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Ah, Wilderness! Program

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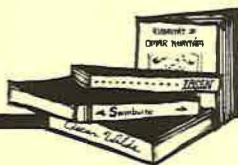
The Russell Square Players Present

Ah, Wilderness!

A Comedy of Recollection

by

Eugene O'Neill



RUSSELL SQUARE PLAYERS
present

AH, WILDERNESS!
by Eugene O'Neill

Directed by
Albert Duclos

Assist. Directed by
Craig Foley

Scenic Design
Charles S. Kading

Lighting Design
Stephen Price

Costume Design
Cecile Metivier

THE CAST

Percy Simon
Kathleen Potts
William Temple
Richard Sebastian
Tara Hofbauer
Mike Desjarden
Ronald Aromando

Laurel Jellerson
Harold S. Withee
Michelle Damato
Richard Petereit
Kelly Reynolds
Louisa Picard
William Gardner
Craig Foley

Mr. Miller, owner of the *Evening Globe*
Mrs. Miller his wife
Arthur, their son
Richard, their son
Mildred, their daughter
Tommy, their son
Sid Davis, Essie's brother, reporter
on the *Waterbury Standard*
Lily Miller, Nat's sister
David McComber, dry goods merchant
Muriel McComber, his daughter
Wint Selby, a classmate of Arthur's at Yale
Belle
Nora
Bartender
Salesman

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I

- Scene I Sitting room of the Miller home in a large small town in Connecticut. Early morning, July 4, 1906.
Scene II Sitting room of the Miller home. Evening of the same day.

Act II

- Scene I Back room of a bar in a small hotel; 10 o'clock the same night.
Scene II The Miller sitting room. A little after 10 o'clock the same night.

Act III

- Scene I The Miller sitting room. About 1 o'clock the following afternoon.
Scene II A strip of beach on the harbor. About 9 o'clock that night.
Scene III The Miller sitting room. About 10 o'clock the same night.

There will be a fifteen-minute intermission between each act.

PRODUCTION STAFF

Master Carpenter
Master Electrician
Light Crew Head
Prop Crew Head
Stage Crew Head
Props
Stage Manager
Box Office Manager
Box Office Personnel
House Manager
Photographer

Steve Price
Matthew Power
Kimberly Gowen
Randy Lang
Phil Smith
Jane B. Sylvester
Louisa Picard
Harold S. Withee
Sue Beaulieu, Pam Peterson
Lori Gage
Kathleen Potts



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THE FOOTNOTE

Eugene O'Neill has generally been regarded from 1920 onward as America's greatest playwright. He won four Pulitzer Prizes: for his first full-length play *Beyond the Horizon* in 1920, for *Anna Christie* in 1922, for *Strange Interlude* in 1928, and posthumously for *Long Day's Journey into Night* in 1957. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1936.

Born in New York in 1888 to a theatrical tradition, O'Neill died in Boston on November 27, 1953. His father was James O'Neill, an American actor of prominence from 1875 to around 1915.

In the late 1870s, James appeared as leading man opposite the reigning star, Adelaide Neilson, and he acted important roles with Edwin Booth. Then he became trapped in a huge success, the role of Edmond Dantes in *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The irresistible big money he could always earn by making still one more tour in this play seduced him into foregoing artistic growth by undertaking any new roles. He continued to act in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, with an occasional appearance in *The Three Musketeers*, for 30 years. His son's contempt for this commercialism, and his antagonism to his father on other scores, is poignantly related in *Long Day's Journey into Night*, produced in New York in 1956.

The playwright's youth was a chaos of rebellion against his father. Sent to Princeton, he never graduated because he was sent to a sanatorium to recover from consumption (which he blamed on his father). He used the sanatorium's experience to write the play *The Straw*, a love story about two patients in such an institution, produced in 1921.

Released from the sanatorium, he ran away to sea and spent two years as a common sailor. During part of this time he was "on the beach" for several months, living in the most disreputable of flop houses in Buenos Aires and New York. His New York headquarters at this time was a dive frequented by derelicts, called Jimmy the Priest's, which he later portrayed in his play *The Iceman Cometh*. He incorporated some of his sailor's experiences in his series of one-act plays called *Ile*, *In the Zone*, *Bound East of Cardiff*, and *The Moon of the Caribees*, all set aboard a fictitious freighter, the S. S. Glencairn.



