Goodman Theatre  Chicago, USA
The Hypocrites  Chicago, USA
The Neo-Futurists  Chicago, USA
The Wooster Group  New York City, USA
Companhia Triptal  São Paulo, Brazil
Toneelgroep  Amsterdam, The Netherlands
WHY A GLOBAL EXPLORATION:
EUGENE O’NEILL IN THE 21ST CENTURY?

To me, Eugene O’Neill is the American Shakespeare. In an era when most playwrights were concentrating on popular entertainments, O’Neill single-handedly invented the serious American drama, creating a massive body of work that was far-ranging both in style and subject matter. Although O’Neill is often considered a realist, I think of him as an experimentalist influenced by many of the great European intellects of his day (Strindberg, Ibsen, Nietzsche), yet writing with a sensibility that was truly American. At the end of his life, he created works that still stand at the pinnacle of American drama: The Iceman Cometh, A Touch of the Poet, A Moon for the Misbegotten, Hughie and Long Day’s Journey Into Night.

O’Neill was a product of the 19th century writing in the first half of the 20th century. Are his works still relevant today? How do artists of the 21st century approach these plays, bringing them to life with the same vitality and sense of exploration that imbued their first productions? To answer these questions, I invited some of the most forward-thinking directors from around the world to explore O’Neill’s earlier works, using their own contemporary sensibilities to interpret plays that have formed the bedrock of the modern American theater. The result is A Global Exploration: Eugene O’Neill in the 21st Century, which I think will afford audiences, critics and scholars an opportunity to see the span of O’Neill’s work in a context that is both comprehensive and theatrically compelling.

At the center of this exploration will be my own production of O’Neill’s first great tragedy, Desire Under the Elms, which I think will afford audiences, critics and scholars an opportunity to see the span of O’Neill’s work in a context that is both comprehensive and theatrically compelling.

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At the center of this exploration will be my own production of O’Neill’s first great tragedy, Desire Under the Elms, which I think is one of the most stunning pieces of theater created in the past half century. From Amsterdam, Toneelgroep presents their stripped-down, highly contemporary, electrifying Mourning Becomes Electra, created by the brilliant director Ivo van Hove. São Paulo’s Companhia Triptal will present André Garoll’s extraordinarily theatrical interpretations of three of O’Neill’s early “Sea Plays,” seen here for the first time in America. Finally, I am thrilled to present productions by two of Chicago’s leading experimental theater companies: The Hairy Ape, directed by Sean Graney and featuring members of The Hypocrites; and Strange Interlude, O’Neill’s Jazz Age epic directed by Greg Allen and featuring The Neo-Futurists.

This astonishing collection of artists and plays offers an unprecedented look at the scope of O’Neill’s writing through the eyes of today’s most exciting interpreters. I am very proud of the range of this Exploration—and I hope that you will share our enthusiasm as we bring to our stages the works of the greatest of American playwrights.
BORN ON OCTOBER 16, 1888, in a Broadway hotel room, Eugene Gladstone O’Neill was the third son of James O’Neill, a well-known stage actor, and his wife Ella, the sheltered daughter of a Cleveland businessman. Their second child, Edmund, had died of measles as an infant while Ella was away from home accompanying her husband on a tour. She blamed James for her absence during her son’s death, and her eldest child Jamie, for infecting his younger brother with the measles. The fallout surrounding Edmund’s death—along with the morphine addiction that Ella developed during Eugene’s birth—would come to inform much of the playwright’s later work, particularly his masterpiece, *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*.

O’Neill’s early years were spent on the road. His father was perpetually on tour performing the lead role in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a commercial success that came to define his career. Nine months out of the year, the family lived in a series of hotel rooms, much to the chagrin of Ella, who aspired to the middle-class stability of her childhood. The family did in fact own a home—a rambling house they called “Monte Cristo Cottage”—in the small port city of New London, Connecticut, and it was here that they spent most of their summers. But throughout his first seven years, O’Neill saw more of the United States than most people see in a lifetime and received a rich theatrical education from his time spent backstage.

Following his seventh birthday, O’Neill was enrolled at St. Aloysius Academy for Boys, a strict Catholic boarding school in the Bronx. The shift from life on the road to life at St. Aloysius was a rude awakening for this shy, bookish boy accustomed to the company of indulgent adults. O’Neill would later describe his time at St. Aloysius as a “rigid Christian exile.” While O’Neill struggled to survive his new circumstances, his brother Jamie, 10 years his senior, was transforming into a reckless and rebellious drunk at war with their father and unable to decide upon a career. Contributing to the tension in the O’Neill household was Ella’s continuing struggle with morphine and alcohol addiction.

Miserable at St. Aloysius and later the DeSalle Academy, O’Neill finally convinced his father to send him to a secular school. The years he spent at Betts Academy in Stamford, Connecticut, were some of the happiest of his life. Freed from strict authoritarianism and religious instruction, O’Neill began to make friends, excel in his classes and develop a reputation as a rebel. He was becoming increasingly influenced by his older brother Jamie, however, and had started to drink heavily. On weekends O’Neill would visit Manhattan, where Jamie would lead him on rambles through the dressing rooms of Broadway showgirls and into brothels in an attempt to wise up “the kid” to the ways of the world.

Following graduation, O’Neill enrolled at Princeton. In spite of his lack of aptitude for math, he had hopes of becoming an engineer. A voracious reader, he had spent the previous summer reading Nietzsche and soon discovered Walt Whitman; but his intellectual promise failed to translate into academic success. He was drinking more than ever, spending more and more time with Jamie in New York and skipping classes. By the end of his second term, he was passing so few courses that he could not be admitted to the second year. He left Princeton for “poor scho-lastic standing,” but not before making one pivotal discovery: during his second and final
“(O’Neill) wanted to take us to the place where the interior life of the characters was ripped open and revealed, and in this limitless America—this land without a horizon—what do we do with the desolate boundaries that we feel within us?”

—John Guare, playwright

term, O’Neill attended a production of Heddle Gabler, a work by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen, at the Bijou Theatre in New York. The play proved to be a revelation. “That experience discovered an entire new world of drama for me,” he later explained. “It gave me my first conception of a modern theater where truth might live.”

