

## A LOVELY SUNDAY FOR CREVE COEUR

by TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

COMEDY

### *On the Kindness of Friends*

In this homey comedy by Williams, set in 1935 and first produced in 1979, Dotty Gallaway, a school teacher who suffers from “Southern belle complex,” nervously waits in a St. Louis efficiency apartment for the man she loves to call her. Dotty’s in her room exercising, but her boisterous roommate, Bodey, can’t hear the phone. Bodey is partly deaf and Sophie Gluck, the grief-stricken German-speaking girl from upstairs, sobs too loudly. Besides, Bodey has other happier plans for Dotty: a picnic at Creve Coeur with Bodey’s twin brother.

*Creve coeur* means ‘broken heart’ in French. It was also the name of an amusement park at the end of the St. Louis streetcar line. Dotty passes from one meaning to the other, coaxed along lovingly by Bodey and prodded by another friend, Helena, a socialite who has “the eyes of a predatory bird.” Bodey and Helena have diverging dreams for Dotty, and what Dotty chooses for herself is a satisfying conclusion.

Williams expanded a long one-act titled simply *Creve Coeur* into a two-act version with the longer title. *Creve* premiered June 1978 at the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina, directed by Keith Hack, who had staged his triumphant British production of *Vieux Carré* that May. The story behind the scenes, told in an interview by Charlotte Moore, who played Bodey in the first production, is that five days before the play opened in Charleston, she was called in by Hack to replace another

actress who was playing Bodey. Hack had himself been hired two days before to replace another director. In four days of rewrites and arguments with the Method-trained Shirley Knight (who played Dotty) somehow the play got up. The critics, including the New York Times second string critic Mel Gussow, who came down to South Carolina, were delighted (and mistaken) to recognize the return of a kinder gentler Tennessee Williams. Six months later, *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* opened with Knight and Moore Off-Broadway under Keith Hack’s direction at the Hudson Guild Theater. The day before it opened the actress playing Sophie was replaced. Despite good reviews the show ran a disappointing 36 performances. Ironically, *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* has been claimed as the inspiration for the television series *Golden Girls*, which ran for seven seasons.

Though Williams cut out long lyric passages in rehearsals, the cadence of the dialogue is recognizably a return to Williams’ earlier stylings. He had dramatized this story before in a script, dated around 1957, for an unproduced television play, titled *All Gaul is Divided*. Williams claimed to have started the 1970s text spontaneously, then found the 1950s television play in a drawer. Maybe. The caring, if sometimes catty, relations between characters are very unlike the fierce cruelties of *Vieux Carré*, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* and *Something*



Sara Richardson and Sally Ann Wright.  
Photo courtesy of Gremlin Theatre

*Cloudy, Something Clear* all of which Williams was working on at the same time in the late 1970’s. *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* proclamation of friendship as salvation much more resembles the sensibilities of *Period of Adjustment* (written in 1959) and the 1950s plays of William Inge, also set in the Mid-West. That life can be satisfying if one settles, which was more Inge’s sensibility than Williams’. On its own terms, Williams play is a beguiling and unusually comic way for the playwright to advance his vision of what a woman does while waiting for a man. In *A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur*, it’s her friends she depends on, not strangers.

*DOTTY: Go on, we must just go on, that’s all that life seems to offer and – demand.*

*A Lovely Sunday for Creve Coeur* comes to the Festival from Gremlin Theatre in St. Paul, Minnesota. Directed by TW Fest executive director, Jef Hall-Flavin. The *Twin Cities Daily Planet* praised the actors’ “perfect timing [and] Midwestern clarity,” calling it “a solid piece by Gremlin not to miss.” The Festival’s site-specific approach welcomes guests through a wonderful garden into a private home where Bodey’s preparations for her picnic include frying chicken and making deviled eggs. Gremlin Theatre returns to Provincetown following their world-premiere Festival production of *The Enemy: Time* in 2009. Sally Ann Wright, who played Mrs. Gibbs in that production, plays the role of Bodey.

*When four eccentric, unforgettable women end up together under one roof in St. Louis in the mid-1930s, high hopes meet with a creeping loneliness, and dashed plans mix uneasily with irrepressible dreams.*

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**Sweet, honest, compassionate, different and totally enjoyable.**

— Clive Barnes, *New York Post*

### A LOVELY SUNDAY FOR CREVE COEUR

directed by JEF HALL-FLAVIN

**Gremlin Theatre**

St. Paul, MN

Thursday September 25, 3:00 – 5:15

Friday September 26, 3:00 – 5:15

Saturday September 27, 4:00 – 6:15

Sunday September 28, 2:30 – 4:45

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