



Press Contacts: Tim Choy, David Barber 323-954-7510  
pr@anoisewithin.org

**25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season**  
**A Noise Within, L.A.'s Acclaimed Classical Repertory Theatre Company, presents**  
**Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!***  
**March 5 - May 20, 2017; Press Opening March 11**

Pasadena, CA (February 9, 2017) -- A Noise Within (ANW), the acclaimed classical repertory theatre, presents the sixth production of their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season, **Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!***, directed by Steven Robman, performing March 5 through May 20, 2017 (press opening is March 11). Robman's work for the theatre includes the premieres of Wendy Wasserstein's *Uncommon Women and Others* and *Isn't It Romantic*, D. L. Coburn's *The Gin Game*, and Ron Hutchinson's *Moonlight and Magnolias*.

A rare departure from the playwright's darker oeuvre, this comedy is unabashedly nestled in the innocent days of turn-of-the-twentieth-century America. Set on July 4, 1906, it is a gentle, loving, and optimistic study of a deeply bonded family as they navigate the youthful indiscretions of their wayward son.

"O'Neill said that he wrote this play about the family he always wished he had," said Director Steven Robman. "So, he took his difficult real life and transformed it into the lighter *Ah, Wilderness!*. Though you can see the outlines and composites of the more troubled characters that appear in his other plays, *Ah, Wilderness!* is a side of O'Neill that many people don't know about or aren't used to. It's his only full-length comedy. When audiences more familiar with *Long Day's Journey into Night* or *The Iceman Cometh* watch this play, they'll be surprised and pleased to see that Eugene O'Neill can write jokes and can give them a fun experience in the theatre."

*Ah, Wilderness!*, subtitled "A Nostalgic Comedy of the Ancient Days when Youth was Young, and Right was Right, and Life was a Wicked Opportunity," focuses on the educated middle-class Miller family of New London, Connecticut. The plot deals with the teenaged middle son, Richard, and his coming of age in sweet days of early twentieth-century America. Inspired by the play's many musical references and moments, Robman adds period songs to the staging and sound design. "Our production opens with the whole family gathered around the piano singing a lilting ballad from the period. In the days before movies and television or even radio, families often entertained themselves by playing musical instruments and singing – and this togetherness underscores the warmth and congeniality of the Miller family and the play itself."

Robman points out that "the play pokes gentle fun at all the kids who repeat to their parents what they've been reading as if it had never been heard before. It's no mistake that the setting is the eve of July 4; it's a play about independence. Richard spouts classical poetry and radical political ideology throughout much of the play, borrowing other people's voices to challenge his elders and to rebel like many 17-year-olds do."

"But at the end of the play, by virtue of making a lot of mistakes and growing up a bit, Richard is in a position to find his own voice; to, in effect, declare his 'independence.' He learns that you don't have to alienate yourself from the people around you to be 'independent,' that you can still be your own person while immersed in the love of your family."

A Noise Within's co-producing Artistic Director Geoff Elliott says, "This play is a delightful comedy and the family we see on stage is the family anyone would like to have. Their fundamentals are abiding loyalty and consistent, uncompromising love and acceptance. It is a healing story for this day and age; a poetic love letter to our democracy and a celebration of America – a needed balm in light of current events. "

The *Ah, Wilderness!* cast includes Nicholas Hormann\* as Nat Miller, Deborah Strang\* as Essie Miller, Ian Littleworth\* as Arthur Miller, Matt Gall as Richard Miller, Katie Hume as Mildred Miller, Samuel Genghis Christian as Tommy Miller, Alan Blumenfeld\* as Sid Davis, Kitty Swink\* as Lily Miller, Marcelo Tubert\* as David McComber/Bartender, Emily Goss as Muriel McComber, Conor Sheehan as Wint Selby, Emily Kosloski\* as Belle, Kelsey Carthew\* as Nora, and Matt Henerson\* as Salesman. \* Denotes member of Actors' Equity

O'Neill, a Nobel Laureate playwright and master of American realism, uses *Ah, Wilderness!* to look fondly back at an earlier, easier era. Of the play, which was a Broadway hit during the Great Depression, O'Neill said, "It was more the capture of a mood, an evocation [of] the spirit of a time that is dead now with all its ideals and manners & codes – the period in which my middle teens were spent – a memory of the time of my youth – not of my youth, but of the time in which my generation spent youth."

