NEWLY DISCOVERED PLAY BY O’NEILL, EXORCISM, FEATURED WITH DIFF’RENT IN SPRING PLAYWRIGHTS’ THEATRE OFFERINGS

Eugene O’Neill’s Exorcism, a newly discovered one-act play recounting the playwright’s attempted suicide in 1912, will be featured in the 2012 playbill of the Eugene O’Neill Foundation’s Playwrights’ Theatre in the old barn at Tao House, on Sunday, May 6. Board member Dan Cawthon will direct.

New York Times critic Alexander Woollcott described the play as “uncommonly good” when it was performed by the Provincetown Players in 1920; however, it closed after only a few performances. Shortly thereafter, O’Neill thought he had destroyed all copies of the play.

Early in 2011, the play was discovered in the papers of screenwriter Philip Yordon, who had received it as a gift from O’Neill’s second wife, Agnes Boulton, following her divorce from the playwright. The staged reading by Playwrights’ Theatre marks the first time the play has been presented in 92 years.

Exorcism is a play about death and rebirth. The protagonist, following an attempted suicide, discovers that his dissipated life has been exorcised. In a recent New Yorker article, John Lahr said the play marks the “tipping point—the moment in O’Neill’s tortured life when he gave up the romance of death for the romance in art.”

In addition to Exorcism, three one-scene plays by PlayGround, the San Francisco based company that develops new playwrights, will be performed. Prompted by the O’Neillian theme “pipe dream,” the scenes were selected from 25 entries submitted in November for presentation at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre. The playwrights include Daniel Heath, Crish Barth, and Emily Esner.

Josy Miller, former artistic director of the Hapgood Theatre Company in Antioch, will direct the scenes.

On Sunday, May 20, Playwrights’ Theatre will present Eugene O’Neill’s Diff’rent, a two-act play that was also performed by the Provincetown Players in 1920 and ran for several weeks in tandem with The Emperor Jones.

Diff’rent is O’Neill’s first venture into Freudian psychology. Emma, the central character of the play, insists that her fiancé, Caleb, be “diff’rent” from the rest of men—that he aspire to lofty values, especially in matters of sexuality. Her inflexible demands drive a wedge between them. The play explores the price that both she and Caleb pay for her repressed sexual instincts. O’Neill called the play “a tale of the eternal, romantic idealist in all of us—the eternally defeated one.”

Lois Grandi, former artistic director of Playhouse West in Walnut Creek, will direct the staged reading. Curtain for both performances is 3:00 p.m.

Playwrights’ Theatre is presented in collaboration with the National Park Service. Shuttle busses to Tao House, provided by the National Park Service, depart from the Museum of the San Ramon Valley in downtown Danville beginning at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are $25 for a single Sunday performance, $45 for both performances. Purchase tickets by phone (925.820.1818) or online at www.eugeneoneill.org.

DIFF’RENT - IS THERE A TENNESSEE WILLIAMS CONNECTION?

Theatre critics and historians frequently refer to Eugene O’Neill as America’s first great playwright. During the 1920s and 30s, his plays transformed American theatre. In the 1940s, the works of several new playwrights appeared on the American stage. Plays by Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, and William Inge were produced alongside O’Neill’s on Broadway and in regional theatres around the country. Each of these playwrights was a beneficiary of O’Neill’s groundbreaking work.

Could it be argued that O’Neill’s Diff’rent made an impact on Tennessee Williams? It had been revived at the Artists’ Theatre in Provincetown in 1940. Records show that Williams attended one of the performances. It is the story of Emma, an idealistic young virgin of 20 who turns into a tragic, sex-starved spinster at 50. Might one conclude that some of Williams’ heroines bear a resemblance to Emma—Blanche DuBois (in A Streetcar Named Desire), Alma (in Summer and Smoke and Eccentricities of a Nightingale), or even Amanda Wingfield (in Glass Menagerie)?
At its board meeting in March, the Eugene O'Neill Foundation board of directors elected Robert Sehr president-elect and Julie Millias secretary. Both will serve on the foundation’s executive board. Bob will assume the duties of president in January, 2013.

*     *     *

**Artist Days** at Tao House will be held May 10, 11, 12. Artists of all stripes - painters, sculptors, poets, photographers - are welcome to create new works in the creative environment that inspired Eugene O'Neill when writing his greatest plays. Artist Days are sponsored twice each year by the foundation and the National Park Service. There is a nominal fee of $5 per day. For more information, visit: www.eugeneoneill.org, or contact Trudy McMahon trudymcmahon@pacbell.net

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**WWW.EUGENEONEILL.ORG** Check out the Foundation’s new website, designed by James Koponen (HeyJames.com). When James is not at his computer, he performs in Bay Area theaters. He recently played the role of Jesus in Godspell at Los Positas College in Livermore

*     *     *

The O'Neill **Studio Retreat** will be held at Tao House July 9 - July 15. Student actors and writers come together for six days to create new original short plays. Their work is then performed for family and friends in the Old Barn on Sunday, July 15. Video of last year’s Studio Retreat can be found on our website: www.eugeneoneill.org, as well as application and participation details.

