

Paul Green Foundation

NEWS – June 2017



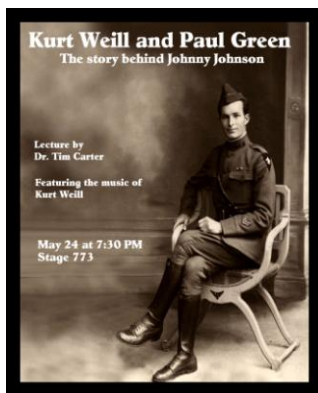
Johnny Johnson & Native Son

There's a lot of new interest in Paul Green's two famous plays – *Johnny Johnson* with **Kurt Weill** and *Native Son* with **Richard Wright**. Not surprising that these two powerful plays are having a revival – the 100th Anniversary of the end of WWI, and the increased sensitivity to race relations in our country.

Johnny Johnson – a bit of history:

In April 1936 Green began thinking about writing “a sort of comic anti-war play” for The Group Theatre at the urging of Cheryl Crawford. To prepare, he took some inspiration from *The Good Soldier Švejk* and other similar works and by reading President Woodrow Wilson's war speeches. In May, Crawford introduced Green to Kurt Weill, recently escaped from Nazi Germany, and they began work in Connecticut in June. By August they were in rehearsals directed by Harold Clurman. *Johnny Johnson*, staged by Lee Strasberg, opened in November at the 44th Street Theatre in New York for 68 performances. From there it went on tour to Boston, New Orleans, Los Angeles and Sacramento. Later it was translated into German and from 1974-78 it was in repertory with the Finnish National Theatre. In subsequent years, *Johnny Johnson* has been performed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2014 and in a concert by the Boston Camerata, Kurt Weill Festival in Dessau, Germany and Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York.

NOW WE'RE HAPPY TO REPORT that *Johnny Johnson* is currently being performed by the Chicago Folks Operetta at Stage 773 from June 24-July 9.



On May 24th at Stage 773, in advance of the opening, Kurt Weill scholar **Tim Carter** presented a multi-media concert that explored the history of Kurt Weill and Paul Green's 1936 Operetta *Johnny Johnson*. The lecture traced Weill's journey from the stages of Europe to the United States and ultimately his collaboration with Pulitzer Prize winning American playwright Paul Green. The concert featured songs from various Kurt Weill shows accompanied by images of both Weill and Paul Green.

Native Son – a bit of history:

Richard Wright's *Native Son* was published in March 1940; in April Wright, impressed with Green's sensitive writing of “Hymn to the Rising Sun,” selected Green to dramatize the play. Wright came to Chapel Hill and the script was completed by August. *Native Son* was first presented as a Mercury Production by Orson Welles and John Houseman at the St. James Theatre in New York on March 25, 1941, with Canada Lee in the role of Bigger Thomas and ran for 114 performances. It went on tour until January 1942. A revised version of the drama, by Green and Ellen Wright (Richard had died in 1960) was produced by the **Carolina Playmakers** for the dedication of the **Paul Green Theatre** on September 29, 1978. In 2006 Kent Gash's adaptation was produced at the Intiman Theatre in Seattle.



NOW WE'RE ALSO HAPPY TO REPORT that *Native Son* has been adapted by **Nambi Kelley <http://www.nambikelley.com/> and has been produced in **California, Arizona and Georgia** with additional performances scheduled in 2017 and beyond.**