

CTE FALL PRODUCTIONS FROM MODERN TO MYSTIC IN OCTOBER

October promises to be a busy month for Conservatory Theatre Ensemble for advanced drama students onstage as well as off. Two main-stage productions are in the works within the same month to kick off the 2009-10 Season with provocative, contemporary plays as well as ancient lore. *Three For Thought: An Evening of Short Modern Plays* premieres on October 6-9, 11 followed by *Crow and Weasel* later in the month; October 26-30. These plays fulfill the opening to a very exciting season for the student theatre company this year.

Three for Thought: An Evening of Short Modern Plays

Three for Thought: An Evening of Short Modern Plays is a collection of three one act plays by contemporary playwrights. Two are by famous playwrights Edward Albee and Eugene Ionesco. The third is a newer playwright, Nick Dear. All three plays share elements of altered time and space with characters who feel the impact of this skewed universe to sometimes hilarious, sometimes poignant moments that examine modern life.

Up first in the evening is Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*, directed by guest artist Joe Lucas. The play first premiered in Paris in 1957 to overt controversy and outrage. Ionesco, an early playwright of the Theatre Of The Absurd, created the play partly in reaction to the post World War II times and partly in revolt to the conventional theatre. This genre came out of the idea that the human condition is basically meaningless. In other words, it is a form of drama that emphasizes the absurdity of human existence by using disjointed, repetitious, and meaningless dialogue, along with purposeless and confusing situations and/or plots that lack realistic or logical development. This genre of theatre was started around the 1950s in France with playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet and eventually Eugene Ionesco. It was wildly popular through the 1960s, eventually influencing British playwright Harold Pinter and American playwrights Arthur Kopit and Edward Albee. With *The Bald Soprano*, French playwright Ionesco developed the idea by exploring the absurdity of language and communication while attempting to learn English from a primer. He was impressed by the contents of the dialogues he was learning, often very sober and strange. Like many works in the Theatre Of The Absurd genre, the underlying theme of *The Bald Soprano* is not immediately apparent, but emerges through the course of the play. The cast of *The Bald Soprano* includes Marcus Salazar, Mark Hill, Gaby Mercer-Slomoff, Carrie Brandon, Danielle Bowen, Peter Malmquist, and is stage-managed by Nicole Wentworth. Cameo appearances of the Commedia Del Arte actors include second year drama students Conor Crockett, Tom Carvey, Lily Rosenswieg, (two more).

Second in the evening is a fascinating short play called *Lunch In Venice* by English playwright Nick Dear and directed by drama teacher Ben Cleaveland. The story involves several young art students who are studying painters in Venice and who meet with an event that changes the course of their lives. Over the span of the play these young people discover several surprises and revelations about themselves and their transcendence of time and place. Though entertaining, the story also includes many metaphysical overtones designed to provoke audiences to think about the role of Art in our lives. The cast of *Lunch in Venice* includes Rachael Chavez, Katya Baker-Levine, Elijah Goldberg, Vanessa Caldarelli, Nick Simkalo, and Frankie Stornaiuolo. Stage-manager duties are handled by Mike Brinkman.

The evening comes full circle as it returns to Theatre Of The Absurd with Albee's controversial play, *The American Dream* directed by drama instructor Susan Brashear. The first production premiered in 1961 in New York City as one of Albee's first efforts following the success of *The Zoo Story* and was widely hailed as a first for an American playwright to fit the bill

of absurdist theatre. The play is a biting satire of American family life and empty values in reaction to the complacency of the 1950's. Albee's American family lives in an altered universe with the familiar uses of warped time and identities often featured in absurdist theatre to hilarious but disturbing results. *The American Dream* cast is Sarah Schwartz, Jordan Liff, Mary DeCuir, Margot Cardamone, and Brett Russell. Stage manager duties are fulfilled by Jesse Kious.

All three plays share the same designers and production staff who interpret the common themes and compliment or contrast them through the visual and audio aspects of the final production. *Three for Thought* designers are Charlie Eddy/ Lighting, Victoria Palmer and Kate Suppes/Costumes, Emmet Raymond/Sound, Ansel Burke/Props, and Lara Zegart/Set Design.

Three For Thought is an evening intended for high school audiences and older that strives to get them to think and to engage in discourse about these plays' subjects and their unconventional styles. The first play begins at 7:00 PM at the Caldwell Theatre. There are no advanced ticket sales but CTE's box office opens at 6:00 PM and the doors open at 6:30 for the audience to claim their seats on a first-come, first-served basis. Students/ Seniors are \$5 and Adults are \$12.

Crow and Weasel

Later in the month, CTE's second show is *Crow and Weasel*, adapted by Jim Leonard, Jr., based on the children's book by Barry Lopez and directed by guest artist Robert Ernst. The story follows two young "Animal People" who go on a Vision Quest to the Northern Lights. The characters are based on tales from the Plains Indian tribe and include many elements of their culture within the play. For example, they had no formal religion but instead practiced Animist religion, putting forth the idea that all living things have a spirit. This idea forms the core of *Crow and Weasel*. Important within this religion was the group ceremonies to *Wakan Tanka* (The Great Spirit) such as the Sun Dance. This ceremony lasted four days and involved some self-sacrifice and self-inflicted feats of pain. Another vital part of the Plains Indians culture was the Vision Quest, a rite of passage for all boys to evolve into young men. *Crow and Weasel* will involve parts of traditional culture such as movement and mask work led by Mr. Ernst who is no stranger to these methods. For those who enjoyed last year's Mother Lode play, *Nothing*, with Bob at the helm, *Crow and Weasel* promises to offer great opportunities for his innovative directing style. Guest artist Kathryn Zdan (who is also a CTE alumn) will supply the movement and choreography.

Caroline De Lone, Peter Wallace, Oliver Erteman, Kelsey Engstrom, Micheal Weintraub, Katie Lee, Martine Ehrlich, Allison Curtis, Taylor Will, and Max Kligman form the ensemble cast. The designers for *Crow and Weasel* are Suzy Plessas/ Set, Sarah Higgins/ Costumes, Greg Rathje/ Sound, Caleb Dorfman/ Props and / Lighting.

Performances are at the Caldwell Theatre at 7:00 PM with the doors opening at 6:30. Tickets are on sale one hour before the performance at the box office: Students/ Seniors @ \$5 and Adults @ \$12. Appropriate for third graders and up.

October is off with a bang at CTE!! Stay tuned for more news as the season unfolds. Check out the website: www.ctetam.org for updates and more information about the company.