Eugene O’Neill Festival, 2011

MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
Celebrates 75th Anniversary of Eugene O’Neill’s Nobel Prize in Literature, 1936

Excitement is in the air as the Eugene O’Neill Foundation prepares to celebrate its 12th annual Eugene O’Neill Festival in Danville. 2011 marks the 75th anniversary of the esteemed playwright’s reception of the Nobel Prize for Literature—an honor not bestowed on any other American playwright.

A production of O'Neill's Mourning Becomes Electra by Role Players Ensemble at the Village Theatre will anchor this year's festival. The play, which runs from September 16—October 1, is a sweeping epic of betrayal, murder, revenge, honor, and fate, set in New England at the end of the Civil War. O'Neill turned to Greek drama for inspiration when writing the tragedy. Like the Oresteia of Aeschylus, Mourning Becomes Electra is a trilogy—Homecoming, The Hunted, and The Haunted—exploring the dark forces that shape the lives of its characters.

Eric Frashier Hayes, artistic director of Role Players and member of the Eugene O’Neill Foundation board, will direct the play. Information about tickets and performance times can be found on the Role Players website: www.danvilletheatre.org.

“A CELEBRATION BEFORE MOURNING” SUPPORTS O’NEILL FOUNDATION PROGRAMS

Prior to the start of Mourning Becomes Electra on Saturday, September 24, the Eugene O’Neill Foundation invites audiences to attend a reception—A Celebration before Mourning—at 6:00 pm in Danville’s Town Meeting Hall. The event will include a hosted wine bar with gourmet appetizers before the show; premium reserved seating for Mourning Becomes Electra; and desserts, champagne and coffee during the intermissions. Cost of admission is $100.

Money raised by the reception will support the various programs sponsored each year by the Foundation in partnership with the National Park Service. With the help of members and donors, the Foundation can:

-educate the next generation of theatre artists and audiences with Student Day Programs and the annual Summer Studio Retreat.

-entertain theatre audiences with compelling productions in the Old Barn at Tao House and the Village Theatre in Danville.

-enrich the community with lectures, the O’Neill Festival, Artist Days at Tao House, and other programs.

For tickets and information about the fundraiser, please visit our website: www.eugeneoneill.org.
The Eugene O’Neill Foundation welcomes its newest board member—Julie Millias. Julie grew up in the Danville/Alamo area and attended local schools. She and her husband are devotees of theatre and have participated in several events at Tao House. While completing her degree at Saint Mary’s College, she wrote a paper on the architecture of the house.

Board member Josy Miller has been accepted into the doctoral program in Performance Studies at UC Davis. Josy is artistic director of Hapgood Theatre Company in Antioch and directed Where the Cross is Made for Playwrights’ Theatre in May.

Eric Fraisher Hayes, Foundation board member and artistic director of Danville’s Role Players Ensemble, directed A Life in the Theatre by David Mamet at the Bothwell Arts Center in Pleasanton in April. The production was underwritten by former O’Neill board member Joan Boer in memory of her late husband, Garret Boer.

During their recent travels in Asia, board member Gary Schaub and his wife Marie located the bronze sculpture of Eugene O’Neill by Jon Hair (featured in the Spring 2011 Newsletter). “Theatre Way” at the Shanghai Theatre Academy pays tribute to a number of notable world playwrights. Gary boasts that O’Neill’s bust was located at the far end of the glade—in the most prominent position.

Congratulations to board member Eileen Hermann-Miller on the publication of her book Eugene O’Neill and his Early Contemporaries which she edited with Robert Dowling, who teaches at Central Connecticut State University. The volume of fourteen essays addresses the milieu O’Neill knew best—his friends in bohemian Greenwich Village, Provincetown, and on waterfronts around the globe.

Beth Wynstra points out a new plaque installed at The Hell Hole in Greenwich Village. Formally known as The Golden Swan, the saloon was frequented by Eugene O’Neill during his early years as a playwright and became the setting for his masterpiece, The Iceman Cometh.

Saturday Symposium on Mourning Becomes Electra, September 24

One of the highlights of this year’s festival will be a symposium which explores various aspects of O’Neill’s tragic vision.

- Eileen Hermann-Miller, a longtime Eugene O’Neill Foundation board member and professor at Dominican University in Marin, will discuss the playwright’s unique understanding of tragedy and compare Mourning Becomes Electra with Electra, the Greek tragedy which inspired O’Neill’s work.
- Two professional actors from the Bay Area will read the speech delivered by Per Hallstrom in Stockholm which Eugene O’Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936, followed by a reading of O’Neill’s acceptance speech.
- Board member Robin Taylor will review the music which O’Neill integrated into the play—as well as other songs popular during the Civil War period.
- Eric Fraisher Hayes, a Foundation board member will share his reflections on directing Mourning Becomes Electra.

The symposium will be held in the Village Theatre from 10:00—12:00. Admission is free.
He Said...

