



2017 Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis Announces Festival Program

*Local Fest Celebrates **Magic of the Other** from America's Foremost Playwright
May 3-7, 2017*

February 27, 2017 / St. Louis - In May, the city of St. Louis again celebrates the city's world-renowned Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright – Tennessee Williams - with the 2nd Annual Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis, May 3rd through 7th, in venues across the Grand Center Theatre District.

The magic of the other is a thread through all of his hundreds of plays, poems, stories, and essays. "Some of us fear and reject strange people and ideas. Williams understood that by confronting and embracing the other, we can be elevated and mysteriously transformed. This is not just the magic of theater....it is the magic of the other," explains TWFSTL Executive Artistic Director, Carrie Houk.

Highlights include the "unacknowledged Williams masterpiece" *Small Craft Warnings*; a breathtaking Spanish-language (with English supertitles) production of *Deseo*; and *The Playwright and the Painter*, an exhibition of acclaimed Tennessee Williams' paintings on loan from Key West. There is something for all tastes--plays, live music, movies, paintings, readings, panel discussions, and tours. Tickets are available through [Metrotix](#) on March 1st. ([Full schedule here](#))

"We thrive on the vibrancy of Grand Center. Mary Strauss and Ken and Nancy Kranzberg have embraced us. We are thrilled to have been invited by the Kranzbergs to be an anchor arts organization at the .ZACK!" boasts Board President, Scott Intagliata. "We premiere *Small Craft Warnings* at the .ZACK theater, and it will be our hub. Patrons can settle in to discuss the festival and enjoy a drink or a meal." All programming is within walking distance of the .ZACK.

Bertha in Paradise, featuring St. Louis's Grammy-winning Anita Jackson, kicks off the festival on Wednesday, May 3rd at the Curtain Call Lounge. In a bluesy cabaret performance, Jackson conjures up a continuation of her hauntingly unforgettable character of the last year's *Hello from Bertha*. An opening night party follows.

The remarkable showcase, *Tennessee Williams: The Playwright and the Painter*, is a major coup for St. Louis. These 18 deeply personal paintings, only once before shown outside of Key West, illustrate how William's magical poetry brilliantly suffuses every art form he undertakes. Exhibited at the St. Louis University Museum of Art, they are on loan from the *Key West Art & Historical Society* and the owner of the paintings, Williams's longtime friend David Wolkowsky.

The marquee, must-see, production of the festival is the little-known but critically heralded Williams play *Small Craft Warnings*. Richard Corley, one of America's most praised Williams directors, directs a cast of St. Louis's top performers. The cast is headlined by New York's much-lauded Williams interpreter Jeremy Lawrence as Doc, a role Williams himself played in its original New York City run.

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Deseo, the festival's first-ever international entry, provides a thrilling re-interpretation of Williams's most famous play from the perspective of the Cuban experience. It remains true to the essence of Williams, while freshly channeling the unfamiliar challenges faced by immigrants and exiles. It is a co-production of Lilian Vega's Miami-based *El Ingenio* and the world-renowned *Teatro Beundia* in Havana, guided by Raquel Carrio and Flora Lauten. In Spanish, with English supertitles, at the Marcelle.

The historic Stockton House, everyone's favorite venue last year, returns as the stage for *Will Mr. Merriweather Return from Memphis?* Local favorite Jeff Awada directs the first professional production in fifty years of this intimate, funny, poignant play. The scarcest ticket in town last year was for the immersive *St. Louis Rooming House Plays* at the Stockton House, so theater-goers should get their tickets early and often.

The *Tennessee Williams New Playwrights Initiative* makes its debut this year. The winner is Jack Ciapciak's *Naming the Dog*, also the recent winner of NYU's Goldberg New Playwright Award. The play presents us with millennials who live near Ferguson, veering between attempts to cope with racial unrest and the apparently more consequential task of naming their new puppy. Ciapciak leads a Q&A after the staged reading at the Kranzberg Studio.

Tennessee Williams Tribute: Magic of the Other features scenes, songs, and poetry as interpreted by special guests including Ken Page, Lara Teeter, Elizabeth Teeter, Anita Jackson, Michael James Reed, Jeremy Lawrence, and a surprise vocalist from the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis. This program will again be curated by Thomas Keith, editor of the continuing series of Williams's newly collected works for the New Directions Press in New York.

The festival's 17 distinct elements, receiving 39 performances, include many of last year's favorites: educational panels, a bus tour of Williams locations, Beatnik Jam, films at the Nine Media Commons, a photo exhibit, and, of course, the crowd-pleasing *Stella Shouting Contest* (to win Stella beer!).

The Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis looks forward to building on last year's critical success and exceeding its 2016 attendance of some two thousand. Says Houk, "I'm gratified that Tennessee's hometown is now embracing our greatest playwright. We look forward to continuing to offer theatrical, artistic, and educational programming to the community, and becoming a major destination event."

Please check the festival's [Facebook page](#) for updates and announcements.

Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis' mission is to enrich the cultural life of St. Louis by producing an annual theater festival and other artistic and educational events that celebrate the art and influence of Tennessee Williams.

Twstl.org

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From some of the creators of this year's festival

Carrie Houk, Executive Artistic Director

When we encounter strange people and ideas, many of us avoid, reject, even banish them. Tennessee Williams understands that by confronting and embracing the other, we can be elevated and mysteriously transformed. This is not just the magic of theater. It is the magic of the other. *Small Craft Warnings* bewitches us with a fog-enveloped seaside bar, full of characters who are simultaneously alien yet familiar. *Will Mr. Meriwether Return from Memphis?* is literally fantastic, the fantasy intruding into reality in unpredictable and indeterminate ways. Deseo reimagines the most famous Williams play through the experience of Castro-era Cubans. This festival removes us from the everyday...and then returns us just a little different.

Richard Corley, Director of *Small Craft Warnings*

I am honored to direct my second production of Tennessee Williams' 1972 play *SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS* for Tennessee Williams Festival St. Louis. I directed the Russian premiere of this play in the late 90's, during a period of enormous change in that country. Today, when the U.S. is going through upheaval, we need Williams' late masterwork more than ever. *SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS* is a *cri de cœur* for empathy, a plea for understanding of the weak, desperate, and lonely. Like all of Williams' work, it plumbs the hearts of people so in need of connection that they often hurt others just to feel human. *SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS* is a love song for, as Williams puts it in one of his finest poems, "the crazed, the strange, the queer," and it reaches across the decades to speak to us forcefully of acceptance and compassion for society's rejects. Working on a Tennessee Williams play is always a pleasure for me as a director - brilliant characters, strong dramatic moments, wonderful humor, and passion. Beyond that, however, his work makes me see others in a richer, more profound, more honest and caring way. That's special - and this is the time for it.

Jef Awada, Director of *Will Mr. Merriweather Return from Memphis?*

What's interesting about *Merriweather* is that "the other" takes on so many forms: famous ghosts, first loves, scolding librarians, second loves, a trio of witches, romantic French teachers, and dead husbands. And every encounter is a kind of attempt to connect, to be changed, or to escape some undesired personal circumstance. As fantastic as the encounters are, what drives them feels so utterly human.

Jack Ciapciak, playwright of *Naming the Dog* (Tennessee Williams New Playwright Initiative)

The characters in *Naming the Dog* have been ignoring things that aren't familiar to them their entire lives. During the play, each character is forced to acknowledge the existence of people and ideas that are 'other' to them, which makes them see their own lives, wants, needs, and desires in a whole new light.