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“Bridging the Gap Between France and the US: The Koltès Project Sets its Seeds in Atlanta”

7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta continues the proud tradition of French/American artistic collaboration with the creation of THE U. S. KOLTES PROJECT. This project was created out of 7 Stages’ desire to continue the artistic legacy of the playwright Bernard-Marie Koltès. In cooperation with and through the exclusive permission of the Koltès Estate, a ten-year program was established in order to translate and produce six of Koltès’ plays: Dans la solitude des champs de coton, Le Jour des meurtres dans l’histoire d’Hamlet, Sallinger, La Nuit juste avant les forêts & Tabataba and Quai Ouest. 7 Stages chose these plays because they address the curious human condition and predicament we face in relation to ourselves as citizens of the United States, as citizens of the world, and how the world views America and Americans. Each play speaks of intense isolation, fear of the ‘Other’, deal-making, senseless war, misplaced national loyalty, and dysfunctional familial love/hate. Isma’il ibn Conner, Artistic Associate of 7 Stages and the official translator of the Koltès plays explains, “the 7 Stages U.S. Koltès Project is a long-range effort to make new versions of Koltès’ plays, including several that have not been published, as well as his novels and other writings by and about him.”

Born in 1948 to a middle-class family in Metz, Bernard-Marie Koltès’ life was violent and anchored in revolt. He tried his hand at writing as a youth but later renounced it, and didn’t take to the stage until the age of twenty. After seeing the film actress Maria Casarès, he was inspired and resumed writing, completing around ten plays in his lifetime. Koltès emerged as one of the most distinctive and important dramatic voices of the 1980s. His work, based in real-life problems, expresses the tragedy of being alone and of death. His writing style accents the dramatic tension and the lyricism of his plays. It is evident that Genet and the absurdist influenced Koltès’ writing. Like other absurdist writers, he felt exiled - in his case, as a homosexual in a heterosexual world. In Africa, he saw native cultures being wiped out by European influences. This theme brought forth Black Battles with Dogs. After a visit to America he wrote Quay West (1985), about a brother and sister in a foreign culture. The psychopathic killer Roberto Succo provided the inspiration for his final play Roberto Zucco.

In the Solitude of Cotton Fields will be performed at 7 Stages opening up on April 24th and running through May 18th in Atlanta. This play is a journey of deals - both profane and sacred, of desires that must be discovered and satisfied, of light and dark - two aspects of one entity, and the powerful interaction of two men who are more familiar than they appear. There is only a dealer, a client, and desires that must be satisfied, at all costs. Conner and 7 Stages artistic director Del Hamilton will appear as the two actors in the play. They were in the original Koltès production of 7 Stages’ 2001 Black Battles with Dogs that was received with critical acclaim in Europe.

7 Stages is pleased to announce that Eric Vigner, one of the leading theatre directors from France and artistic director of CDDB, National Theatre of Lorient, has agreed to direct In the Solitude of Cottonfields. Highly regarded as a director at the well-known Comedie Francaise, Mr. Vigner has also recently directed successful productions in Montreal, Korea, Albania and elsewhere. “Hosting one of the hottest French directors is a coup for Atlanta, but it also means our show has the best possible person as its leader, so we are especially happy to have him,” says Hamilton.

Furthermore, Ism’ail Conner will be taking part in an artistic residency from February 5 to March 1, 2008 at La Chartreuse - National Center for Playwrighting, in Villeneuve-les-Avignon, France. As an American actor and translator, creator of the artist collective Group 7(G7) at 7 Stages and 7 Stages Artistic Associate, he will be hosted in residence with the U.S. Koltès project. His goal is to translate six plays of Koltès’ plays over the next decade, and also to publish, organize symposia and panels, tours in France, Germany, Africa, and the United States. During his residency, Conner wants to work with French artists on his translations of In the solitude of cotton fields and The day of murders in the history of Hamlet. He will also explore other writings of Koltès. Here is the link for the residency: <http://www.chartreuse.org/>

IN THE SOLITUDE OF COTTONFIELDS premieres at 7 Stages, April 24 and plays until May 18, 2008. For more information : www.7stages.org

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