The next six years of O’Neill’s life were marked by a series of escapes and failures; he met and married Kathleen Jenkins only to abandon her soon after she had been pregnant with their son; he sailed to Honduras with a group of gold prospectors and returned to New York after contracting malaria. He fled again a few months later, this time traveling to Buenos Aires, where he became acquainted with the sailor’s underworld; he drank, fought, frequented brothels, slept in parks and eventually contracted malaria a second time, which drove him back to New York. Funded by a meager allowance from his father, he set up camp at a flophouse above a saloon on Fulton Street, which would later serve as a model for the saloon in The Iceman Cometh. He continued drinking and whoring and was eventually sued for divorce by Kathleen, who was raising their son, Eugene Jr., alone. Early in 1912, O’Neill attempted suicide by overdosing on the narcotic veronal. Alarmed, James brought his son back to New London. Later that year, O’Neill was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was sent to recover at the Gaylord Farm Sanitarium, where he discovered the plays of Swedish expressionist August Strindberg. It was this discovery, he said, that inspired him to become a playwright.

In one year, O’Neill wrote 14 plays, including what would eventually become Bound East for Cardiff, his first produced play. The production came about when O’Neill, back in New York and drinking heavily, met up with a radical journalist named Jack Reed, who was on his way to Provincetown, Massachusetts. Eager to get away from the distractions of New York, O’Neill accompanied Reed, who introduced him to a group of artists and radicals who called themselves the Provincetown Players. They read O’Neill’s play, then titled Children of the Sea, and according to Susan Glaspell, playwright and co-founder of the Players, “then we knew what we were for.” After producing Bound East for Cardiff as part of a bill of one-acts in Provincetown, the group returned to New York and convinced that they had discovered an important new playwright. There they established the Playwrights Theatre and mounted Cardiff in 1916 with O’Neill directing.

After a series of well-received one-acts, O’Neill finished his first full-length play, Beyond the Horizon. That play, along with his marriage to Carlotta Monterey, was the first step on his trajectory of his children’s lives would too closely mirror O’Neill’s own youth. Eugene Jr. was a talented classics scholar who failed to live up to his promise. He suffered from alcoholism and did his younger half-brother Shane, who was also a heroin addict. Eugene Jr. committed suicide in 1950 and Shane was arrested for heroin possession in 1947. Against her father’s wishes O’Neill’s daughter Oona married film star Charlie Chaplin, who at 54 was the same age as O’Neill. O’Neill never forgave Oona and cut off all contact with her in spite of her attempts to reconcile.

In 1933, O’Neill’s first and only comedy, Ah, Wilderness!, was produced on Broadway to great acclaim. O’Neill, however, had begun to suffer from the alcoholism and substance disorder that would rob him of his ability to write in his final years. Despite his failing health, O’Neill continued working every day, outlining ambitious projects that he called “the Cycle,” a chronicle of American history that would include nineteen and eleven interconnected plays. While this project occupied him for the next four years, only two plays—A Touch of the Poet and the unfinished More Stately Mansions—survive from this period.

O’Neill was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936. He was the first—and, so far, only—American playwright to receive that honor. Ironically, at that point in his life his career was in great repute and did not produce a new play until 1946. He continued to write throughout those years and produced much of the work with which he is most strongly identified, including The Iceman Cometh, A Moon for the Misbegotten and his landmark exploration of his parents’ embattled relationship, Long Day’s Journey Into Night.

When O’Neill died in 1953 in a Boston hotel room, he had yet to see Long Day’s Journey Into Night realized on stage. So deeply personal was his play that many wondered whether the conditions for the play to be produced for 25 years after his death. But Carlotta gave permission to have it staged in 1957, and it became a best seller, winning O’Neill his fourth Pulitzer Prize and a lasting legacy as perhaps the finest American playwright.
O’NEILL:
THE EXPERIMENTER

THE EXPERIMENTER

THE PROBLEM WITH BECOMING A “GREAT PLAYWRIGHT” IS THAT YOUR STATUS CAN OBSCURE THE MEMORY OF HOW ARTISTICALLY BOLD AND DARING YOU REALLY WERE. JUST LOOK AT EURIPIDES. OR CHEKHOV. OR THORNTON WILDER. OR EUGENE O’NEILL.

O’Neill deservedly ranks as one of the preeminent playwrights of the last century, but without an appreciation for his experimental early career as a member of New York’s bohemian theater community, we cannot fully appreciate his greatness. Understanding O’Neill’s total aesthetic legacy explains the continuing appeal of his plays for some of the finest experimental theater artists in the world today.

But in the 1910s, as O’Neill turned from his travels of self-discovery to an artistic life, the theatrical landscape was changing. So-called “little” and “art” theaters began sprouting up in Chicago, Boston, New York and beyond. These new organizations staged edgy modernist plays from Europe and created opportunities for American writers to explore theater art removed from the demands of “show business.”

In 1916, O’Neill spent the summer in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and began his storied association with one of these “little” theaters. Founded by a group of bohemian New York theater artists, the Provincetown Players were led by writer Susan Glaspell and her husband Jig Cook. O’Neill began tentatively sharing his unproduced plays with the group and was soon building sets and acting in the plays of his new Provincetown companions. In turn, they supported him by mounting the first productions of his work.

O’Neill’s debut play, Bound East for Cardiff, premiered on July 28, 1916, in the recently scorched shack the Players called the Wharf Theatre in Provincetown. As was custom with the Provincetowners, O’Neill directed the play, which is set in the forecastle of the fictional British steamer the S.S. Glencairn on a foggy night. In the play, the sailors pass their off-duty time sleeping, trading stories, playing music and insulting each other. The mood is disquieting, however, because one man lies dying in his bunk. O’Neill’s stage directions throughout the play are filled with sound: live accordion music underscores a sailor’s storytelling, the ship’s whistle calls men to watch, bells announce the time and men snore in their bunks. While a European realist like Ibsen would stage a similar scene with tremendous attention to plausible detail, O’Neill’s use of layered sound heightened the theatricality. Musically and aurally, O’Neill was doing something new.

