

## ***Robert E. Lee-Shades of Gray***

### **New drama takes controversial look at Slavery**

#### **Los Angeles/CA March 2005**

"The educational system in this country is not all that is cracked up to be." Says Mel Johnson Jr. director of the controversial one-man play *Robert E. Lee-Shades of Gray*. "As a black director I'm eager to help audiences form opinions about the history of slavery based on a fuller picture of the times. Lincoln was no saint; the emancipation of the four million slaves in the United States was inspired less by moral obligation than political dexterity. On the other hand Robert E. Lee was no devil, he believed in emancipation. He urged the Confederacy to adopt the successful type of gradual emancipation that had worked in Europe and South America. So you see why the play is called "...Shades of Gray" history is not as simple as most of us have been taught; it's much more interesting than that." Actor/Playwright Tom Dugan, during a rehearsal break for an upcoming tour of the eastern United States, reflect on the public's response to his play thus far "I wanted to challenge the audience against what they think they know about slavery and the Civil War." Johnson adds "We have received standing ovations across the country so I think the public is up for that challenge." After attending the April 2004 premiere of *Robert E. Lee-Shades of Gray* in Richmond Virginia, William Rasmussen, of the Virginia Historical Society, remarked "Here is a man who has been mythologized as saint-like for more than century, only in recent years to be vilified as a proponent of slavery, which in fact he was not. Dugan has contributed much to giving us Lee as a human being, with flaws and virtues."

*Robert E. Lee-Shades of Gray* will tour the eastern United States in the fall of 2005. For more information contact Tom Dugan at (818) 887-7117.

## ***Robert E. Lee-Shades of Gray***

### **New drama takes controversial look at “Simpler Times”**

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Americans don't like messy war. They like stories of good vs. evil with happy endings. That's why the romantic saga of the American Civil War continues to be such a crowd pleaser. Every year hundreds of books, films and documentaries are devoured by a public hungry for a simpler time when war seemed uncomplicated. Now along comes playwright Tom Dugan and war is getting messy again. His new one-man drama *Robert E. Lee - Shades of Gray* has been challenging audiences to look beyond the black and white pages of our history books into the gray areas of America's past. "Because gray is all there ever is... nothing is ever black and white!" Says Dugan on a break in his Los Angeles rehearsal studio, "My grammar school Civil War studies boiled down to 'the North was good and the South was bad'. 'What an amazing coincidence' I thought. 'All the evil people in the US just happened live south of the Mason Dixon line!' As the writer, who also plays the role of General Lee in this controversial tour de force, prepares for his next tour of the US he reflects on the public's response to his play thus far "People are up for the challenge. They're intrigued to learn that Lee, the commander of all Confederate forces, was actually against slavery and repulsed by the very idea of a war between the states." Despite his decidedly unromantic take on the subject *Robert E. Lee - Shades of Gray* is a crowd pleaser receiving standing ovations in every city it has played "People do like romance, but they also like history that they can relate to. An unromantic look at the past can help us understand the present. Just as Lee says in the play... 'Fictionalized history teaches later generations to long for the good old days, which never really were, and to despise the little good that is granted us in this present world'."

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## **Civil War general honors WWII private Los Angeles/CA March 2005**

When I began to do the research for my one-man play *Robert E. Lee-Shades of Gray* I was struck by how dull the books about the Civil War's greatest general were." Actor/Playwright Tom Dugan, during a rehearsal break for an upcoming tour of the eastern United States explains the odd connection between PFC. Francis E. Dugan, to whom the play is dedicated, and the famous Confederate general. "My father received both the Bronze Battle Star and the Purple Heart during WWII. He fought at Normandy, the Battle of the Bulge and all the way up to Berlin. Because of the startling similarities I found between some of the general's and my father's war experiences I was able to infuse what had been dry historical accounts of Robert E. Lee's life with my Dad's intensely emotional memories of war. My Dad was once trapped in a wheat field in France when he tried to crawl out the Germans would spray the field with machine guns fire, in the Mexican War Robert E. Lee hid under a log surrounded by a very hostile enemy. Any movement at all would have cost them both their lives. No one knows how Robert E. Lee managed to stay still for all those hours but I do know how my father did, he took a nap. Remarkably he was able to fall asleep until the sun went down and it was safe again to move. So in my play that's exactly what Lee does. And for all I know it's what really happened." Dugan, who bares a startling resemblance to the late general, continues "In the late sixties my father tried to talk my cousin out of volunteering for Vietnam. The ghastly realities he shared with his nephew of first killing a man became possibly the most moving scene in my play where Lee prepares his youngest son Rob for the bloody battlefields of Virginia." With the help of Historian's from The Museum of the Confederacy, The Virginia Historical Society and Appomattox Court House, Dugan has managed to bring Lee's amazing story to life while maintaining historical accuracy. Dugan concludes "It's very satisfying for me to present an exciting piece of theatre while at the same time honoring my father's memory."

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