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Picking himself up out of this slough, O'Neill made sufficient peace with his father to have his support in training to be a playwright. He attended the celebrated course of Professor George Pierce Baker at Harvard, whence so many prominent theatre folk came, including Sidney Howard, S. N. Behrman, George Abbott, Robert Edmund Jones, and others.

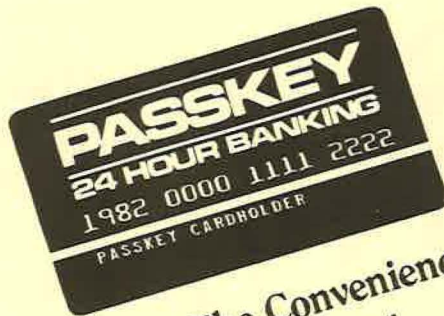
In 1918 he became associated with a tiny theatre at the edge of a wharf in Provincetown, Massachusetts, run by George Cram Cook and Susan Glaspell. This married couple nurtured the talent of O'Neill and several other promising writers, and soon carried on their work at the first of New York's off-Broadway theatres, the Provincetown Playhouse, on Macdougall Street in Greenwich Village. The Playhouse they made out of the ground floor of an old brownstone house still exists as a major off-Broadway theatre. The Provincetown Players produced the first of O'Neill's plays, including *The Emperor Jones*. Other O'Neill plays were produced at the neighboring Greenwich Village Theatre or by "uptown" Broadway producers.

All of O'Neill's plays had a grim, brooding, tragic quality—except one, his *Ah, Wilderness!*. A charming comedy throughout, the play is an amusing and compassionate portrayal of the playwright as an adolescent, with his and his family's identity somewhat disguised.

He poured forth an abundant stream of plays from 1920 to 1934, but brought forth no new play after that until *The Iceman Cometh* in 1946. This was not successfully produced, and another play, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, was closed during a try-out tour without being taken to New York.

O'Neill became stricken with Parkinson's Disease, an acute form of palsy, and could do little work, but painfully put together the anguished story of his youth, in relation to his father, in the form of *Long Day's Journey into Night*. He felt it was so intimate a revelation that he announced that the play should not be produced until 25 years after his death. His widow felt authorized to allow production of it three years after his death, in 1956, when it became a sensational success and won a fourth Pulitzer Prize for its author.

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THE COMPANY

RONALD A. AROMANDO

(Sid)
From Moody Beach, Maine, Randy graduated from Wells High School, where he played the role of Simon Stimpson in *Our Town* and Munro Murgatroyd in *Dirty Work at the Cross Roads*. Since arriving at USM last year, Randy has performed as Lt. Rooney in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, as Cornelius Hackl in *The Matchmaker*, and as Gus in *The Dumbwaiter*. He also appeared in *Volpone*, beginning each performance with the traditional three knocks of the staff against the floor. Randy made the 1984 Deans's List while involving himself so consistently with the department's productions—a commendable achievement. Currently in training for the 1988 Winter Olympics as a representative on the U.S. Luge Team, Randy surfs the big ones and studies blues music.

MICHELLE DAMATO

(Muriel)
Originally from Perth Amboy, New Jersey, Michelle graduated from Rockland High School, where she was perpetually active: a member of Dirigo Girls State, a Rotary Club Student of the Month, the state gymnastics champion in 1980 and 1983, a member of the Maine Drama Festival All-Star Cast, and a recipient of the Excellence in Performing Arts award at Rockland High. She has appeared in *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Our Town*, *Profiles in Comedy*, *Oklahoma!*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. Though Michelle is only a freshman at USM, she has already been involved in two other productions here. The audience will remember her as Voltore's oft-elbowed shadow in *Volpone* and as Mary Tifler, auditionee and owner of the irrepressible Tat the Cat in *Talking With*. Michelle also worked with the Children's Theatre of Maine on their recent production of *A Christmas Carol*.