THE PROVOCATIVE MOVEMENTS OF MODERNIST EUROPEAN THEATER, FROM REALISM TO SYMBOLISM, WERE ALMOST NEVER SEEN ON THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC AND THERE WAS LITTLE PLACE FOR BOLD THEATRICAL EXPERIMENTATION.
expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker. O'Neill’s continuing interest in theatrical experiment led to his next major works, The Emperor Jones and Beyond the Horizon. O’Neill’s first produced play Bound East for Cardiff is staged by the Provincetown Players. O’Neill’s second foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

The Emperor Jones, a 1920 play by Eugene O’Neill, opens on Broadway at the Comedy Theatre. Beyond the Horizon opens on Broadway at the Morocoo Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The Emperor Jones opens on Broadway at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Anna Christie opens on Broadway at the Glendale Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The Hairy Ape premieres at the Provincetown Playhouse and moves to Broadway, where it opens at the Plymouth Theatre. Desire Under the Elms premieres at the Greenwich Village Theatre and moves to Broadway, where it opens at the Earl Carroll Theatre. Strange Interlude opens on Broadway at the Golden Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Mouning Becomes Electra opens on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. Ah, Wilderness! opens on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. O’Neill is awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. The “Sea Plays” open on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. The Iceman Cometh opens on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. Long Day’s Journey Into Night opens on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize—the first time the award was given posthumously.

ACCOLADES

EUGENE O’NEILL: HIGHLIGHTS & ACCOLADES

1916 O’Neill’s first produced play Bound East for Cardiff is staged by the Provincetown Players.

1917 In the Zone opens on Broadway at the Comedy Theatre.

1920 Beyond the Horizon opens on Broadway at the Morocoo Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The Emperor Jones opens on Broadway at the Neighborhood Playhouse.

1922 Anna Christie opens on Broadway at the Golden Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The Hairy Ape premieres at the Provincetown Playhouse and moves to Broadway, where it opens at the Plymouth Theatre.

1924 Desire Under the Elms premieres at the Greenwich Village Theatre and moves to Broadway, where it opens at the Earl Carroll Theatre.

1925 Strange Interlude opens on Broadway at the Golden Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

1931 Mouning Becomes Electra opens on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. Ah, Wilderness! opens on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. O’Neill is awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

1937 The “Sea Plays” open on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. The Iceman Cometh opens on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre. Long Day’s Journey Into Night opens on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize—the first time the award was given posthumously.


1953 O’Neill dies at the age of 65 in a Boston hotel room.

1963 O’Neill is awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1939 The “Sea Plays” open on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. The Iceman Cometh opens on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre.

1946 The “Sea Plays” open on Broadway at the Guild Theatre. The Iceman Cometh opens on Broadway at the Martin Beck Theatre.


1957 Long Day’s Journey Into Night opens on Broadway at the Helen Hayes Theatre and is awarded the Pulitzer Prize—the first time the award was given posthumously.

1960 O’Neill’s second foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1965 O’Neill’s third foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1970 O’Neill’s fourth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1975 O’Neill’s fifth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1980 O’Neill’s sixth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1985 O’Neill’s seventh foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1990 O’Neill’s eighth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

1995 O’Neill’s ninth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2000 O’Neill’s tenth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2005 O’Neill’s eleventh foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2010 O’Neill’s twelfth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2015 O’Neill’s thirteenth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2020 O’Neill’s fourteenth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2025 O’Neill’s fifteenth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.

2030 O’Neill’s sixteenth foray into American expressionism, a 1920s movement that begins with writers like Oskar Kokoschka and Georg Bleecker.
in Chicago, they took their work to Wisdom Bridge Theatre, the small, scrappy house in the Rogers Park neighborhood where Falls was the hip, up-and-coming artistic director.

"I couldn't have made more than 150 bucks a week," Dennehy says, "and they got me a place in this very grim apartment building that a friend of mine said looked like it had been decorated by a blind man. But I bought a bike, started exploring the city, hung out with a lot of great actors in some terrific saloons (I was drinking back then) and, as any person with any intelligence would, I fell promptly in love with Chicago."

Bat in the Skull was a hit for Wisdom Bridge and during the run—although Falls had not been directly involved in the day-to-day rehearsals—Dennehy in a rehearsal of David Cromer in Dennehy, Steve Pickering and Dennehy in Arthur Miller's and Brian Dennehy in Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman. Photo by Lisa Ebright. Brian Bertolt Brech's Galileo, the director's opening production of his first season. Although he had doubts about the playwright's leftist leanings, Dennehy agreed to take on the title role. His arrival at the Goodman, then located in the rear of the Art Institute, was an entrance in the grand manner. As Falls recalls: "That morning, Brian drove his fancy rental car right into the small, restricted parking area in the back of the building, got out of the car, walked toward the Goodman entrance and when the security guard came rushing toward him, Brian just said, 'Here's 20 bucks. Park the car. I'll be back at 6pm.' He gave him the bill, kept on walking and of course, the guard parked the car."

Galileo set the pattern for the Falls/Dennehy work to come. It was big, tough and difficult to handle. Dennehy swears the show's first public preview was also the first time the performance ran the entire way through with all of its many technical aspects—costumes, scenery, lighting—in place. But in its size and daring it was a thrilling show, one of those big plays with a big central role that became the duo's trademark.

Since then, there have been six other such collaborations at the Goodman, all but one (Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman in 1998) plays written by Eugene O'Neill. These are projects that Dennehy calls "impossible," mountains that are almost too steep and too high to climb. But the scope of the plays and the power of the characters attracted both men. In each of the big roles in these big plays, Dennehy faced fresh challenges and reached new heights. Con Melody, the self-dramatizing, deluded alcoholic in A Touch of the Poet, was the toughest of all these parts, Dennehy says, "because he was a leading character with a completely phony persona who is impossible to like but who in the end becomes heroic."

Dennehy says, "We joke about wondering when we'll get around to actually rehearsing this thing."

...Once he (Dennehy) gets into the run of his performance in a play, he keeps getting better and better as he comes back to it."

It comes down to serious work in the end, and since both Falls and Dennehy are men of strong opinions, there are sometimes battles and confrontations. "They're both very intense, and they're both Irish," notes Steve Pickering, a cast veteran of Death of a Salesman and Long Day's Journey.

"We fight all the time," says Dennehy. And not just with each other, but with the absent, invisible playwright as well. As Pickering says, "They talk like they know O'Neill personally, as if he's right there with them. It's like having two 800-pound gorillas in the same room. Honestly, I would pay admission to sit in with the two of them during rehearsals. It's very exciting."

