

LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT



WESTON PLAYHOUSE
THEATRE COMPANY

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Cast and Creatives

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MEET THE CAST

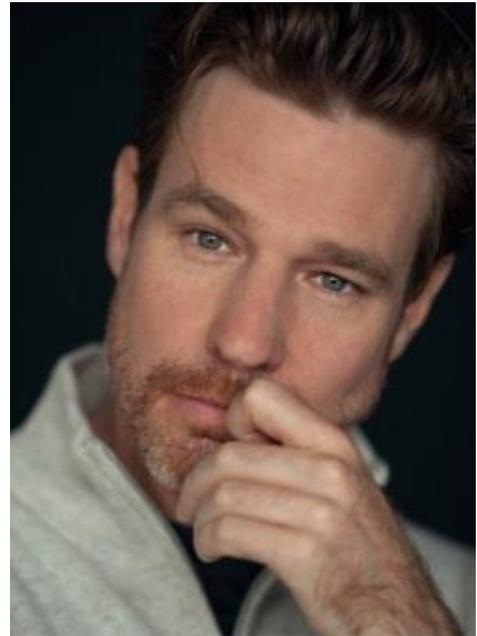
Meet the cast of this dark family drama. Starring Derek Smith, Kathryn Meisle, Liam Craig, Andrew Veenstra, and Piper Goodeve.



AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ETHAN MCSWEENEY

Piper Goodeve: Why is *Long Day's Journey into Night* a play you were interested in directing? What draws you to the piece?

Ethan McSweeney: For starters, alongside about half a dozen other plays, it is definitely one of the great classics of American literature, and also of 20th century world dramatic literature. It's the masterpiece of a master dramatist. But I'm really most drawn to it because he wrote it not to have it published in his lifetime and with explicit instructions that it never be produced onstage, so it's an extraordinary work of confession and exploration. It is O'Neill exhuming his family but also himself, and trying to understand how he came to be. And frankly that's the job of the artist, to help understand how any of us came to be, and to hold a mirror up to our nature.



PG: What do you think *Long Day's Journey into Night* is about?

EM: I think it is an extraordinary portrait of a family coping with addiction: every single member of this family has an addiction issue. And that's true in a lot of families, and in many families it's also true that even if only one member of the family is actively dealing with an addiction issue, that means everybody is somehow involved. We are all connected in that. *In Long Day's Journey*, even Cathleen, the Irish serving maid, has potential addiction issues. There isn't anyone in the household who isn't dominated by them.

PG: Addiction and substance abuse is something that every state in America is dealing with right now, and Vermont in particular. Can you talk a bit about the relevance of this play, even though it was written in 1942 and published in 1956?

EM: Mary's story, word for word, is the exact pattern of how so many people have been caught up in the current opioid epidemic. I find that just devastating and incredibly relevant and remarkably timely. To be able to do this play now and explore this story in a state that is unfortunately currently ground zero for this problem, and not the only ground zero, but one of the places where this epidemic has taken hold in a more devastating way than almost any place else, is I think an opportunity. We have the opportunity to really look at Mary's story and not judge her. An irresponsible physician treating her post-partum and pregnancy related pain, prescribed addictive opiates for her after her third child was born, and she's never able to shake the dope. She started because she got pain medication that was addictive. I'm very interested in all forms of addiction and I think somewhere inside us we are all capable of it. I think it is a problem we share as humans. One of the things about treating pain is, well who isn't in some kind of pain? I've been reading a lot of books about the opioid epidemic, and in one the doctor says, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how bad is the pain?" And it's like, well 10 being what? 10 being a Syrian refugee? Or 10 being my job is a dead end, I'm not in love with my partner, and the dog recently died. I mean, who couldn't claim a 10 somewhere? There's a lot of universality in that, and I'm quite interested in this play because of that. Add to that, that unavailable to Mary is any sort of addiction therapy, or AA, or anything. There are no tools for her in that time or world. So she is trying to white knuckle her way through battling a very serious problem.

My whole approach to it is to take this play off the museum shelf, and say that I think it is ultra-contemporary. Yes, it is a classic. And a real classic, like a Greek play or a Shakespeare play, is timeless. They deal with issues that unfortunately will always be with us. If it isn't one addiction epidemic, then there will be another. The question is how do we cope? And what can theatre do to help us?

PG: What do you hope young people take away from seeing LDJ?

EM: When Steve Stettler first approached me, two things he said were 1) we know there will be student performances of this, and 2) are you interested in editing it? And I said, great, and yes. I got excited about the possibility of trying to edit it in a way that takes nothing away from the journey but essentially gets you to "night" a little bit sooner. So instead of having quite such a long day of set up, we get to the scene where everything is starting to come out sooner. And to me, the reason why that is possible, is that O'Neill, in order to make sure you get something, sometimes

will write the same thing two or three times. And particularly in this play, because some of the material he's looking at is hard for him. You can feel that it is hard for the writer. He keeps apologizing for his family, and he doesn't want you to look at them in a bad light, so he'll give them a couple more things to say before he lowers the boom. With the advantage of a slightly more modern appreciation of psychology and motivation, and frankly a more holistic view of addiction, one that it is not quite so laden with an Irish Catholic shame, we can cut through the apology and just get straight into it. I can't promise it will only be two hours, but it is going to be sharper, sleeker, and edgier.

And as for the school matinees, if I can hold the interest of students on a play as long and as challenging as this one, then we will know we have done a good job. And I want them to just think, "What a great play!" I want them to be surprised. And to think, "Who knew? This play that is old and I didn't think was for me, but has spoken to me and brought me out of myself, and given me something to think about."