Excerpts from the Presentation
Speech by Per Hallström, Permanent Secretary of the Swedish Academy, on December 10, 1936

Whatever the source of his pessimism may have been, however, the line of his development was marked out, and O'Neill became by degrees the uniquely and fiercely tragic dramatist that the world has come to know. The conception of life that he presents is not a product of elaborate thinking, but it has the genuine stamp of something lived through. It is based upon an exceedingly intense, one might say, heart-rent, realization of the austerity of life, side by side with a kind of rapture at the beauty of human destinies shaped in the struggle against odds.

...The training bore fruit in the real tragedy that followed, the author's grandest work: Mourning Becomes Electra (1931). Both in the story it unfolds and in the destiny-charged atmosphere enshrouding it, this play keeps close to the tradition of the ancient drama, though in both respects it is adjusted to modern life and to modern lines of thought...

...The most remarkable feature in the drama is the way in which the element of fate has been further developed. It is based upon up-to-date hypotheses, primarily upon the natural-scientific determinism of the doctrine of heredity, and also upon the Freudian omniscience concerning the unconscious, the nightmare dream of perverse family emotions.

...He Said

Excerpts from the acceptance speech, written by Eugene O'Neill, read by the American Charge d'Affaires at the Nobel Banquet Hall in Stockholm:

Mr. O'Neill has been prevented from being here today principally because the state of his health, damaged by overwork, has forced him to follow his doctor’s orders to live absolutely quietly for several months. It is his hope, and I follow his own words in a letter to me, that all those connected with the festival will accept in good faith his statement of the impossibility of his attending, and not put it down to arbitrary temperament, or anything of the sort.

"...I feel so deeply that it is not only my work which is being honored, but the work of all my colleagues in America - that this Nobel Prize is a symbol of the recognition by Europe of the coming-of-age of the American theatre.

...If there is anything of lasting worth in my work, it is due to that original impulse from him (August Strindberg), which has continued as my inspiration down all the years since then - to the ambition I received then to follow in the footsteps of his genius as worthy as my talent might permit, and with the same integrity of purpose.

...I have never been one of those who are so timidly uncertain of their own contribution that they feel they cannot afford to admit ever having been influenced, lest they be discovered as lacking all originality."
Rosie is back!! Eugene O’Neill’s player piano, affectionately referred to as “Rosie”, has been artfully repaired and is back home in Tao House. Over the last two years the piano has been in Fresno undergoing extensive restoration. The playing of the piano is again being incorporated into the tours of the house, adding another layer of interest to the complex story of Eugene O’Neill’s life.

Maintaining and preserving the landscape around the house continues to be a priority. Keith Park, the park horticulturist, has been working all summer with the Youth Conservation Corps crew that was hired to help with these tasks. In this program high school students are given an opportunity to gain job experience and learn about the National Park Service and Eugene O’Neill. The crew from Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site also worked closely with a crew we hire at John Muir National Historic Site, providing a broader range of experiences for all.

We are excited to be working closely with the Eugene O’Neill Foundation in preparations for this year’s festival and hope everyone will take the opportunity to come visit the site on any Saturday – capitalizing on the opportunity to visit the site without a reservation. Just meet at the Museum of the San Ramon Valley at 10:00, 12:00 or 2:00 and ride the shuttle up – it is a great chance to hear Rosie playing.

Remembering Ed Hastings

O’Neillians lost a beloved friend on July 5 with the passing of Edward Hastings. The former artistic director of A.C.T. (American Conservatory Theatre) in San Francisco, Ed was a long-time valued member of the Eugene O’Neill Foundation, Tao House.

Ed is best known for his work with A.C.T. where he directed more than 35 productions over the years. He served many years as an EONF Board member. Ed helped guide the O'Neill Centennial Celebration in 1988, and directed several Playwrights’ Theatre productions.

In 2007 the Board of the Foundation saluted Ed’s significant contributions to the American theatre by recognizing him with the Tao House Award.

In 1965, Ed joined William Ball as one of the founders of A.C.T. in Pittsburgh, PA, and later became the company’s Executive Director when the company moved to San Francisco. After Ball left the company in 1986, Ed joined Joy Carlin as co-artistic director of the company until he left A.C.T and moved to Santa Fe where he spent his “retirement” years. Among Ed’s significant contributions were his promotion of new plays and the nurturing of young and emerging theatre companies in the Bay Area. He was a “gentle-man” who always provided coolness and thoughtful direction when activities at A.C.T. got hectic.

Ed is a graduate of Yale College, and the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He was invested in the College of Fellows in the American Theatre at the Kennedy Center in 1991. Ed was 80 at the time of his passing. He is survived by his long-time partner Eugene Barcone.
**EUGENE O’NEILL SOCIETY REPORT**

by Beth Wynstra

O’Neill scholars and enthusiasts from around the world gathered in New York’s Greenwich Village June 22nd-June 26th for the Eighth International Conference on Eugene O’Neill. The conference’s theme was “O’Neill in Bohemia,” and the panels, presentations, excursions, and performances all focused on O’Neill’s young life and experiences in the Village.