About Dennehy, Falls says: "He's deeply instinctive when he first jumps into a project, and once he gets there he actually has to wrestle with the character in his role before he finds his way. At first, he's extremely passionate about the reception the work is going to receive, but he goes at it with great enthusiasm, keeps working on it, and ultimately it pays off. He's one of the smartest actors I've ever worked with. He reads endlessly, he researches, he digs. And once he gets into the run of his performance in a play, he keeps getting better and better as he comes back to it."

About Falls, Dennehy says, "He still wants to do big plays that make big statements, and he wants to take his audience along with him on that journey. He has a clear idea of what he wants; he won't change his mind very often but when he does, he's ready to admit he's wrong, and he goes on. It's funny, but I think that over the years when he and I get together and start working we actually become a third character, another entity that becomes the driving force of the play."

There are other ways of looking at this force, this combination of Bob and Brian that becomes a "Bobrian" character unto itself. Witt calls it "Two men who are two sides of the same coin." Cromer believes that "their relationship is really complicated; it's almost as if they're working with each other in code." And Pickering says, "There's this epic creative struggle between them to come to a common ground, but it's a struggle that is always honest and open."

Whatever it is, it has endured and prospered. As Dennehy neatly puts it, "Somehow it all seems to work out."

DENNEHY & FALLS AT THE GOODMAN

1986 Galileo, Bertolt Brecht
1990 The Iceman Cometh, Eugene O'Neill
1996 A Touch of the Poet, Eugene O'Neill
1998 Death of a Salesman, Arthur Miller
Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play

2002 Long Day's Journey into Night, Eugene O'Neill
Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play
2004 Hughes, Eugene O'Neill
2009 Desire Under the Elms, Eugene O'Neill
Heywood Broun wrote dismissively that "it was the cantankerous, cancerous proceedings in even the subway station directly beneath arising from…" Alan Dale carped, "The theatrical miasma involved," while wrote, "Mr. O'Neill's dramas always make of the New York press. Critic Percy Hammond greeted less than enthusiastically by a majority of the New York press. Critic Percy Hammond wrote, "Mr. O'Neill's dramas always make me glad that I am not one of the characters involved." While The New York American's Alan Dale carped, "The theatrical miasma arising from...Desire Under the Elms made even the subway station directly beneath the cantankerous, cancerous proceedings in the playhouse seem delicious." and critic Heywood Broun wrote dismissively that "It would have been possible last night to count 'one, two, three' as this new tale of vengeance clicked into certain old and well worn grooves." Joseph Wood Krutch was more appreciative; in his review in The Nation he referred to the author as "a brother of tempests," concluding that O'Neill's greatness lay "not in any control intellectual idea and certainly not in a 'message,' but merely in the fact that each play is an experience of extraordinary intensity." O'Neill had begun work on the play nearly two years earlier, in January 1923. The previous three years had seen the deaths of his father, his mother and his elder brother Jamie. Within two weeks he had completed a scenario for the play (originally titled Under the Elms) and a draft of part I, but the unex- pected death of Jig Cook, co-founder of the Provincetown Players and O'Neill's first professional mentor, sent the author into a deep depression, made worse by the inner demons that O'Neill was confronting as he created his play about musing, desire, greed and deception. He spent the next four months drinking heavily, working fitfully on other proj- ects and traveling back and forth from New York to his home in Ridgefield, Connecticut. Finally, in May, he ended his self-destructive hiatus and finished Desire Under the Elms in less than a week.

For Desire, his most ambitious play to date, O'Neill drew from a number of influences. His fascination with Greek myth resulted in an Apollonian versus Dionysian tension in the play. The hardscrabble practicality of life on a remote New England farm set into stark relief the deeply rooted desires of the central char- acters: Eriphyle Goliat, the elderly patriarch of the family, Abbie, his much-younger bride; and Elen, his son. O'Neill's fascination with the writings of Nietzsche and Freud infused contemporary theories of sexuality, fertility and power into an already potent tale of family dysfunction (another of the author's favorite themes). And the tormented period of mourn- ing that he had recently endured imbued the entire play with a sense of bereavement and loss that lay at the center of the adulterous relationship between stepmother and stepson.

Under the direction of Robert Edmond Jones (who also designed the set, creating a house with removable walls framed by two giant elm trees), the Provincetown Players production featured 40-year-old vaudevillian Walter Huston as the 75-year-old Eriphyle, a casting choice that the skeptical playwright came to applaud, telling the actor, "You made that character live in a way that an author usually sees only in hopeful dreams." Despite the mixed critical reception, Desire moved uptown to Broadway after its initial two-month run at the Provincetown Players' original New York venue (a private production of the play was mounted by the Provincetown Players in 1923, but it was not produced for the general public until 1940). In Los Angeles, the entire company of the touring production was brought to trial on obscenity charges. Later revivals, however, firmly established Desire Under the Elms as one of O'Neill's most powerful works. A much-praised 1965 staging by Harold Clurman featured Karl Malden as Ephraim, and a celebrated Circle in the Square production in 1963, directed by José Quintero, received accolades for the fiery performances of George C. Scott, Colleen Dewhurst and Rip Tom. Subsequent productions have firmly sup- ported the assessment of O'Neill's friend and fellow playwright Sidney Howard, who wrote a passionate defense of Desire shortly after its initial New York premiere:

 Desire Under the Elms is a tragedy, a real tragedy, with the power, starkness and nobil- ity which only real tragedy can assume. If it strikes snags, they are heroic snags of the same stature and dignity as those which stagger the closing scenes of Macbeth. I don't see any criticism of Desire Under the Elms which does not as aptly apply to Macbeth. And I can't, for the moment at least, see much praise for Macbeth which might not be applied to Desire Under the Elms... If it seems extravagant to our back- ward respect for Shakespeare's plays, I only ask to be shown anything produced by the English-speaking theater of recent genera- tions which is half so fine or true or brave as Desire Under the Elms.

The premiere of Eugene O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms by the Provincetown Players on November 11, 1924, was greeted less than enthusiastically by a majority of the New York press. Critic Percy Hammond wrote, "Mr. O'Neill's dramas always make me glad that I am not one of the characters involved." While The New York American's Alan Dale carped, "The theatrical miasma arising from...Desire Under the Elms made even the subway station directly beneath the cantankerous, cancerous proceedings in the playhouse seem delicious." and critic Heywood Broun wrote dismissively that "It would have been possible last night to count 'one, two, three' as this new tale of vengeance clicked into certain old and well worn grooves."

