

COCTEAU: Pride and the Populous

One of the most famous and respected artist of the 20th Century, **Jean Cocteau** lived his life and loved with pride. His legacy and popularity is best interpreted through his diverse works in opera, ballet, theater, film, visual arts and literature were his pure poetry scant in sexual content, but rich in a universality of passion, tragedy, pathos, compassion, insight, innovation, style and emotion are always in evidence.

Cocteau revealed his private life through his works and lived openly as a gay man. As a teenager, Jean went a grand ball where Sarah Bernhardt said, “*Young man go home and wash all that make up off your face.*” He greatly admired this icon of the 19th Century, but he set the stage for the 20th Century through a rebellion of artistic simplicity.

In his film, *The Blood of a Poet*, one sees a young boy who is a victim of bullying by little thugs who hit him in the head with a snowball that had a stone in it. The blood that flowed from his wound was symbolic of Cocteau’s writing later to be published in *The Difficulty of Being*. This blood was his line of poetry that he tied and retied again, in different ways, to create more manifestations of his *Poesie Plastique*.

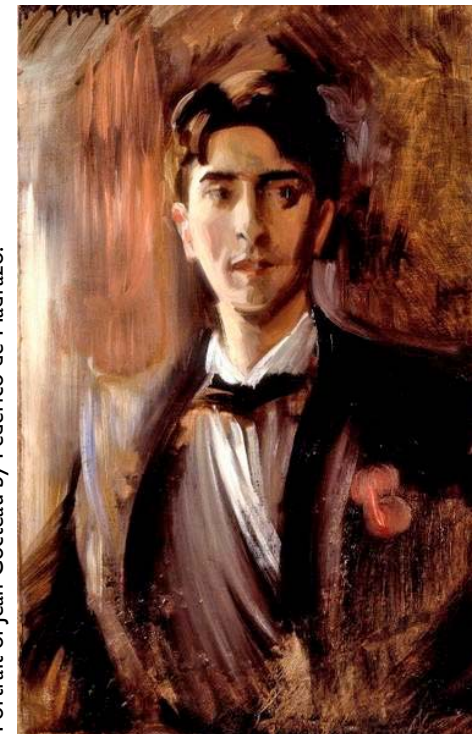
During World War I, Cocteau was not considered “physically fit” to serve in the military. He published a series of war journals: *Le Mot-The Word*, as a warning to the French to not allow the Germans to devour the French spirit at the birth of the Nazi reign of terror. Additionally, he took action that he recounted in his autobiographical book, turned movie, *Thomas the Imposter*.

Cocteau went behind enemy lines on the Belgium Front. Instead of killing, he was washing the wounds of the Marines. He returned to Paris and formed his own ambulance service to bring the wounded back home. He

had Paul Poiret create his personal blue uniform and Elsa Schiaparelli help underwrite this endeavor. He said “*I am the lie that always tells the truth.*” He pretended to be a soldier in order to serve that which he believed to be correct because he felt it was the right thing to do. “No” was not an option for him.

He admired the beauty in men and women. He created a ballet, *The Blue God* for Vaslav Nijinsky whom he considered a good friend and the god of dance. When he finished his ballet, *Phedra*, he wanted a cross between Garbo and Dietrich to dance the role. He set it on the “Black Pearl” of the *Ballets Russes* Tamara Toumanova.

Cocteau was known as *Jean the Birdman*. He always discovered talents or they were attracted to him. He was accused of jumping from limb to limb.



Portrait of Jean Cocteau by Federico de Madrazo.



Ceiling of the Salle de Mariage, Menton, France

He said “Yes, it is true, but it is always in my own tree.” He brought many mainstream artists such Picasso, Bakst, Fini, Man Ray, Dali and many others to the theatre to realize his productions. Two of the most important productions were his opera with Stravinsky *Oedipus Rex* and the ballet *Parade* with music by Les Six. As there spokesman, he was considered “Le Sept” – *The Seventh*.

Cocteau strongly identified with Orpheus’ *The First Prince of Poetry* and according to Albrecht Durer “the first homosexual.” According to legend the furies had him decapitated and his head flowing on his lyre found its final resting place on the isle of Lesbos, and all the time it was singing.

Cocteau discovered **Jean Marais** who was a good actor, but Cocteau made him a living legend. Marais was the natural choice to play the protagonist in his film *Orpheus* which was based on his book of the same title. Marais was the great love of his life. In his last film, *The Testament of Orpheus*, he created the first “living will” to be filmed. He brought together glimpses of his great dramatic works and people that he loved together in his final statement.



It was only fitting that Marais be the one to play in the most classically romantic of all his films, *Beauty and the Beast*. It will be screened in the library’s theater on **Thursday, June 14**. This is one creation from a lifetime body of work that portrayed love and its complexities which was almost always heterosexual, but it is the same in any profound relationship in the GLTB Community because I advocate *Love knows no gender*.

Cocteau felt that the Greeks had portrayed every human emotion and situation. He took these as the corner stones upon which he built his entire literary and artistic world that he shared during his lifetime. Cocteau loved and shared lust with men. He stated that “*Friendship always lasts longer than love.*” You will have a chance to see Cocteau and Colette at the Grand Vefour, a world premier contemporary play about an eternal friendship that he shared with Colette, one of leading female figures of

the 20th Century in the Library’s Theater **Saturday, June 23**.

Launching Pride Month, the City of West Hollywood is featuring *The Poetic Expressions of Jean Cocteau*. The retrospective art exhibition will be displayed on two floors of the West Hollywood Library at 625 North San Vincente Blvd. in West Hollywood, California. The premiere will be **Friday, June 1** at 7:00 pm with a tour led by me, and the exhibition will run through July 31, 2012.

On the library’s first floor you may view that which Cocteau wanted to leave as his visual legacy. This lithographic suite reflects the themes, passions and style of Cocteau’s life. Many of these works may be found as murals in six chapels he created and in the *Salle De Marriage* in Menton, France where he “tattooed” the walls. He is further immortalized by the new *Jean Cocteau Museum* which I opened in heart of Menton, France November 6, 2011.

By Tony Clark, Chevalier dans l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres.



"Remembrance of 1945" dedicated to and portrait of Jean Marais

The City of West Hollywood through its Arts and Cultural Affairs Commission

presents

Cocteau & Colette

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AT THE GRAND VÉFOUR


a new play by

William Emboden

directed by Jason Jenn

starring

Jason Jenn & R. SKY Palkowitz

Saturday, June 23, 2012  7pm

@ The West Hollywood Park
Public Meeting Council Chamber

625 N. San Vicente Blvd

Admission: FREE

2 hrs free parking w/ validation

