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**THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.**  
WSJ.com

SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA | JANUARY 4, 2012, 5:09 P.M. ET

## Play Spotlights Killing of Moscone

By VAUHINI VARA

Jonathan Moscone was barely a teenager when an assassin gunned down his father, San Francisco Mayor George Moscone, along with city Supervisor Harvey Milk, in 1978. In the ensuing years, the younger Mr. Moscone was dismayed to see his father often playing a supporting role to Mr. Milk in the historical record.

Now Mr. Moscone is presenting his side of the story.

Starting Friday, Mr. Moscone's version of events—in which his father's public and private legacy looms large—will be dramatized in a play called "Ghost Light" at the Berkeley Repertory Theater. "Ghost Light" was written by the theater's artistic director, Tony Taccone, with Mr. Moscone coming up with the idea and directing the drama. The play runs until Feb. 19.

"My work is to tell my story in relation to my father," says Mr. Moscone, now 47 years old and artistic director at California Shakespeare Theater in Orinda. "The play doesn't try to realign history, but it shares the son's perspective."

"Ghost Light," which Mr. Moscone says he came up with after he visited the set of the 2008 film "Milk," isn't a docudrama. The play revolves around a fictional character named after him who sets out to direct "Hamlet" while being terrorized in his dreams by a shadowy figure who evokes his dead father. Messrs. Moscone and Taccone say historical facts—like a mention of George Moscone's stewardship of a gay-rights bill as a leader in the state legislature—are all accurate.

George Moscone and Mr. Milk were assassinated by Dan White, a troubled city supervisor. During their tenures, Mr. Moscone was more popular than Mr. Milk in San Francisco politics, but Mr. Milk's legacy has overshadowed Mr. Moscone's because "the gay-rights movement helped transform Milk into a heroic figure," says Ron Eyerman, a sociology professor at Yale University, who has studied the cultural narrative of the Moscone-Milk assassinations.

"It's hard to imagine that this play will have much of an impact on popular memory, or on official memory," says Prof. Eyerman. "But it's a step in that direction."

Growing up, Mr. Moscone—the youngest of the mayor's four children—didn't see much of his father, who spent a lot of his time as a state legislator in Sacramento before becoming mayor of San Francisco in 1976.

After the assassination, Mr. Moscone continued living in the Bay Area with his family until he went to Williams College in Massachusetts. As an adult, Mr. Moscone worked as associate director at the Dallas Theatre Center and came out as gay.

Mr. Moscone says he has been "aggressively not political." Until recently, he rarely discussed his father, even with close friends. One exception, however, was a speech in 1998, at an event memorializing the 20th

anniversary of the Moscone-Milk assassinations. "I imagine that my dad was not afraid of death," he told the crowd gathered at the War Memorial Opera House. "He loved to win, and he won a lot—especially at cards—and in order to be great at winning, you have no choice but to conquer your fears."

"Ghost Light" was set in motion in 2007 when the artistic director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Bill Rauch, told Mr. Moscone that he hoped to put on several plays about American history. Around that time, Mr. Moscone visited the set of "Milk" and gave one of his father's ties to the actor playing the mayor.

That visit "proved to me that if someone else can make a movie about Harvey Milk, I can make a play about my father," Mr. Moscone recalls thinking.

Soon afterward, Mr. Moscone emailed Mr. Rauch with the idea of doing a play about his father. Mr. Rauch said he was "moved and excited by it, immediately." Mr. Moscone also brought in Mr. Taccone, a longtime friend who in the early 1980s had commissioned "Execution of Justice," a play about Mr. White's trial.

Over several months, Messrs. Moscone and Taccone met at Mr. Taccone's Emeryville loft. Mr. Taccone asked Mr. Moscone about everything from his dreams to his father's funeral. It was the first time Mr. Moscone opened up about his father's death and his grief in their decades-long friendship, Mr. Taccone recalls.

Those conversations inspired moments in the play, like a funeral scene. And while other moments are made up, like a final scene where Mr. Moscone visits his father's grave, both men describe many of them as hewing to Mr. Moscone's experience in one way or another.

"Figuratively, I think he really did go back to the grave," Mr. Taccone says. "If this wasn't fiction, the play would end with him deciding, 'I'm going to write a play.' "

**Write to** Vauhini Vara at [vauhini.vara@wsj.com](mailto:vauhini.vara@wsj.com)

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