

Synopsis: *Renaissance*:

A play by George Taylor

13470 SW 31st St. | Beaverton, OR 97008 | 503-641-1015 | Cyrano@europa.com

Behold the Renaissance man! Uomo universale. Self-taught genius and expert on all things. Scientist. Engineer. Inventor. World's greatest artist. Opinions on everything, and all of them absolutely beyond reproach. —Ombra; Act 1

Imagine a time 500 years ago. Two celebrated artists are commissioned to paint monumental battle scenes to glorify the Florentine Republic. One, in the late afternoon of his career, is notorious for leaving commissions unfinished. The other, a young genius with stone, has never painted a portrait for pay, much less a fresco the size of a billboard. Leonardo; Michelangelo: One-name celebrities with talent so large, it still grabs the imagination today. But in their own times, they are polar opposites and bitter rivals sometimes seen arguing in public. The man who commissions them, the head of the Republic, is a politician with the hubris to believe he can manage two famous egomaniacs who detest and distrust each other.

Renaissance reinvents this (actual) painting competition and its (imaginary) aftermath to cast a new light on modern and universal issues. Act One is a roundelay of conflict and shifting alliances as the artists argue, drink, reconcile, connive, split, and paint very little. The politician plots and meddles and...meddles some more. After two years, only a part of one fresco — Leonardo's — is on the wall. As the act ends, Michelangelo packs for Rome, on orders of the Pope. Leonardo watches his fresco dissolve into ruin, victim of another failed experiment. What might have been “the school for the world” has become a lesson in lost opportunity.

Act Two embraces Einstein's premise that the distinction between past, present, and future is “a stubborn illusion.” Imagine now two immortal artists, unhitched from time, still working out their differences; still confronting the nature and purpose of existence; still, in one case at least, obsessed by what might have been. The battle fresco was to have been Leonardo's masterpiece, a legacy beyond *The Last Supper*, beyond even the Smile Lady.

His plan: revisit 1505 and finish his last battle. Michelangelo and he “march through history together, friends or foes,” so of course Michelangelo must join him. The turning point of the Renaissance, perhaps of the world, pivots on the genius of both of the greatest artists of the age.

But suppose we could alter the past — what will that mean to the present? What alternate realities will we unleash? In 1505 and a half century later, the artists come face-to-face with the murky relationships between past and present, mortality and immortality, art and politics. The play reveals connections between a lost masterpiece of the Renaissance, a controversial icon of 20th century art, and the politics of war in the 21st century.

In the end, *Renaissance* is a play about power and manipulation: art manipulated by politics; people manipulated by art. It poses a central question for the audience to ponder: What, after all, is the purpose of art, and who gets to decide?

Cast: 4 actors:

- Leonardo DaVinci, early 50s. Vibrant, not the weary graybeard of the chalk drawing.
- Michelangelo Buonarroti, 29, compact, dark, intense.
- Piero Soderini, 54, medium in every dimension. Loves the sound of his own voice.
- Ombra, any size, shape, age. Chorus figure; plays several roles.

Michael Annis, a judge for the 2005 Oregon Literary Fellowships, wrote the following in awarding a fellowship to George Taylor for *Renaissance* (then entitled *DaVinci's Last Battle*):

George Taylor has written a most excellent work...a play brimming with historical intrigue, imaginatively conceived dialogue, interior monologues, and facilely reborn characters.

The beauty of the piece is best captured through the pointed commentaries on our time by a man who, 500 years ago, having transcended his own time in every aspect except through his physical body, saw through the political and social corruption of his own day and age, and thus saw through the same corruption of every day and age. Politicians still erect shrines to the glories of battles and their waging of wars, having never been combatants within them themselves; they see the death and suffering of war and its ensuing grief and psychological and spiritual trauma as a great canvas on which to depict the immortality of their own egos.

The dramatic tension between major characters—Leonardo and Michelangelo, with a little Soderini/Machiavelli to stir the pigments—drives the play forward on several levels. The dialogue is never “on the nose,” but rather keeps the suspense elevated and the mind engaged as recreated historical rivalries, jealousies, and dirty tricks are faithfully given new life, purpose, and wax allegorically of the struggle between the old artistic guard that is continuously being challenged and ultimately overthrown by the newer generation of up and coming cultural gunslingers who must replace them. As usual, overbearing and avaricious politicians pull the puppeteer’s strings in an attempt to control the cultural legacy for their own benefit—despite the cost to their nation, their nation’s populations, their artists or their audiences.

*As Taylor, himself, has said, “Rivalries—like art—don’t end with death. Five hundred years after Act I, Leonardo and Michelangelo are still working out their differences and ... working on a legacy... confront[ing] each other, authority, mortality, immortality, and the nature and purpose of existence.... What, the play finally asks, is the purpose of art, and who gets to decide?” George Taylor has left the decision to the audience, yet, like Soderini, he pulls our strings to create the definitive brush strokes that will become what we believe to be our own interpretation of how we perceive these matters. To reiterate what I said once in a play of my own, the personal interpretation of the abstract is the only reality. Through [*Renaissance*], Taylor warns us to be certain our interpretations of life, politics, and art, even though temporally exhilarating, are eternally our own.*