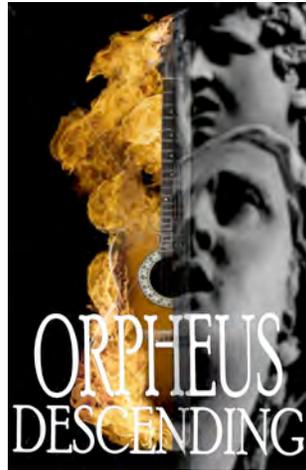


September 15, 2011

Department of Dramatic Arts 2011/12 Season



Orpheus Descending

Written by Tennessee Williams

Directed by Virginia Reh / Scenography by Michael Greves

November 10, 11, 12, 2011, at 7:30 p.m.

Student Matinee: Friday, November 11, 2011 at 1:00 p.m.

The Play

In celebration of the 100th anniversary of Tennessee Williams' birth, the Department of Dramatic Arts of the Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts at Brock University is proud to present their first mainstage production of one of the great American playwrights of the 20th century.

Tennessee Williams' *Orpheus Descending* is a modern version of the Greek myth in which Orpheus, the beloved musician of the gods, goes down to the underworld to rescue his dead wife Eurydice. He is not to look at her until they are clear of the underworld, but he cannot resist and loses her forever. In Williams' play, Valentine Xavier (Val), a guitar-playing stranger, comes into a small town in the U.S. South and "rescues" the unhappy Lady Torrance. He breaks the rules of the tight society of the town, with catastrophic results.

The play echoes not only the Greek myth, but it also plays with Christian themes. The rescuer/saviour's name is Xavier. He arrives a couple of months before Easter and the climax of the show is at Easter. Val develops close relationships with three misfit women in the town: Lady, an unhappily married woman being stifled by her husband and the community; Vee Talbott, a religious ecstatic who paints visions; and Carol Cutrere, the banished member of the town's richest family.

It is a play of extremes, but also of hope. It has been described as one of Williams' "pleasant" plays, enhanced by the imagery, language and mysticism.

Artistic Direction

This play was written and rewritten by Tennessee Williams over a period of almost 20 years. One element that was never lost was a non-realistic spirituality, which seems to have been connected to the Greek and Christian roots and to the land itself. Director Virginia Reh and scenographer Michael Greves have positioned the production within these two worlds: the harsh reality of a small town in the deep South and a more ephemeral presence that surrounds the events and players. We have set it in 1954, when “the times they were a-changing.” Integration was coming to the South and meeting considerable resistance. The deep fear and mistrust of the “other”/“the outsider” is at the heart of our realization of this production.

Curriculum Ties

Besides the exposure to one of the most important North American playwrights of modern theatre, *Orpheus Descending* has many themes that are relevant to the high school student. The major theme deals with the “outsider,” how a small-minded, bigoted town deals with the outsider, the “other”. Williams felt himself a misfit and his plays frequently explore this theme. Val is the physical outsider. There are also outsider/misfits within the town. The play offers an opportunity to look at intolerance, prejudice, bullying and isolation. “Us” vs. “them.” It looks at small town Southern life in the mid-20th century. A warning on content: because of the town’s intolerance, derogatory labels are used. There is some violence and sexual material, and as such it is best recommended for students in grades 11 and 12.

Student Matinee Booking

The student matinee for *Orpheus Descending* is **Friday, November 11, 2011 at 1:00 p.m.**, held in the Sean O’Sullivan Theatre. Tickets for the student matinee are \$10 for each student and teacher. To book your school, please telephone the Centre for the Arts Box Office, 905-688-5550 ext. 3257, long distance toll free 1-866-617-3257, and reserve your group tickets.

The deadline for reservation by telephone is Friday, November 4, 2011 for *Orpheus Descending*. Once you have made your booking through the Centre for the Arts, I will confirm your reservation by telephone on Monday, November 7, 2011.

Study Guide/School Outreach

Study guides contain background information and research articles that provide critical information for use in the classroom. A study guide will be available online at the end of September and can be viewed on our website: www.brocku.ca/humanities/departments-and-centres/dramatic-arts/events