Twenty-two students from 14 high schools attended the 11th annual Studio Retreat at Tao House over 10 days in June. They brought their talents, energy, and world views to the writing, rehearsing, and presentation of intriguing new 10-minute plays. Imagine an elf held in a prison cell, a princess who protests fairy-tale expectations, a circus entering the TV age, superheroes hiding a death from the police, and a struggling writer whose characters try to help. And more!

One student commented, “Studio Retreat was one of the best experiences of my life. I grew in so many ways.” Another said: “I wish it was longer!” Many thanks to Norman Gee, program director, and the staff for setting the stage for this kind of experience: Brady Lea, acting instructor; Tracy Held Potter, playwriting instructor; Natalie Rich, assistant program director and Studio Retreat alumna; and Brooke Cox, intern and Retreat alumna. Numerous volunteers turned out to help with the retreat, organized by the Eugene O’Neill Foundation’s Education Committee. The National Park Service is always an invaluable partner in this project. The Foundation is also grateful for the Lesher and the Wood Foundations for funding the program, so that it can be free to all students.

Visit www.eugeneoneill.org to learn about our many upcoming Festival events.
Artist in Residence John Jesurun: Project became ‘much clearer’ at Tao House

John Jesurun found the creative focus he needed during his four weeks at Tao House as a Travis Bogard Artist in Residence. The playwright, director, and media artist was looking for time and solitude away from New York City to research and write his ambitious new play, “Tabula Rasa.”

“Being there day after day without interruption gave me great focus … to bring the work from an idea to actual writing,” said Jesurun, whose specialty is integrating drama, art, and media into stage works. “The emphasis of the project became very much clearer.”

Jesurun’s new play is part science fiction and part meditation on how human beings, especially in the digital age, retain and use information. In the not-too-distant future, an academic travels to a “decontaminated” archival material that a “morally ambiguous” government finds contrary to the past and present it wants to shape. With his work, Jesurun hopes to explore “the archival qualities of the mind and the fragile nature of information.”

Jesurun, who previously had fellowships with the National Endowment for the Arts, the MacArthur Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation, said the Tao House Artist in Residence program is “unique” in that it is a solitary fellowship. “I could get some serious work done.” He’ll continue work on “Tabula Rasa” at the American Academy of Rome, where he will focus on architectural features that may appear in the play.

New at Tao House: The Travis Bogard Day-Use Program

After a successful five years of an artist in residence program, the Eugene O’Neill Foundation, in partnership with the National Park Service, is launching a day-use program at Tao House at the Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site, beginning in 2020, exclusively for Bay Area residents. The artistic disciplines accepted can be theatre-related—e.g., playwriting, directing, stage design—or may include scholarly research, creative writing, or the visual arts. We would especially welcome a theatrical team using our theatre space to workshop a play.

Only online applications are accepted. They must include a curriculum vitae, references, and explanation of why dedicated time at Tao House is important. The program is offered in two sessions, one beginning in April (application deadline of January 31, 2020) and one in October (application deadline of June 30, 2020), from Wednesday through Sunday, 3 pm to 7 pm. Applicants may request the number of days they desire; these days do not have to be consecutive. More specific details of the program are available on the Foundation website: http://www.euoneillfoundation.org/artist-in-residence-program/

National Park Service News

Visit the Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site

Guided Tours Available Wed., Thurs., Fri. and Sun. 10AM & 2PM. Reservations are required.

Self-guided Tours “Saturdays Without Reservations” at 10:15AM, 12:15PM and 2:15PM. If hiking to the site on Saturdays, please be here before 3PM. The park is closed to visitors Monday and Tuesday.

Due to the location of this park, all visitors are required to take a free National Park Service shuttle to the historic home and grounds. Visitors are not permitted to drive their personal/private vehicles to the site. The shuttle meets at 205 Railroad Avenue in downtown Danville, outside of the Museum of the San Ramon Valley. Parking is available next to the museum. Admission to the site is free.

Reservation Line (925) 838-0249 Visit www.nps.gov/euon for more information.

Thanks to Our Donors, Festival Patrons, and Volunteers

At Eugene O’Neill National Historic Site, the National Park Service is responsible for maintaining and preserving the historic features of the site. In the early 1980s, soon after the site was established, we began the restoration of the house and grounds. This involved undoing substantial modifications to the house made by the subsequent owners, the Carlson family. Fortunately, we had life magazine photographs from 1941 to help facilitate this restoration work—the pictures providing visual evidence of how the house was furnished and the location of key features. Since the completion of this restoration, tens of thousands of people have been able to visit Tao House and get a real glimpse into the place where Eugene O’Neill created some of his most important works. We have put almost as much effort into restoring the historic courtyard and grounds.

Restoring the historic character of the site has been an important focus of the Park for many years, but should we stop there? As we reflect on how we use the site and explore new programming opportunities for the future, we have begun looking at ways to enhance the visitor experience.

New seating and risers in the Old Barn were some of the first steps we took to make this type of improvement, but we continue to explore other opportunities as well. The latest addition to the site is a new, fully accessible and lighted walkway that connects the shuttle drop-off area to the Old Barn theatre space and also contains the names of the works created by O’Neill at the site.

We continue to explore new opportunities to enhance the visitor experience and hope you return to see what we have now in store.

Tom Leatherman, Superintendent

The Eugene O’Neill Foundation, Tao House is most grateful to you, our supporters, for your generous contributions that enable us to provide artistic and educational programs that focus on O’Neill’s vision and legacy. Thank you to the following donors (through June 2019):

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Thank you also to all of our valued Actor Level members.