ALBERT J. DUCLOS

(Director)
Al Duclos, Maine native, has spent an equal number of years as an associate professor of theatre at USM and as a professional actor and director in Maine, Boston, and New York City. His last professional engagement was as Antonio in de Beaumarchais' *The Marriage of Figaro* at the American Repertory Theatre, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1981.

CRAIG FOLEY

(Assistant Director/Salesman)
A senior theatre major from Westbrook, Craig's activities with the department have included stage managing *The Hostage*, writing and directing *The Conservative and The Rose*, *Love and Other Props*, directing *The Dumb Waiter* and *Victoria Station*, and acting as associate director with the University's Music Department in their production of *Candide*. Craig has appeared as an actor in many RSP productions, including *All My Sons*, *The Matchmaker*, and most recently *Volpone*, in which he performed the role of Mosca. This role won him an Irene Ryan Award nomination for Acting Excellence.

As scenic designer, Craig worked with the Town Players on their production of *Fiddler on the Roof* and with the Portland Players on *Death Trap*. Craig also worked as technical director for Children's Theatre on their production of *Jungle Book*. Craig is currently working on a new script by Don Jellerson that he will be directing in the spring.

BILL GARDNER

(Bartender)
Bill has appeared in one other production by the Russell Square Players since he arrived on the USM campus this past fall. Audience members may remember him as Captain of the Sbirri in *Volpone*. A senior theatre major with another degree in communications, Bill is a native of Portland. He has also been involved with Children's Theatre of Maine. Bill enjoys karate, traveling, theatregoing, and running. At Portland High School, Bill won the Sullivan Award for track.

TARA HOFBAUER

(Mildred)
Tara's hometown is Greenville, Maine. She transferred here from the University of Maine at Presque Isle in her sophomore year. At USM she played the role of Grace in *Crawling Arnold*, a student-directed, one-act play. A junior theatre major this year, Tara has busied herself with tech work, especially on *Volpone*. At UMPI she played Gertrude in *The Matchmaker*, Sister in the musical *Damn Yankees*, and Christine in *Picnic*. In high school she appeared in the one-act *Romancers* and in *Arsenic and Old Lace*. During her high school years she won many scholastic honors, was a member of the National Honor Society and was selected for Dirigo Girls State. Tara is listed in *Who's Who Among American High School Students*.

LAUREL JELLERSON

(Lily)
Laurel graduated from Sanford High School, where she played the role of Captain Von Trapp's head maid in *The Sound of Music*. Presently a first-semester senior majoring in psychology and minoring in theatre, Laurel appeared in a student-directed, one-act play last spring. An avid reader, Laurel also enjoys swimming and playing the piano.

CHARLES S. KADING

(Scenic Designer)
Charles is an associate professor of theatre at USM where he has taught for the past seven years. He earned his B.A. in theatre arts from California State University at Fullerton, his M.A. in scenic design from the University of Washington, and his M.F.A. in scenic design from California State University at Fullerton. He has designed professionally for the Union Plaza Hotel in Las Vegas, the Seattle Repertory Company, Intiman Theatre, Casa Mana Musicals, and the Fullerton Civic Light Opera. Kading has designed 28 productions for the Russell Square Players and has been recognized by the American College Theatre Festival for his design of *Happy Birthday*, *Wanda June*. Local theatre audiences know his work from settings in the productions of *My Fair Lady*, *The Music Man*, *Cosi Fan Tutte*, and *The Most Happy Fella*.

CECILE METIVIER

(Costume Designer)
Cecile came to USM after five years of professional freelance dressmaking and since then has designed costumes for the Russell Square Players productions of *Miss Julie*, *All My Sons*, *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, *The Birthday Party*, *The Lion in Winter*, *My Fair Lady*, *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *The Most Happy Fella*, and

Talking With. Cil has also designed costumes for Ram Island Dance Company. She plans to work towards an M.F.A. in costume design.