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The Hairy Ape is considered one of the foremost examples of American expressionism, an artistic movement that began in early 20th century Germany. Expressionism presents a distorted reality in which the emotional turmoil of the artist is reflected; prime examples of this creative approach are found in visual art (Edvard Munch’s The Scream) and film (Fritz Lang’s Metropolis, F.W. Murnau’s Nosferatu and Robert Wiene’s The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), as well as in the pre-World War I dramatic works of Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller.

The Hairy Ape follows the saga of Yank, a maritime laborer who questions his place in society when branded “a filthy beast” by the rich daughter of a steel industrialist. In a series of eight scenes, O’Neill chronicles Yank’s struggle with “the human condition,” caught somewhere between his own primitive nature and the more intellectually based (and emotionally vacant) upper classes. Rejected by the bourgeoisie of Fifth Avenue as well as his fellow workers, Yank finally seeks solace from the only creature with whom he finds kinship: an ape in the Central Park Zoo.

Like Metropolis and other expressionistic works, The Hairy Ape portrays the dehumanizing effects of industrialization, which compromises the human spirit for the sake of productivity. The play simultaneously reflects O’Neill’s dissatisfaction with socialism and its failure to accommodate the emotional needs of the individual, marking the author’s own movement toward philosophical anarchism.

The Provincetown Players premiered The Hairy Ape in March 1922, under the direction of frequent O’Neill collaborator Robert Edmond Jones. This production, featuring Louis Wolheim’s powerful performance as Yank, moved that April to Broadway’s Plymouth Theatre. In 1944, a film version of the play featured William Bendix and in the ensuing decades the play has received dozens of notable revivals around the country; perhaps the most celebrated of these was The Wooster Group’s 1996 production, featuring Willem Dafoe as Yank.

ABOUT:

THE Hairy Ape

The Hairy Ape is considered one of the foremost examples of American expressionism, an artistic movement that began in early 20th century Germany. Expressionism presents a distorted reality in which the emotional turmoil of the artist is reflected; prime examples of this creative approach are found in visual art (Edvard Munch’s The Scream) and film (Fritz Lang’s Metropolis, F.W. Murnau’s Nosferatu and Robert Wiene’s The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari), as well as in the pre-World War I dramatic works of Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller.

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WHO IS THE HYPOCRITES THEATRE COMPANY?

Founded by director Sean Graney in 1997, The Hypocrites Theatre Company has spent the last decade challenging the theatrical norms of Chicago. Inspired by various 20th century styles, The Hypocrites seek to break the emotional distance between artist and audience, inviting the spectators to become actively involved in the performance while questioning themselves and the world around them. The company initially staged classics of the absurdist and expressionist traditions, such as Beckett’s Endgame, Büchner’s Woyzeck and Ionesco’s The Bald Soprano. Though such avant-garde works are not generally met with large audiences, the quality and integrity of the company’s work quickly solidified The Hypocrites’ place among the most adventurous of Chicago’s off-Loop theaters. Their first major success came with their production of Sophie Treadwell’s Machinal, which garnered critical raves and six Jeff Citations. Graney has been described by Chicago magazine as “Chicago’s best avant-garde director” and was recently selected for participation in the prestigious National Endowment for the Arts/Theatre Communications Group Development Program for Directors.

THE HYPOCRITES

OPPOSITE: Kurt Ehrmann and Sara Sevigny in The Threepenny Opera. Photo by Margaret Lakin. TOP: Jack Tamburri, Lila Collins, Samantha Gleisten and Ryan Bourque in Miss Julie. Photo by Margaret Lakin. ABOVE: Alex Balestrieri, Vanessa Greenway and Greg Hardigan in The Threepenny Opera. Photo by Margaret Lakin.
The Neo-Futurists

Chicago, USA

Founded by Greg Allen, The Neo-Futurists is a collective of writer/director/performers. Their unique, experimental style is inspired by the dynamism of the Italian futurists; the dadaist joy of randomness; the surrealist thrill of the unconscious; and the social consciousness and redefining of audience/performer relationships that marked the theatrical experiments of the 1960s. The company’s signature production, Too Much Light Makes the Baby Go Blind, which opened in 1988, is written and performed by an eight-member ensemble. Billed as “an ever-changing attempt to perform 30 plays in 60 minutes,” Too Much Light… is performed every week in their North Side home, the Neo-Futurarium.

Through the success of Too Much Light… and a variety of other works, The Neo-Futurists have become one of the most highly regarded experimental theater companies in America. They have been commissioned to create works for such disparate organizations as the Arts Club of Chicago, the city’s Department of Cultural Affairs, Public Broadcast Service, the Eugene O’Neill Theatre Center and the prestigious Humana Festival of New American Plays at the Actors Theatre of Louisville. They have performed extensively nationally and internationally and in 2004 opened a New York branch of The Neo-Futurists. They have also found success in other media: anthologies of plays from Too Much Light…, CDs featuring both live and studio recordings, appearances on National Public Radio and a state-of-the-art computer-animated short film, Bingo. Allen teaches Neo-Futurism in residencies at universities and theater programs across North America.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR SEAN GRANEY

Sean Graney recently met with the Goodman’s Scott Podraza to discuss The Hypocrites and their upcoming production of The Hairy Ape.

Scott Podraza: You’ve observed that the Chicago theater community is fixated on realism. Why do you feel people should explore absurdism, expressionism and other avant-garde genres?

Sean Graney: Realism is connected with a single-minded obsession: the behavioral manifestation of psychology. We are complicated organisms who can feel energies, have unexplainable nightmares and become connected to abstract movement. I think theater is the ideal clinic for exploring all aspects of humanity, not just the ones you can see.

SP: Why do you suppose people are hesitant to see avant-garde productions?

SG: I have three theories. First is that the audience is afraid of feeling stupid; there is a hidden message in the abstraction they aren’t deciphering. Second, in the early 20th century avant-garde theater was associated with various political movements, and I think Americans fear political deviation. Third, most avant-garde theater is terrible.

SP: How do you plan to make this production of The Hairy Ape uniquely yours?

SG: The first four scenes take place on various strata of an ocean liner. Knowing we could not build huge layers of platforms, I was stuck with a problem—until one day I was watching a show in the Goodman’s Owen Theatre and I looked at the seating tiers and thought, “That’s my ship.” So we decided to invent the staging—to have the actors where the audience normally is, and to have the audience where the stage action normally happens.

