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THEATRE ARTISTS WORKSHOP PRESENTS A DYNAMIC SEASON OF CLASSIC PLAYS FOR 2012

The trauma that was felt throughout the entertainment industry over a half century ago. The socialite novelist inviting a clairvoyant to his home for a seance in hopes of finding good material for his next book. The romantic and artistic conflicts experienced by four unique characters in Czarist Russia. These three wildly divergent shows encompass the Theatre Artists Workshop 2012 lineup of Classic Night Reading Series.

Beginning February 10 & 11, 8 p.m. each night, with Eric Bentley's powerful retelling of the era when Hollywood and the entertainment industry shuddered, *ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN?*, then moving to March 9 & 10, 8 p.m. each night, with the comedic genius of Sir Noel Coward and *BLITHE SPIRIT*, and culminating on April 13 & 14, 8 p.m. each night with Anton Chekov's immortal, *THE SEAGULL*, the Theatre Artists Workshop presents a unique trifecta of plays spanning continents, centuries and conflicts as extreme as the great writers who penned them.

2012 marks the 65th anniversary of the commencement of HUAC (the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings). Often referred to as "The McCarthy Hearings," HUAC spanned nearly a decade in which lives and careers were systematically destroyed by simply having one question asked of the person called before the Committee: *Are you now, or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?* Esteemed scholar and writer Eric Bentley (a member of New York's Theatre Hall of Fame) culled through countless hours of testimony and extensive archives to present a play that is as relevant and powerful today as the devastating effect of HUAC was in the 1940s and '50s. In the early 1970s, Bentley wrote this assessment of transcribing the Hearings into dramatic theatre: "*While I have my own opinions and commitments, I have tried to be fair, and my aim in employing a high degree of selectivity was not, lawyer-fashion, to make an overwhelming case for a client...What I hoped to have captured in this treatment is a story, a newspaperman's "story," and a writer's, even perhaps a playwright's story, a dramatic action.*"

Bentley has indeed captured a story that draws many comparisons to the world and political climate we live in today. Directed by Trumbull resident Mark Graham, featuring many names and faces familiar to our TAW audiences, and staged in a unique setting that feels as if the audience is right in the middle of a courtroom, this first Classic Night offering of 2012 is not to be missed.

As the calendar turns to March, TAW lightens the mood a bit by presenting Sir Noel Coward's hilarious take on the social elite of England, BLITHE SPIRIT. Coward wrote his classic in less than a week and it debuted in 1941 in the West End of London as a way to lighten the mood of many Londoners living with the horrors of constant Nazi aircraft raids during the Second World War. This little diversion ended up running for nearly 2,000 performances! When it transferred to Broadway shortly thereafter it ran on the Great White Way for almost two solid years. In fact, 2012 marks the 70th anniversary of BLITHE SPIRIT at the Booth Theatre in NYC. The TAW cast features TAW founder Keir Dullea (Fairfield) starring as Charles Condomine, Keir's wife Mia Dillon (Fairfield), E. Katherine Kerr (Wilton), Rosemary Foley (Pelham NY), Martin West (Westport), Cindy Hannah (Wilton) and Caroline Marble (Ridgefield). The reading is directed by Westport resident David Rogers. When asked about the elegant style of Sir Noel and if his work stands the test of time, Rogers replied, *"Yes, of course, but if Coward were with us today and writing he wouldn't do this type of play again. That world of the British upper class he wrote about so often is gone now, and yet when he wrote about the "every man" his words and characters were equally wonderful."* Rogers notes that early in the development of his long career in theatre one of his great inspirations was indeed Coward – for his writing, acting, dancing, not to mention the lyrics he wrote for scores of songs and poetry. A true Renaissance man of the arts, regardless of the time in history.

Finally, as winter turns into spring, TAW closes its Classic Night Reading Series with the great Anton Chekov's THE SEAGULL, directed by Wilton resident E. Katherine Kerr and starring Florence Phillips (Cos Cob), Miles Everett, Wynter Kullman, Mark Basile (Weston), Chilton Ryan (Weston), Don Striano (Newtown), Jo Anne Parady (Norwalk), Katie Sparer (Stratford), Richard Leonard, and Damien Langan.

2012 marks the 115th anniversary of the first professional production of the play in Moscow. Universally panned by the critics there, a distraught Chekov vowed to never write for the theatre again. Fate intervened a few years later, however, when the great Stanislavski re-mounted the show to wild critical acclaim. Without that happenstance, the great literary voice of Anton Chekov might have been stopped completely, thus depriving theatre audiences worldwide of such classics as THE CHERRY ORCHARD, UNCLE VANYA, and IVANOV, among others. In fact, the success of the revived play is the reason that a seagull is the emblem of the world-famous Moscow Art Theatre.

All performances take place at 5 Gregory Blvd., Norwalk. There is no admission charge for Classic Nights, although donations are encouraged. Reservations are not taken for Classic Nights, so early arrival is recommended to insure a seat. Parking is free. For more information, visit our website at www.taworkshop.org.

The Theatre Artists Workshop is a group of professional actors, writers, and directors who have been honing their craft on a weekly basis for more than 28 years. Started by Keir Dullea (2002: A Space Odyssey), his wife Susie Fuller, and a like-minded set of theatre professionals, the company now numbers more than 120, and has added Classic Nights, fall and spring performances, as well as Alternate Night showcases for new works.