RICHARD PETEREIT

(Wint Selby)
Richard, of Thomaston, Maine, has performed in such production as *You Can't Take It With You*, *Brigadoon*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *Love, Sex, and the I.R.S.* Richard is majoring in theatre at USM and made his first appearance with the Russell Square Players as Voltore in the Elizabethan comedy *Volpone*, which was selected to compete in the American College Theatre Festival Regional competition. Richard enjoys collecting comic books.

LOUISA PICARD

(Stage Manager/Nora)
Louisa designed the costumes for Russell Square Players opening season production of *The Dumbwaiter* and *Victoria Station*, and in 1983 she designed costumes for *Army of Two*. Other productions at RSP have benefitted from Louisa's work in the costume shop: *Birthday Party*, *The Matchmaker*, *Lion in Winter*, *Cosi Fan Tutte*, *Inspector General*, and *My Fair Lady*, for which she was costume manager. From Madawaska, Louisa traveled to England on exchange in 1983 and worked on the film, *Coriolanius*, in Winchester, with Paul Shelley. Louisa was MHSST captain in track her freshman year. She collects vintage clothing, enjoys skating, macrame, and sewing, and has a special love for music.

KATHLEEN FRANCES POTTS

(Essie Miller)
This is Kathleen's last production with the Russell Square Players, as she will be graduating with a bachelor of arts degree in

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theatre in May. As a character actress, Kathleen has experienced a wide range of roles. She has played characters ranging from Ropeen, the old woman in *The Hostage*, to Lydia Lubey, the young and innocent woman in the pink dress from *All My Sons*. Her latest and most favorite role has been the outspoken rodeo rider, Big Eight, which she played in last semester's production of *Talking With*.

Last spring, Kathleen was chosen to be Terry Drew's partner for the Irene Ryan Award Competition. After winning the regional competition they traveled to Washington, D.C., to perform at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

This spring, Kathleen is looking forward to her first trip to Europe, on tour with the cast of *Ah, Wilderness!* In the future she plans to continue being a drummer, photographer, and actress. Kathleen also hopes to become a filmmaker.

KELLY REYNOLDS

(Belle)

Last seen as the woman about to give birth to a dragon in RSP's fall production of *Talking With*, Kelly is a junior at USM with a double major in theatre and political science. She also appeared as a villager in last spring's *Miss Julie*. Kelly attended the Masters School in Dobbs Ferry, New York, to study theatre. There she performed as Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, as the Princess in the Golden Grotto in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, and as Liesel in *The Sound of Music*. She received the Actress Award at the Masters School her senior year, then went on to The Barn in Rumson, New Jersey, in the summer. For some time she has been modeling in Boston and feels that modeling has helped with her acting. A lover of reading, especially

poetry and French literature, Kelly also loves ballet and football.

RICHARD SEBASTIAN

(Richard)

Richard is a transfer student from the University of Maine at Presque Isle. A graduate of Winslow High School, Richard served in a number of ways on productions there, including directing and acting. While in high school he won the United States Achievement Academy Speech and Drama Award and many other honors and awards.

With the Waterville Summer Music Theatre, Richard performed in *Annie, Oklahoma!*, and *The Student Prince*. Richard has also performed with Waterville Players and the Waterville Repertory Company in such musicals as *Carousel, A Christmas Carol, The Unsinkable Molly Brown, Brigadoon, Oklahoma!, Camelot, Sound of Music*, and *Fiddler on the Roof*. At UMPI, Richard was in the chorus and the vocal ensemble and performed in *Anything Goes, St. George and the Dragon, Guys and Dolls, The Music Man, Damn Yankees, A Moon for the Misbegotten*, and, *The Matchmaker*.

Richard is now a junior at USM, majoring in theatre and minoring in voice. Since arriving here he has handled props for RSP's *Talking With* and has tumbled onto stage as Volpone's servant in *Volpone*.