"That's the way I would have liked my boyhood to have been. [*Ah, Wilderness!*] was a sort of wishing out loud."

Eugene's own father, James O'Neill, was a talented actor said to have bitterly 'wasted' his talents performing in over 6,000 performances of the Alexandre Dumas' chestnut, *The Count of Monte Cristo*. His mother was addicted to morphine. O'Neill suffered from bouts of depression and alcoholism; his brother Jamie drank himself to death at age 40, his sons Eugene and Shane committed suicide.

The title derives from Edward Fitzgerald's translation of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, one of Richard's favorite poems:

*A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread—and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness—  
Oh, Wilderness were Paradise now!*

The plot of *Ah, Wilderness!* came to O'Neill in a dream – and he wrote the play in three weeks in 1932. "It simply gushed out of me," he said in a letter to his son. *Ah, Wilderness!* and his tragic semi-autobiographical masterpiece *Long Day's Journey Into Night* are said to be companion pieces; both are thought to be set at O'Neill's boyhood summer home, the Monte Cristo cottage.

In the original production on Broadway, George M. Cohan – who was born on July 4<sup>th</sup> and is the composer of "You're a Grand Old Flag" and "The Yankee Doodle Boy," played father Nat Miller. On tour, Will Rogers played Nat, contributing to the commercial success of the play. *Ah, Wilderness!* had only been open two weeks when MGM offered O'Neill \$75,000 for the film rights. There were two film adaptations: one in 1935 and then as *Summer Holiday* ten years later; Mickey Rooney appeared as Tommy in the former, and as Richard in the latter. The story was made into the 1959 Broadway musical *Take Me Along* starring Jackie Gleason as Uncle Sid, Walter Pidgeon as Nat, and Robert Morse as Richard. The production ran for 448 performances, and Gleason won the 1960 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical.

### **Praise for *Ah Wilderness!***

In the review of a 1998 production of the play at Huntington Theatre Company in Boston, Ed Siegel in *The Boston Globe* noted O'Neill, who "penned [it] in a single month in 1932, the Harvard educated playwright takes a well-deserved vacation from this cold and unrelenting world, and gives us a surprisingly warm portrayal of middle-class family life in large small-town America ... The character Richard Miller was clearly

modeled on O'Neill's image of himself as an aspiring poet, but unlike O'Neill, Richard's rebellion is quelled and his craving for romantic endeavors extinguished by a loving family who cares and wishes him the best."

Jason Mason Brown said, in the *New York Evening Post*, "Mr. O'Neill has laid aside his Tragic Mask. Forgetting about Freud and the fierce struggles his men and women have waged for years against merciless gods, he has written a comedy about sweet scented youth which is unlike any other play that has come from his pen."

Brooks Atkinson in *The New York Times* said, "All the characters are beguiling ... [has a] warmth that floods through the play. He not only likes these burgher folk, but he understands them; and particularly in the last act in the scene between the son and the father he has caught all the love and anguish that such relationships conceal. If Mr. O'Neill can write with as much clarity as this, it is hard to understand why he has held up the grim mask so long."

Terry Teachout in *The Wall Street Journal* said, "It's as sunny as the day that it describes. But bright sunshine casts dark shadows, and part of what makes *Ah, Wilderness!* so excellent is that it doesn't ignore the complexities of life."

### **About Eugene O'Neill**

O'Neill was the first American dramatist to regard the stage as a literary medium and the only American playwright ever to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Through his efforts, the American theatre grew up during the 1920s, developing into a cultural medium that could take its place with the best in American fiction, painting, and music. Until his *Beyond the Horizon* was produced in 1920, Broadway theatrical fare, apart from musicals and an occasional European import of quality, had consisted largely of contrived melodrama and farce. O'Neill saw the theatre as a valid forum for the presentation of serious ideas. Imbued with the tragic sense of life, he aimed for a contemporary drama that had its roots in the most powerful of ancient Greek tragedies – a drama that could rise to the emotional heights of Shakespeare. For more than 20 years, both with such masterpieces as *Desire Under the Elms*, *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *The Iceman Cometh* and by his inspiration to other serious dramatists, O'Neill set the pace for the blossoming of the Broadway theatre.