Conference attendees had the opportunity to visit and learn the history of the Provincetown Playhouse, located at 133 MacDougal Street, which is the theater where some of O’Neill’s early plays such as The Moon of the Caribbes, The Emperor Jones, and The Hairy Ape were first produced. The Conference’s keynote speaker was Tony Kushner, and he, along with Broadway composer Jeanine Tesori gave attendees a preview of their newest collaboration, a short opera called A Blizzard in Marblehead Neck, based on a real-life incident between O’Neill and Carlotta Monterey.

The Conference also included over ten panels of academic papers and a spirited bus tour of several locations significant to O’Neill’s life in Manhattan, which was written, coordinated, and narrated by Arthur and Barbara Gelb. A major highlight of the Conference was the awarding of the Medallion Awards to three distinguished O’Neillians who have dedicated significant portions of their careers to furthering knowledge and appreciation of Eugene O’Neill. The awardees were famed film and theater actor Brian Dennehy, Goodman Theater Artistic Director Robert Falls, and Eugene O’Neill Society Secretary and Treasurer, Diane Schinnerer. Diane is also a longtime supporter of the Eugene O’Neill Foundation, having served for many years on the Foundation’s Board of Directors, and on its Advisory Board.

Dedication of O’Neill sculpture slated for Tao House

A bronze sculpture of Eugene O’Neill will soon be placed at the Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site, according to plans announced by Park Superintendent Tom Leatherman.

Noted monumental sculptor Jon Hair has contributed a larger-than-life-size bust of the playwright. Plans are underway to dedicate the work in September in conjunction with the annual O’Neill Festival. Specific details for the dedication will be announced by the National Park Service later in the summer.

The bronze bust of O’Neill is identical to the one Jon Hair was commissioned for placement in Shanghai, China in 2009 as part of a collection of famous international playwrights at the Shanghai Theatre Academy. O’Neill is identified as the “Father of the American Theatre.” About a dozen world playwrights are included in the Shanghai outdoor gallery, including Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, and Goethe. Eugene O’Neill is the only American represented.

“The sculpture is very life-like and beautifully done,” said O’Neill Foundation Board member Gary Schaub, who searched out the sculpture when he was in Shanghai last spring. “It’s bound to be an important part of every visitor’s tour of the O’Neill National Historic Site.”

‘Jon Hair is recognized as a force in American sculpture. Working from his studio in North Carolina, he has had more than thirty major public art commissions since he began his career in 1999. His 35-foot bronze and steel monument entitled Olympic Strength has become the icon for the U.S. Olympic Training Center in Colorado.”

New Risers to Improve Seating in Tao House Barn

In 2009 the Eugene O’Neill Foundation and the National Park Service looked at ways to improve audience comfort and safety during events held in the Old Barn at the O’Neill National Historic Site. With assistance from Mark Cavagnero Associates of San Francisco, known for their work in historic preservation and arts-related projects, a long-term facility and site plan was developed.

Audiences who attend performances in the Old Barn will be happy to know that plans are now underway to implement an important step in the plan. We are now working acquire a full set of new seating risers for the Old Barn to replace the set of old wooden platforms that have been in use for the past twenty or so years.

“Flexibility and safety is what we’ve been looking for,” says Park Superintendent Tom Leatherman. “We want seating risers that can be set up in various configurations for staging, but also are easier to set-up and dismantle, and that give our audience members a safe place to view events.”

Thanks to grants from the Dean and Margaret Lesher Foundation and from the Western National Parks Association, plans are now underway to acquire and install new metal risers this fall.

“We’re very grateful to both the Lesher Foundation and to the Park Association for recognizing this improvement to the Tao House experience,” stated Foundation President Gary DeAtley.
We Can’t Do It Without You!

Each year the Foundation looks to its members to help secure the community support we need to sustain the Foundation’s programs. You can help us do this by signing on as a Foundation member, or by renewing your current membership.

Without those memberships:

- We can’t produce the Playwrights’ Theatre productions each May.
- We can’t stage the annual Eugene O’Neill Festival in the Fall.
- We can’t maintain the largest O’Neill archival collection and scholar’s resource on the West Coast.
- We can’t bring scores of high school students to Tao House to learn about O’Neill, and his contributions to the American theatre.

There’s lot’s we can’t do without you … and so much we can do if you’re a member.

While we work closely with the National Park Service, we receive no direct program support for these programs. We depend on community members like you to help make it happen. Be a Crew Member for as little as $35/yr, or a Playwright’s Circle Member for just $100/yr. Other membership levels are available as well.

It’s easy to join or renew. Go on-line to www.eugeneoneill.org, and click the Memberships button on the Home Page. Your annual donation to the Foundation is needed and is greatly appreciated.