BILL TEMPLE

(Arthur)

A freshman majoring in theatre and minoring in classics, Bill's hometown is Portland. His first appearance on the Russell Square Players stage was as the judge in *Volpone*. At Deering High School Bill appeared as Jean Claude in *Museum*, and in *Bentley, Red Pep-*

pers, Diabetes, God, Open and Shut Case. Also with the Deering Players he performed the role of A.J. in *Runaways* and Booker in *Working*. He performed in a benefit variety show at Portland Lyric Theatre and in *Finian's Rainbow* at Catherine McAuley High. A stand-up comedian, Bill won second place in Humorous Interpretation at the Deering High School Invitational Speech Festival. He likes to find humor in the everyday things in life, such as cereal dust. Also an athlete, Bill was in All State Football, was named Best Defensive Back for Deering High School in 1983, and was J.V. regional champ in wrestling, weighing in at 167 pounds. Bill presently works as a lifeguard and swim teacher in Portland.

HAROLD WITHEE

(David McComber)

Harold has toured with the Children's Theatre of Maine as the Emperor in *The Emperor's New Clothes*. From Anson, Harold is a sophomore theatre major and German minor at USM. He most recently performed for Russell Square Players as the breathless and palsied Corbaccio in *Volpone*, for which he was nominated for the Irene Ryan Award for Acting Excellence. Last year Harold was

Jonathan in *Arsenic and Old Lace*, Rudolph the waiter in *The Matchmaker*, and he appeared in *Miss Julie*. At Carrabec High School, Harold performed in *Spoon River Anthology*, as Judas in *Godspell*, as Sgnarelle in Moliere's *Doctor in Spite of Himself*, as Petrucchio in *Taming of the Shrew*, for which he was selected for All-State Cast in 1983. While in high school, Harold was also in the KV Music Festival, went to Boys' State, and won third place in the "Voice of Democracy" competition. In the summer of 1981, Harold apprenticed at the Lakewood Theatre (now the State Theatre of Maine) where he was a member of the cast of *South Pacific*. Harold is box office manager this season at Russell Square Players, and is interested in pursuing a career in theatre management.

PERCY SIMON

(Nat Miller)

Percy earned his master of arts degree in philosophy from the City University of New York and is currently completing his Ph.D. dissertation. A member of the USM Philosophy Department faculty, Percy is also executive director of the television show, "Kaleidoscope," and business manager of the Children's Theatre of Maine.



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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

On September 1, 1932, Eugene O'Neill, ostensibly on vacation at Big Wolf Lake in Maine, recorded his first idea for *Ah, Wilderness!*: "Awoke with the idea for this 'Nostalgic Comedy' and worked out tentative outline—seems fully formed & ready to write."

He set aside his current work, *Days Without End*, and devoted the next weeks to the new project, completing the first draft on September 27. What began as a waking idea at Big Wolf Lake became a reality at the Guild Theatre, New York, on October 2, 1933.

O'Neill characterized *Ah, Wilderness!* as a "comedy of recollection" and in a letter to Leon Miras, an Argentinean critic, he added that "it is first a simple comedy—nostalgic, sentimental recollection of the days of my youth, of the typical family life of that time in the typical town of our states—of the customs and morals of these days as contrasted with what exists today."

Following the opening of the play, reviewers and others wondered if the Miller family and particularly Richard Miller was a thinly disguised retelling of his youth and family in New London, Connecticut.

To some extent, the ensuing years have not totally dispelled that consideration. O'Neill seemed to foster that impression. In a letter to a friend who had sent him a congratulatory letter, he said: "I have a deep personal affection for that play—a feeling towards it that is quite apart from any consideration of it as a piece of dramatic writing by me as a playwright."

O'Neill, however, did try to set the record straight. In a requested interview with *The Times* critic, Brooks Atkinson, he disclaimed an autobiographical connection, stating that the play was not a mirror of his early years except for superficial fragments of his kinship with Richard Miller and his family.

It was not until some years later that reality and artistry would meet. The rending, expiatory family portrait of "the four haunted Tyrones" in *Long Day's Journey Into Night* surely reflects his own experience.

We must then agree with O'Neill that *Ah, Wilderness!* was not a homeward returning for him, but a "dream walking" (as he also referred to it) of what he wished his youth in New London had been: a comedy of recollection—and his only comedy.

Albert J. Duclos

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Performances

Thursday through Saturday at 8:00 p.m.;
Sunday matinee at 2:00 p.m. the first weekend
the show runs.

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