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**13th Annual Eugene O’Neill Festival**

**PLANS UNDERWAY TO CELEBRATE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF TAO HOUSE**

When Eugene O’Neill and his wife, Carlotta, moved into their new home in the Las Trampas Hills west of Danville in 1937, the playwright wrote to a friend: “We really have an ideal home, with one of the most beautiful views I have ever seen—pure country with no taint of suburbia.” The Nobel Prize for Literature that he received in 1936 included a cash award of $40,000—enough to help Eugene and Carlotta purchase 158 acres of the former Bryant Ranch and to build a home they hoped would be their “final harbor.”

They named their home Tao House, which means “the right way of life.” Carlotta was mainly responsible for its unique architecture, with its blend of Chinese and California styles. The house and surrounding hills provided the inspiration for O’Neill to write his greatest plays—including The Iceman Cometh, Long Day’s Journey into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten.

In collaboration with the National Park Service, the O’Neill Foundation is planning several activities in September to celebrate the House’s 75th birthday. The Pear Avenue Theatre Company, from Mountain View, will perform A Moon for the Misbegotten at the Old Barn during the last weekend of September. Other events include a fundraiser at the house and presentations in Danville’s Town Hall about the history of Tao House and its impact on O’Neill’s writing. Role Players Theatre will join in the festivities with a production of O’Neill’s Ah, Wilderness! at the Village Theatre.
FESTIVE CELEBRATION HONORS THREE FOUNDATION BOARD MEMBERS

Foundation board members gathered with their families and friends for a gala dinner celebration on Wednesday, January 25, in the Eugene O’Neill Room of the Crow Canyon Country Club to honor three persons who have served the Foundation with distinction in recent years.

The Open Gate Award

This award honors those who have served as directors of the foundation and whose dedication and service have enhanced the memory of Eugene O’Neill. This year’s recipients were Florence McAuley and Robert Rezak.

President of the board, Gary DeAtley, introduced Florence McAuley, calling attention to her exceptional service to arts organizations in the San Ramon Valley. She has served twice as the president of the Eugene O’Neill Foundation, Tao House.

Under her leadership, the Foundation entered into negotiations with the National Park Service, the community and neighbors, formulating a plan that was to guide the Site for the next ten years.

She coordinated the presentation of the first Tao House Award to Jason Robards, signed the original Memorandum of Understanding with the National Park Service, and was instrumental in acquiring the document module leading to the opening of a research library for use by O’Neill scholars, critics, and theatre professionals.

Currently, she is an active member of the O’Neill Foundation’s Advisory Board and is spear-heading the revised development of our long coveted Artist in Residence Program. She is also the president of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley and Role Players Ensemble in addition to serving on the Board of Directors of the Walnut Creek Clay Arts Guild and the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Foundation Advisory Council.

* * *

Carole Wynstra, past president and longtime board member, introduced Robert Rezak. After graduating from Stanford with his degree in journalism, Bob was a reporter for the Wall Street Journal, the San Francisco News, and the Stockton Record before joining the public relations department of Pacific Bell, where he worked for 35 years.

For 45 years, Bob has served as a volunteer on boards of numerous arts organizations in the East Bay. Bob joined the board of the Eugene O’Neill foundation in December, 1999, and served for ten years. He was a member on Festival Committees, the Nominating Committee, was editor and writer of the Newsletter, and was Marketing and Public Relations Director.

Wynstra pointed out that “during his tenure, he generated the most widespread publicity the Foundation has ever enjoyed. She ended with a tribute by Daren Carollo, a former Foundation board member and long-time Artistic Director of Diablo Theatre Company:

“Bob’s love, support and dedication for the arts in the East Bay is truly unbelievable. He has served over a dozen Arts organizations over the last 45 years. The only love Bob has that is greater than his love for the arts is his love for his family. Anyone who thinks Bob is running the Rezak household has never met his awesome wife, Pat. She is the in the driver’s seat and he loves it that way.”

The Artistic Award

This award is given to individuals who have been outstanding in their commitment to the Foundation’s mission to provide artistic and educational programs that focus on the contribution of Eugene O’Neill to the American theater.

Board member Merilyn Milam introduced Jack De Rieux, this year’s recipient of the award. She emphasized the two driving forces of his life: his family and his teaching.

Jack met his wife, Cecilia, in an archery class at Stockton Junior College. They have been married 48 years and are the parents of two children, and have four grandchildren.

Jack taught for nine years at Mt. Diablo High School in Concord. He then moved to Northgate High School in Walnut Creek where he remained for 25 years. Following his retirement in 2003, a new theatre at Northgate was named after him as a tribute to the impact he had on the students in the school’s theatre program.

Jack’s contributions to the educational programs of the Foundation have been extensive. Milam testified to his putting new life into Student Days at Tao House. “I have seen what was a good, but unfocused, program turn into one that explores the application of an art form in four of the facets of theater---acting, writing, photography and art. . . .It has been an amazing evolution to observe.”