SP: Expressionism has recently found a new audience with musical adaptations of Wedekind’s Spring Awakening and Rice’s The Adding Machine, and with more frequent productions of Treadwell’s Machinal. Why do you suppose this is?

SG: I think we might be willing to admit the “Machine of Industry” can hold an awesome destructive power if we ignore the human soul it was created to aid. We feel the destruction in our everyday lives; it wears down our family and friends and our planet.

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SP: This play, written in 1922, shows O’Neill’s movement toward philosophical anarchism, rejecting capitalism and socialism as oppressive and imperfect theories. How do you think his frustration is relevant to today’s society?

SG: I think American society has become confused and paralysed by the collapse of so many capitalist financial institutions and the government turning to socialism to save the corporate banks but not the starving masses. People just don’t know who to trust anymore.
ABOUT: STRANGE INTERLUDE

In nine acts, set over the course of 25 years, Strange Interlude is the story of Nina Leeds and her three lovers—and the lengths she will go to keep them in her life and under her control. Employing extensive asides in which characters reveal their inner thoughts through monologues addressed to the audience, the play was an immediate sensation when it premiered in New York in 1928. Although critical opinion was mixed, Gilbert Gabrilow of The New York Sun expressed the majority view in his full-some praise of the work:

Strange Interlude stands firm and giant-sized as a giver of new scopes, as a heater of ways for such truths as the usual drama can scarce imply, as a method to meet the need, today’s immense need, for plays that can ably cope with Freud. If only for that reason—and I guarantee to find you others—it is the most significant contribution any American has made to the stage.

The play’s unconventional approach to character revelation, its use of the theories of Freud and Jung (extremely popular at the time), even its daunting length (approximately five-and-a-half hours) all contributed to Strange Interlude’s overwhelming popular success, as did its controversial nature. Banned in Boston in 1929 for being “a plea for the murder of unborn children, a breeding ground for atheism and domestic infidelity, and a disgusting spectacle of immorality,” the production was brought to nearby Quincy, Massachusetts, where it attracted scores of audiences eager to view “the spectacle.” The play ran on Broadway for a nearly unprecedented run of 426 performances, won O’Neill his third Pulitzer Prize and became an object of admiration and satire among the theatergoing elite. Rarely revived (most recently in 1985, featuring Glenda Jackson and Edward Petherbridge in a production that capitalized on the play’s ironic humor), Strange Interlude stands today as one of O’Neill’s most unusual and iconic achievements.

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“EVERYTHING IS A MATTER OF CONVENTION. IF WE ACCEPT ONE, WHY NOT ANOTHER...? MY PEOPLE SPEAK ALoud WHAT THEY THINK AND WHAT THE OTHERS AREN’T SUPPOSED TO HEar.”

—Eugene O’Neill on Strange Interlude

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR GREG ALLEN

Greg Allen recently took the time to talk with the Goodman’s Lara Ehrlich about the Neo-Futurists and their upcoming production of Strange Interlude.

Lara Ehrlich: Why this play?

Greg Allen: In Neo-Futurist shows, the audience is always aware that they’re watching a performance. Strange Interlude has this crazy conceit of having all of the characters speak their internal thoughts onstage, which lends itself very well to our aesthetic. It’s an outrageously, preposterous play with jaw-dropping turns of events that are simultaneously hysterically funny and horrifying.

LE: As you mentioned, all of the characters speak their internal thoughts onstage as though the other characters cannot hear them. How will this be performed?

GA: I may have the actors directly perform the asides, do them in voiceover or in projection. I may have other actors read the asides, or perform only the subtext while the actual dialogue is performed in voiceover. I’m a fan of tinkering and playing around with different levels of reality on stage.

LE: Could you talk about your concept of having the same actors play multiple roles?

GA: I have a specific actor in mind playing each of the three characters. First, he will appear as old Professor Leeds, who dies at the end of the first act. Then he will come back as Mrs. Evans, who everyone describes as being “a very strange woman.” To have this part played by a guy in preposterous drag will be great. And finally, he will reappear as Nina’s 10-year-old son. I think there’s a lot of humor and irony to be gained by watching the same actor go through these perambulations.

LE: How will you address the characters’ dramatic aging throughout the course of 25 years?

GA: I was thinking maybe the actors will have cans of gray hair spray and you’d see them spraying themselves down right before the next act, in which they are supposed to have aged 10 years. Or they could draw on wrinkles.

LE: The Neo-Futurists are known for interacting with the audience during shows. Will you incorporate the audience in Strange Interlude?

GA: I’m thinking of penetrating the fourth wall in the Owen Theatre and including the audience in the experience. With Strange Interlude, I will expose the theatrical illusions that are usually part of contemporary theater and by doing so unite the audience with the stage. We will all be experiencing and creating this show together.
One of O'Neill’s first full-length plays, *The Emperor Jones*, was first produced by the Provincetown Players in November 1920 with Charles Gilpin in the title role; Paul Robeson starred in a celebrated 1933 film version. The *Emperor Jones* is the story of Brutus Jones, the self-appointed emperor of a West Indian island, as he flees from both the natives he has exploited and his own haunted past.


…the petite, Caucasian, obviously female Ms. Valk is playing the title role…and she is playing it in blackface. This choice might seem, on the surface, to be a culturally insensitive stunt designed to stir controversy, but...in this case it could be argued that the decision to cast a white woman in a role written for a black man is uniquely sensitive....We remain, at all times, powerfully aware that we are witnessing an actress fashioning, with superb precision, a simulacrum of a stereotype. And this heightened awareness of Ms. Valk’s performance as an artificial construct shapes our perception of her character as a man spouting words and attitudes that destiny has forced him to emit. We see Brutus Jones himself as an actor helplessly playing a role written by the savage errors of American history.

One of several of O’Neill’s plays dealing with racial themes, *The Emperor Jones* has continued to be one of the author’s most provocative works. Its first production was greeted by nearly unanimous critical praise; but some contemporary critics, while cognizant of the play’s historic importance, have been less comfortable with the atavistic and primitive overtones of O’Neill’s writing. The diction of the central character has also been called into question; Isherwood notes that “the language O’Neill used to create his ultimately compassionate portrait was inevitably influenced by contemporary cultural depictions of African-Americans...and it induces instant wincing today.” But O’Neill’s depiction of a man struggling for survival against the ghosts of his own sins and those of the society that created him remains a powerful experience today, as unsettling for audiences now as it was 90 years ago.

FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS, THE WOOSTER GROUP HAS CULTIVATED NEW TECHNIQUES OF THEATRICAL EXPRESSION REFLECTIVE OF AND RESPONSIVE TO OUR EVOLVING CULTURE. UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ELIZABETH LECOMPTÉ, THE GROUP HAS CREATED MORE THAN 40 WORKS FOR THEATER, DANCE AND MEDIA CONSTRUCTED AS ASSEMBLAGES OF JUXTAPOSED ELEMENTS: RADICAL SHAPING OF BOTH MODERN AND CLASSICAL TEXTS, FOUND MATERIALS, FILM AND VIDEO, DANCE AND MOVEMENT, MULTI-TRACK SCORING AND AN ARCHITECTONIC APPROACH TO THEATER DESIGN.

The Wooster Group has played a pivotal role in bringing technologically sophisticated and evocative uses of sound, film and video into the realm of contemporary theater, and in the process has nationally and internationally influenced a generation of theater artists. The veteran troupe has a worldwide reputation for their original, multimedia productions as well as their bold interpretations of classic texts, including *Brace Up!*, based on Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*; *To You, the Birdie*, a contemporary take on Racine’s *Phèdre*; and Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape*, among others.

The Group has created all of its theater pieces at The Performing Garage in the Soho district of New York City. All pieces in their award-winning repertory have toured widely in the United States and Europe, as well as Asia, Australia, Canada and South America.

...THE USE OF MASKS WILL BE DISCOVERED EVENTUALLY TO BE THE FREEST SOLUTION OF THE MODERN DRAMATIST’S PROBLEM AS TO HOW...HE CAN EXPRESS THOSE PROFOUND HIDDEN CONFLICTS OF THE MIND WHICH THE PROBINGS OF PSYCHOLOGY CONTINUE TO DISCLOSE TO US.

—Eugene O’Neill, “Memoranda on Masks”
Actors often talk about “the genius of Elizabeth LeCompte.” Scholars of performance art write books about the influence of Derrida or Barthes or Foucault on LeCompte’s work, and on the theories of theater that have led her to deconstruct or dissect a play—to take something familiar, something you know, or think you know, subject it to every conceivable transgression of interpretation and form and return it to you illuminated and deepened. Luminaries of the theatrical avant-garde—Richard Foreman, Robert Wilson and Peter Sellars among them—describe her as first among equals. In 30 years of directing, she has survived both the storm troopers of political correctness and the reverence attendant on a $350,000 MacArthur “genius” Award. (She gave the money to the Group.) She says, “I am not an intellectual. I am not trying to mean anything—I’m trying to have a good time.”

“I am a classic voyeur,” she explains. “I love to watch. I feel like God, watching. I did some acting once. I hated that. What I loved was getting people on the stage doing what I wanted. I watch them for something that precedes the words, for a physical metaphor for where the words come from. I don’t want illustration. Theater isn’t illustrative. Theater is Katie [actress Kate Valk] as Emperor Jones…and the way she holds her body, the way she moves in diagonals. She inhabits something so strong that, when she speaks, the words and that ‘something’ are equal. And when I see that happen, those two tracks coming together, it’s ‘Ah!’—it’s an epiphany. I say this because I’m never sure of what that is, starting out. And I really don’t care.”

Her stage directions consist of broad, linear swoops and mysterious smudges that she sketches into her rehearsal notes and then takes home and studies and keeps adjusting until, in her mind’s eye, everything seems to be moving right. The stage designer Jim Clayburgh put it this way: “Liz directs with her eyes. She ‘sees’ thoughts, ‘sees’ ideas. That’s her talent.” Peyton Smith, an actress who worked with her for almost 20 years, told me, “Liz watches the worst kind of television and reads the finest books, she goes to the opera one night and a ballgame the next—and brings all those ideas and images to the theater. She watches, she reads, she directs like she eats, picking at a little of everything. She gives you a little hit of this or that, and then you finish the collage—she’ll put things on the table and say, ‘Here, entertain me,’ and then kind of disappear. But then she’ll say, ‘God, I hate that,’ and start discarding, rearranging, changing her mind, changing it back. You have to trust her. Even when it hurts.”

ABOUT: HOMENS AO MAR

Companhia Triptal presents three of O’Neill’s early plays about life on the sea: Zona de Guerra (In the Zone), Longa Viagem de Volta pro Casa (The Long Voyage Home) and Cardiff (Bound East for Cardiff), collectively titled Homens ao Mar. Written between 1914 and 1917, these plays were based on O’Neill’s experiences as a young merchant marine on ships that sailed from the Caribbean to Wales and then were converted to Navy service during World War I.

All three plays are set aboard a ship called the S.S. Glencairn, with each play exploring a different incident in the lives of the ship’s crew: the search for a German spy in their midst in Zona de Guerra, a young seaman on leave in Longa Viagem de Volta pro Casa and the death of a young sailor in Cardiff. But this cycle of plays collectively introduces many of the themes that O’Neill would explore more fully in his later works: loneliness, death, hope and alienation. This imaginative approach to O’Neill’s work—reversing the order of the plays collectively introduces many of the themes that O’Neill would explore more fully in his later works: loneliness, death, hope and alienation. This imaginative approach to O’Neill’s work—reversing the order of the plays introduced in his Sea Plays—reveals O’Neill’s intellectual and artistic formation.

André Garolli, director of Companhia Triptal, is also interested in investigating the cultural and political changes that included the beginning of World War I and the crisis of the capitalist system. These major changes influenced the author’s intellectual and artistic formation.

This imaginative approach to O’Neill’s work—revealing O’Neill’s intellectual and artistic formation.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ANDRÉ GAROLLI

André Garolli: I decided to stage O’Neill’s “Sea Plays” in 2003 when I coordinated a workshop that had more male actors than female actors. I proposed that we study a play and invite them onto the ship, where the audience will move around the space to understand the universe of the “Sea Plays” has been a great voyage for this staging.

Na: In your production of the third “Sea Play,” Cardiff, the audience moves around the space with the actors. How did you develop the idea for this staging?

AG: We first produced Homens ao Mar in a historic warehouse in Brazil and we will reproduce the original atmosphere of the three plays in the Owen Theatre. We will seduce the audience by conjugating the danger and the beauty of the sea: fragments of movement, voice modulations and changes of light will indicate the ambiguity of the maritime universe. We will absorb the audience into the play and invite them onto the ship, where they will move from the quarterdeck to the bilge and then down into the basement.

