

All SNB

Upper Arlington

'Ah, Wilderness!' captures changing patterns of family

Eugene O'Neill was the son of James O'Neill, an Irish immigrant who came to the United States at the age of five.

Eugene O'Neill, went from private schools to Princeton University but was dismissed at the end of a year because of failing grades. The next five years he worked as a common seaman and held laborer jobs in Argentina. Eugene was both an actor and stage manager for short intervals with his father's troupe. This was followed by being a reporter. In 1912, he entered a sanatorium where he was a tubercular patient. It was there that O'Neill decided to become a playwright and his first step was to read all the plays written by Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg.

Eugene O'Neill's first professionally produced play, *Beyond the Horizon*, received the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1920 followed by Pulitzer Prize-winning *Anna Christie* in 1922 and *Strange Interlude* in 1927. In 1936 he became the second American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.

Ah, Wilderness! (1932) was one of O'Neill's few incursions into comedy and is a very successful play with audiences throughout the world.

The Otterbein Summer Theatre again proved the universal appeal of O'Neill's *Ah, Wilderness* as they

opened their twentieth anniversary season with a well-produced and very touchingly played production of *Ah, Wilderness*. It is a play of a slower-paced time — a play about family life and family values and the continuity of that life and its values.

We meet the Miller's in the family home in a small town in Connecticut. Father, Nat Miller is owner and editor of the towns newspaper. Nat Miller was played by Michael Hartman, on his second return to this Otterbein Summer The-

act II

Jean Ann Wolfe-Weaver



ater as an equity artist.

Director Dr. Charles Dordrill and professional actor, Michael, had last worked together in 1970 for a summer theater production of *Harvey*. Hartman has worked on Broadway in *Sherlock Holmes* and numerous off

Broadway productions which includes his favorite role of Jay Follet in *All the Way Home*. Obviously, Dordrill and Hartman work well together as Hartman's portrayal of the father, Nat Miller, was warm, humorous and very believable.

Hartman is comfortable on a stage and can fill that stage or be a part of the background, he can command focus or give focus to another, one thing many actors cannot do.

The rest of the Miller family is played by Catherine Randazzo as mother, Essie Miller; Arthur, the son home from college (Tim Gregory); Mildred (Bethany Bangeman), the still at home daughter; Tommy (Brad Egger), the youngest son; and the middle son, Richard, (Steve Geyer) who is the re-

bel of the family, the reader and "free" thinker.

Nat Miller (David Caldwell) is Mrs. Miller's brother and "Uncle Sid" to the family. He has a salesman's personality, is a flashy dresser can drink too much, and everyone loves him most of the time.

The story is about the family, growing up, and acceptance of others. It is also about patterns of life. The changes in the patterns from July 4, 1906 to July 4, 1986 are legion, yet in some ways the same.

Otterbein grad returns for 'Ah, Wilderness'

By Dana Stone
SNP Staff Writer

Michael Hartman, a 1970 Otterbein College graduate, has experienced some personal and theatrical nostalgia since returning to campus to appear in *Ah, Wilderness!*

Hartman, who has appeared on the New York stage and in television commercials, portrays the father of the main character in *Wilderness*. The Eugene O'Neil play, a romantic story about a 16-year-old boy growing into manhood in early the 20th century, runs until next Sunday in the Arena Theater in the Campus Center.

"The play is a warm, nostalgic piece," he said. "And it's nostalgic for me to come back to Otterbein a few days early and see some old friends."

Hartman, who appeared in a 1983 Otterbein production of *Elephant Man*, will work with play director and theater department chair-

man Charles Dodrill for the first time in 16 years, he said.

"It's fun working with the student thespians in the play," he said. "I learn as much from them as they learn from me."

Hartman has appeared in *Sherlock Holmes* on Broadway and in *So Long on Lonely Street*, an off-Broadway play, according to Chris Cox, an Otterbein actress. He has done some national television commercials for Pepsi-Cola and Miracle Whip salad dressing, she said.

Steve Geyer portrays Richard, Hartman's theatrical son who falls in love. The father of Richard's girl is unhappy when he finds out that the boy reads poetry.

As a result, he tells his daughter to get rid of him, said Tod Wilson, the play's business manager. In the end, everything works out for the best, and boy gets girl.

Co-25-86 Westville Times News
Hartman and the student actors and actresses have put in long hours getting ready to put on *Ah, Wilderness!*, Cox said. They rehearsed three times a day for eight days prior to its opening, which was yesterday.

When the student performers weren't rehearsing, they were busy building

scenery and sewing up costumes, Cox said.

"Creating the scenery was a big job because it had to be built from scratch," she said. "It has to look realistic."

The play will be performed tonight through Saturday at 8:30 p.m. and Sunday, June 29, at 2 p.m.

VISION

Nostalgic picnic worth joining

By Nancy Gilson

Dispatch Arts Reporter

Ah, wilderness. Ah, nostalgia. Ah, tradition.

Otterbein Summer Theatre is celebrating its 20th anniversary with a nostalgia piece, Eugene O'Neill's cheerful *Ah! Wilderness*.

This production and indeed, the whole season, is like a family picnic with lots of members coming home to recall good times and add to them. In all, Otterbein will bring back nine of its theater graduates — actors, designers and directors who have gone on to professional theater. Equity actor Michael Hartman, a 1970 graduate, heads the cast of *Ah! Wilderness*. He's the father in this turn-of-the-century domestic comedy.

THIS PLAY is a comfortable, if obviously dated selection. O'Neill is better known for his bitter, Greek-like tragedies such as *The Iceman Cometh* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night*.

Some say that with *Ah! Wilderness*, about the growing pains of an adolescent boy, O'Neill fantasized about what his own boyhood might have been under happier circumstances. The play takes place during the Fourth of July, 1906, in a small town in Connecticut. Family crises revolve around an unmarried aunt, her tiptling suitor and the teen-age son's first brush with demon rum and puppy love. It all seems especially old-fashioned compared to today's teen angst movies such as *The Breakfast Club*.

Otterbein's production, directed by Charles Dodrill, is played straight. Hartman's father is a moral newspaper owner who defends his children even if it means offending a major advertiser. The mother (Catherine Randazzo) fusses around the house and objects to such language as "getting

REVIEW

***Ah! Wilderness* continues through Sunday in the Campus Arena Theatre at Otterbein College.**

in dutch" and "water closet." (It's the *bathroom*.) Charlotte Dougherty overcomes the disadvantage of youth to give a poignant portrayal of the spinster aunt and David Caldwell is never better than when playing her devoted but drunk admirer.

WITH HIS fresh face and slight build, Steve Geyer looks exactly right in the pivotal role of the teen-age son, Richard. Geyer

takes himself a little too seriously — a touch of self-deprecation would have added some needed bite to the production — but he has deftly captured the high-minded, squirmy anxiety of adolescence.

Dodrill has chosen a leisurely pace, perhaps appropriate for the 1900s setting. Still, the production feels stodgy and every performance would be improved with snappier deliveries.

As often happens at Otterbein, the designers have worked a little magic in the tiny basement Arena Theatre in the Campus Center. Fred Thayer has fashioned a beautiful Victorian home and Petie Dodrill has designed crisp, congenial costumes.