### **About director Steven Robman**

**Steven Robman** divides his time between directing for the theatre and for television. He has staged more than 50 plays in New York and across the United States and helmed over 100 hours of television, including 22 episodes of the Golden Globe Award-winning *Party of Five*.

After graduating from the University of California at Berkeley and spending two years in the Peace Corps, Robman earned an MFA in Directing from the Yale School of Drama and began staging plays professionally. His work for the theatre includes the premieres of several new plays which continue to be produced both in the U.S. and internationally: Wendy Wasserstein's *Uncommon Women and Others* and *Isn't It Romantic*, D. L. Coburn's *The Gin Game*, and Ron Hutchinson's *Moonlight and Magnolias*. In the Los Angeles area, he has recently directed productions at the Mark Taper Forum, The Pasadena Playhouse, the Antaeus Theatre, and the Odyssey Theatre.

His work for television includes episodes of *Medium*, *Boston Public*, *Gilmore Girls*, *The O.C.*, *Law & Order*, *Northern Exposure*, *L.A. Law*, *Melrose Place*, *Sisters*, *Strong Medicine*, *American Dreams*, *The Guardian*, *Ghost Whisperer*, *Shark*, *Against The Wall*, and *Lonestar*. Robman has also directed 10 television films, including *The Audrey Hepburn Story*.

## **Symposium, Conversations, Pay What You Can**

The run of *Ah, Wilderness!* includes a pre-performance symposium on Wednesday, March 8, at 6:30 pm, post-performance conversations with the artists on Sunday March 19, at 2:00 pm, Friday, April 21 at 8:00 pm, Friday, May 19 at 8:00, with a Pay What You Can performance on Thursday, March 9 at 7:30 pm.

## **About the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season 2016-2017 – *Beyond our Wildest Dreams***

This spring, ANW's *Beyond our Wildest Dreams*-themed season continues with *King Lear* (Feb 12-May 6, 2017) and *Man of La Mancha* (March 26-May 21, 2017), which round out our celebratory season.

## **About A Noise Within**

A Noise Within, celebrating its 25th Anniversary during the 2016-2017 season, was recently named "one of the nation's premier classical repertory companies" by *The Huffington Post*, and is a leading regional producer based in Pasadena, CA. ANW's award-winning resident company practices a rotating repertory model at their state-of-the-art, 283-seat performing space. This venue, established in 2011, has allowed ANW to expand its audience, surpassing its previous box office, subscription, and attendance records each year. In addition to producing world-class performances of classical theatre, the organization runs robust education programs committed to inspiring diverse audiences of all ages. Helmed by Producing Artistic Directors Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, who hold MFAs from San Francisco's American Conservatory Theatre, A Noise Within truly delivers CLASSIC THEATRE, MODERN MAGIC.

[www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org)

## **Calendar Listing for *Ah, Wilderness!***

### **Eugene O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness!***

Directed by Steven Robman

A Noise Within, 3352 E Foothill Blvd, Pasadena, CA 91107

### **Performances:**

Sunday, March 5 at 2:00 pm

Wednesday, March 8 at 7:30 pm

(Symposium at 6:00 pm)

Thursday, March 9 at 7:30 pm

Friday, March 10 at 8:00 pm (*Pay What You Can*)

Saturday, March 11 at 8:00 pm (Press Opening)

Sunday, March 12 at 2:00 pm

Sunday, March 19 at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm

Sunday, April 9 at 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm

Saturday, April 15 2:00 pm and 8:00 pm

Thursday, April 20 at 7:30 pm

Friday, April 21 at 8:00 pm (*Conversations*-post show)

Sunday, May 14 at 2:00 pm & 7:00 pm

Friday, May 19 at 8:00 pm (*Conversations*-post show)

Saturday, May 20 at 2:00 pm & 8:00 pm

### **Tickets and information:**

**Online** [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org)

**Phone** 626-356-3100 ex 1

**Prices** Single Tickets start at \$25

Student Rush with ID, one hour before performance \$20.00

**Groups** 10 or more -- adults from \$25/ticket; students from \$18/ticket

*Pay What You Can* Performance – Thursday March 9 at 7:30 pm-- on sale at box office on day of performance at 2:00 pm, sold cash-only, based on availability; limit two tickets per person.

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