NA: This is your first time working in the United States. Why do you think artistic exchange between countries is valuable?

AG: Just as O’Neill brings sailors with different backgrounds together to analyze the essence of a human being, I think that it is fundamental for different cultures to understand that acting is universal, and a play can be a microcosm of humanity.
First produced in 1931 at the Guild Theatre in New York, Mourning Becomes Electra is O’Neill’s retelling of Aeschylus’ trilogy The Oresteia, in which a brother and sister, Orestes and Electra, avenge the murder of their father Agamemnon by plotting to kill Clytemnestra, their mother and the agent of Agamemnon’s death. Originally written in three acts (mirroring Aeschylus’ three-play structure), O’Neill’s play follows a similar plot: Ezra Mannon (O’Neill’s Agamemnon) returns from military duties abroad to discover that his wife Christine has taken a lover; Christine in turn murders Ezra to escape her unhappy marriage and their two children wreak vengeance by committing matricide. Critical response was rhapsodic; critic Brooks Atkinson called the play “a universal tragedy of tremendous stature—deep, dark, solid, uncompromising and grim”—and noted that O’Neill “has never commanded his theme in all its variety and ambinations with such superb strength, coolness and coherence.”

Director van Hove uses a variety of theatrical tools to focus on the subtext of O’Neill’s classic story of a family’s disintegration: a text pared down to its absolute minimum, video and other stage technology to attenuate the feeling of the characters’ alienation from each other (a modern equivalent of the “mask/face” dichotomy that fascinated O’Neill) and a performance style which indelibly captures the torture of the inescapable patterns that families hand down from one generation to the next. As van Hove notes, At the end Lavinia (O’Neill’s Electra) realizes that she cannot escape her parents. Even though they are dead, she has to live with them. She must learn to mourn the terrible things that have happened. If you don’t learn to reconcile yourself with past wrongdoing or with your own origin, you will never find peace. I feel a strong emotional connection to this view of life. Often shocking and emotionally uncompromising, Toneelgroep’s interpretation brings to contemporary life one of O’Neill’s most haunting and ambitious works.

WHO IS TONEELGROEP?
The innovative and provocative productions of Toneelgroep have captivated audiences in New York, Boston and across Europe— and in their home city. As the Netherlands’ largest repertory company, Toneelgroep occupies a prominent place in the center of the country’s thriving cultural community. Led since 2001 by Artistic Director Ivo van Hove (whose work has been dubbed “refreshingly daring” by The New York Times), Toneelgroep specializes in unique and compelling reinterpretations of classic texts. Van Hove’s unorthodox stagings of such works as A Streetcar Named Desire, Hedda Gabler and The Misanthrope have earned him international renown as an uncompromisingly original artist.

Toneelgroep is a truly international company that operates under the belief that the rapid growth of globalization blurs the boundaries between countries and cultures. They welcome the influence of artists and art forms from abroad and their conviction that the contemporary theater should reflect a variety of global points of view has resulted in international and cross-cultural collaborations with prominent companies around the world. Van Hove’s multimedia-based productions have been featured in a variety of major venues, including the Holland Festival, New York Theatre Workshop, California Institute of the Arts and American Repertory Theatre, as well as in such diverse cultural capitals as Cairo, Paris, Rome and Vienna. Mourning Becomes Electra marks Toneelgroep’s first appearance in Chicago.

ABOUT:
MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA

“...THE OEUVRE OF O’NEILL IS CHARACTERIZED BY A GREAT AMOUNT OF NECESSITY, THE NEED, EVEN WHILE WRITING, TO FATHOM WHY YOU ARE IN THIS WORLD, HOW YOU SEE THIS LIFE AND WHICH OPPOSITIONS YOU ARE CONFRONTED WITH. THESE ARE BIG THEMES CLOSE TO MY HEART.”

—Director Ivo van Hove
DIRECTOR IVO VAN HOVE

As a director, Van Hove strives to be very clear and at the same time polyinterpretable. The directional “message” should, he says, be distinctly formulated and at the same time open to various interpretations. Clearly averse to Stanislavsky realism, he creates performances directed to what he sees as the heart of the matter, the inner, universal-psychological realism, what O’Neill called “the drama of souls.” Characteristic of the acting style he cherishes is that the characters switch very quickly from one mood to another, from passionate outbursts to cool distance, but “every moment is true in itself.” The restlessness of modern man can be sensed in this changeability.

The relationship between free will and determinism is obviously of key importance to van Hove, as it has been to many dramatists. A rational person with an intense wish to explain why you are in this world, how you see this life and which oppositions you are confronted with. These are big themes close to my heart.

O’Neill wrote out of necessity, I make theater for the same reason. It was on the occasion when he had already conceptualized his second production of Mourning Becomes Electra that Van Hove happened to see the American documentary film Capturing the Friedmans. The film which demonstrates how a once happy family disintegrates under pressure of their alleged hidden crimes, had a great impact on him and confirmed, as it were, the actuality of O’Neill’s trilogy and the meaningfulness of his own approach to it. Characteristic of the

Friedmans is that they record their own misery by filming it. Similarly, Van Hove lets Lavinia create her own “photo album” by having her film her own family in exceedingly revealing situations. The central underlying idea behind the production has much to do with Van Hove’s own experience of denying the importance of your parents until, eventually, you realize that you cannot escape them. Nevertheless, you are a product of a father and a mother.

I have once in a while called O’Neill America’s Shakespeare. Like Shakespeare he manages to present a very personal message in totally different ways.

A second, even more important reason why he appeals to me is that the oeuvre of O’Neill is characterized by a great amount of necessity, the need, even while writing, to fathom why you are in this world, how you see this life and which oppositions you are confronted with. These are big themes close to my heart.

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**A GLOBAL EXPLORATION: EUGENE O’NEILL IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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All performance times are PM.

**ALBERT THEATRE**
- DE DESIRE UNDER THE ELMS

**OWEN THEATRE**
- EJ EMPEROR JONES
- ZG ZONA DE GUERRA
- LV LONG VOYAGE
- CR CARDIFF

**HAIRY APE**
- MB MOURNING BECOMES ELECTRA
- SI STRANGE INTERLUDE