spirit more than Ludlam, who founded the Ridiculous Theatrical Company in 1967 and staged numerous campy, farcical and very gay shows during the heyday of New York's downtown scene. Quinton continues that subversive spirit: just this past June, he directed and starred in Ludlam's play "Galas: A Modern Tragedy" on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall uprising.

During his 2017 visit to Provincetown for the Williams festival, Quinton had on his mind the revival of a Ludlam classic when he stumbled across Marine Specialties, one of Commercial Street's unique and picturesque shops. "I was doing Charles Ludlam's 'Conquest of the Universe' ['or When Queens Collide'], which has a dance of the fire women. [In Marine Specialties] I found four red, velvet-like fireman hats and I snapped them up for the play."

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