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VETERAN BROADWAY ACTRESS TONI GILLMAN APPEARS IN ONE-WOMAN SHOW ABOUT ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AT UD

DAYTON, Ohio, February 18, 1988--As part of a five-state tour of regional theatres throughout the Midwest, Broadway actress Toni Gillman will portray former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt in a one-woman play, ELEANOR: a celebration, at the University of Dayton on Friday, March 4. The production, the final presentation in UD's 1987-88 Arts Series, is scheduled for 8 p.m. in the Boll Theatre in the Kennedy Union on campus.

Written and directed by Gillman's playwright husband, Gordon Davis, and toured by Minnesota's Lyceum Productions, the play recreates the vivid story of a self-conscious "ugly duckling," a woman moved more by the challenges of her conscience than by party-line dogma--someone whose social vision extended far ahead of her time. Originally commissioned as a piece to celebrate the 100th birthday of Eleanor Roosevelt, the play premiered at St. Paul's Ordway Theatre in January 1985. It has toured theatres around the country ever since.

"I became acquainted with Mrs. Roosevelt in 1957 when we appeared together on a series of ABC television shows," said Gillman, whose credits include 10 Broadway productions, scores of films and numerous television shows, including the popular soap opera Days of Our Lives during the early 1970s.

"I have never understood why she referred to herself as an 'ugly duckling,'" Gillman said. "Love, warmth and good humor radiated from her. She is perhaps the most gracious lady I have ever met and, yes, one of the most beautiful."
In preparation for the part, Gillman said that she researched Mrs. Roosevelt's life and carefully noted fashions and hair styles. She portrays her as a wife and mother, as Mrs. Roosevelt saw herself, and not as the celebrity the world remembers so well.

"She was a humble woman who never wanted to be the First Lady because she knew in advance that living in the White House could have an adverse effect on her children," Gillman said. "Yet she faithfully filled the role when it was obvious she must."

Born into a fifth-generation theatrical family, Gillman made her Broadway debut at the age of 12 in *Let Freedom Ring* with the late Will Geer of *The Waltons*. Her Broadway credits also include *My Fair Ladies* with Betty Furness and Celeste Holm, *The Walking Gentleman* with Arlene Francis, *Beat the Band* with Joan Caulfield and *Follow the Girls* with Jackie Gleason. As a child, she performed in the famous radio soap operas, *Little Orphan Annie*, *Ma Perkins* and *Backstage Wife*. She shared the air waves with such legends as Spencer Tracy, Humphrey Bogart, Myrna Loy and William Powell.

It's the role of Mrs. Roosevelt, however, that Gillman calls "the high point" of her long career.

"She was truly a great woman," the actress said. "When she shook your hand and asked how you were, you knew she was really interested. I hope I do justice to the most remarkable woman I have ever known."

**ELEANOR: a celebration** is being produced at UD with the support of the Ohio Arts Council. Tickets are $6 for the general public, $5 for UD faculty and staff and $3 for students. To make reservations or for more information, call 229-2347.