Milam also applauded Jack’s “crown jewel”—the O’Neill Studio retreat. The program brings together as many as 18 student playwrights and actors to Tao House in the summer for a nine days of intensive training in their fields.
The Eugene O’Neill Society will be sponsoring a panel at the American Literature Association Conference in San Francisco on Friday, May 25th. I will be moderating a panel focusing on O’Neill’s newly discovered play, _Exorcism._

Panelists and papers are:


“A Warm Bed of Quicklime: Gender, Memory, and Form in _Exorcism,_” Kurt Eisen, Tennessee Tech University

“Dramaturging the Dead: A Dramaturg’s Experience Excavating Eugene O’Neill’s _Exorcism_ for Film and Stage,” Kati Donovan, San Diego State University

“ _Exorcism: The Lost Prequel to Long Day’s Journey into Night,_” Robert Dowling, Central Connecticut State University

The panel will be followed by a business meeting for the Society. For more information please email me at bethwynstra@gmail.com.

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 lots 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.

National Park Service Update

Have you been in Tao House lately?

If you have been to Tao House recently you may have noticed some subtle updates to the historic room installations. With the recent addition of full-time professional cultural resources staff at Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site, we now have the resources to not only continue to properly care for the museum collection but also to make more of the original O’Neill related objects accessible to the public. An example of this is the collection of O’Neill family-owned dinnerware now on display in the Tao House pantry. Objects include everyday simple glass plates to decorative platters, including one with the O’Neill’s monogram.

Along with the addition of objects throughout the house, the cultural resources staff have begun rotating items on display in Carlotta’s closet and Eugene’s closet on the second floor. This not only gives us the opportunity to put more objects on display but is also critical in ensuring that delicate museum objects, such as textiles, are not exposed to damaging environmental elements for long periods of time. Current and past items on display include Carlotta’s Asian inspired robes, her summer dress, Eugene’s tuxedo, and multiple monogrammed handkerchiefs. The next rotation of items, which will be installed by the end of March, will include further examples of Carlotta’s clothing, hats, and accessories, giving everyone yet another reason to visit the house they previously thought they knew!

As highlighted in a previous newsletter we have completed the restoration of “Rosie”, the O’Neill’s player piano. Read about the restoration process here: http://terrysmythe.ca/Amica_Jan-Feb_2012_Rosie.pdf
STUDENT DAYS ATTRACTS BUDDING TEEN ARTISTS TO TAO HOUSE

On four separate days during the first week of March, high school students with a demonstrated interest in photography, writing, art, and theatre were hosted at Tao House by the Eugene O’Neill Foundation and the National Park Service, the setting where O’Neill created his most powerful work.

Student Days at Tao House, now in its twenty-first year, is a unique educational program of the Foundation, providing students the opportunity to learn more about their chosen art forms and apply their knowledge to the creation of a product that may later be displayed at Tao House. Heading up the program is Jack De Rieux, Education VP for the Foundation, and former theatre instructor at Northgate High School in Walnut Creek.

De Rieux coordinated the efforts of several Foundation board members—recruiting students from local high schools, welcoming them at the BART station and Tao House, hosting each day’s events, providing meals, and seeing the students off at the end of each day’s activities.

Each of the four days began at 9:00 am with a light brunch, followed by an interactive tour of Tao House led by National Park Service interpretive rangers. The tour was designed to provide students with an understanding of O’Neill’s life story and his creative process while living in the hills just outside of Danville.

Students then participated in workshops and presentations, lead by professionals in the designated discipline:

Photography - Ben Krantz;
Art - Nina Ball;
Writing - Erin Phillips & Ignacio Zulueta;
Drama - Chad Deverman and Elena Wright

At lunchtime, Bay Area actors Kerry Shawn and Richard James performed selections from The Triple Door, a collection of scenes written by O’Neill in the nearby study. By the end of the day, students left Tao House with a deeper understanding of their art forms and an assignment to complete after returning home.

I recently attended the writing day program on March 8th. I am a senior at Monte Vista High School and have lived in Danville my entire life. I hadn’t even known the Tao House existed until this program. It was very interesting learning about the history behind it and Eugene O’Neill. I enjoyed seeing the acting performance by the guest actors along with the writing exercises.

Classroom learning seems like it can often easily defeat the learning process. It does this by bogging it down with assignments, many of which have complex rubrics to follow. The student’s main goal then becomes to try and meet the rubric’s demands to the best of their ability so they can earn the greatest amount of points. The points equate the student’s grade and it turns into a system where schools become a big competition of how many “points” a student can accumulate - while the actual creative and lasting learning component can go by the wayside.

Your program promotes that creative and lasting learning component that is often lost in schools these days and I hope the Tao House educational programs in all of their categories continue to be successful and beneficial to students for years to come.

Thank You,
Will DeMuri
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The Old Barn, Tao House
The Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site

TICKETS
$25, single performance
$45, both performances
RESERVATIONS/Purchase ONLINE:
www.eugeneoneill.org
www.eugeneoneill.org
925.820.1818
925.820.1818

Shuttle service to Tao House from the Museum of the San Ramon Valley, 205 Railroad Avenue, Danville, provided by the National Park Service beginning at 2:00 pm.