



For Immediate Release
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Mark Medoff Stars in *Waiting for Godot* Jan. 6-11, 2015 at Las Cruces' Rio Grande Theatre

November 7, 2014 – Tony-winning playwright Mark Medoff returns to the stage for the first time in 25 years in Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot," which opens January 6, 2015 at the Rio Grande Theatre in downtown Las Cruces.

Medoff played "Pozzo" in the Las Cruces Community Theatre's (LCCT) 1978 production of "Waiting for Godot" (which he also directed) at the Fountain Theatre, and has wanted to do the play again ever since. "It's something that fills a part of me," said Medoff. "I so admire the play. It's just inside of me somewhere every day."

Joining Medoff in the cast are Richard Rundell (who met Beckett at a 1975 revival of "Waiting for Godot" in Berlin), David Edwards and Brandon Brown. "They are superb actors who could work anywhere," said Medoff. "They are also close friends and among the actors I have worked with most frequently in my 48 years in Las Cruces and at New Mexico State University." Medoff's granddaughter, Grace Marks, completes the cast. "For a 12-year old, she has an amazing amount of experience," he said.

The play is directed by Jessica Medoff Bunchmann, who is Medoff's youngest daughter and Grace's aunt. Medoff Bunchmann, an opera, musical theater and cabaret performer, has taken up directing in the past few years, most recently directing the premier of her father's play, "Parsifal Worthy," in New Orleans.

“I’ve listened to my dad and Dick talk about Godot, I think, since I was about to turn six and my dad directed Dick and me in his play, “Kringle’s Window,” at NMSU,” said Medoff Bunchmann. “I’ve grown up acting alongside these talented men and it’s a thrill to now have the opportunity to change roles and guide them as actors to what I know are going to be exceptional performances.”

Sage Theatricals, a company created by Medoff and Medoff Bunchmann, is partnering on “Waiting for Godot” with the Doña Ana Arts Council (DAAC) and Spence Asset Management Foundation. The performances will kick off DAAC’s 10th anniversary celebration of the re-opening of the historic Rio Grande Theatre. “Kathleen Albers (DAAC’s executive director) and I have been talking about me doing something at the Rio Grande for several years,” said Medoff. “This seemed liked the perfect opportunity.”

Medoff, who last appeared on stage as Lee in an American Southwest Theatre Company (ASTC) production of “True West” at NMSU in 1989, has acted in professional theatre in New York, Chicago and Detroit. He won Chicago’s Jefferson Award for best actor of the 1975 season for his performance in his own play, “When You Comin Back, Red Ryder?” He has also had roles in movies like “Clara’s Heart” and “Off Beat” (he wrote the screenplays for both). And currently, in addition to rehearsing “Waiting for Godot” and performing scenes from it with Rundell for Las Cruces high school students, Medoff is filming “The Heart Outright,” a movie shooting in Las Cruces based on his 1986 play, which premiered at the New Mexico Rep and ASTC before a New York production in 1989. Directed by Medoff’s son-in-law, Ross Marks, and produced by Dave Witt, the movie’s cast includes Medoff, Medoff Bunchmann, and two of Medoff’s former Florida State University graduate students, Brad Makarowski and Josh Rowan.

Medoff won a Tony Award for Best Play for “Children of a Lesser God” in 1980. His screenplay for the movie adaptation was nominated for an Oscar in 1986. He has also won a Guggenheim Fellowship in Playwriting, two Drama Desk Awards for Distinguished Playwriting, London’s Olivier Award for best play and two Outer Critics Circle Awards. “When You Comin’ Back, Red Ryder?” received an OBIE Award for Distinguished Playwriting in 1974.

The hardest part of returning to the stage? “Learning the lines with a 74-year-old brain,” said Medoff. In addition to drilling their lines and rehearsing together almost every day, Medoff and Rundell are doing yoga twice weekly under the guidance of local instructor Annie Pennies and walking the ditch banks of Mesilla.

Rundell, a retired NMSU language professor and a long-time fixture in local theatre, has twice played the part of Pozzo, the role Edwards is playing in this production of “Waiting for Godot.”

“I had the great good fortune to meet Beckett and sit in on rehearsals of his 1975 revival of ‘Warten auf Godot’ at the Schiller-Theater in West Berlin,” said Rundell. “His attention to detail was mind-boggling. Every step, every bit, every piece of business was choreographed. And now, 56 years after my first contact in college with ‘Waiting for Godot,’ I’m playing Estragon opposite the perfect Vladimir (Medoff’s character), Pozzo and Lucky, all of whom I have admired for decades. My life with Beckett just keeps getting better and better,” he said.

Beckett, an Irishman, wrote “Waiting for Godot” in French and translated it into English. It opened in Paris January 5, 1953. Beckett died in 1989 at age 83.

Beckett is one of three writers (the others are William Faulkner and Thomas Wolfe; artist Jackie Clark couldn’t come up with a likeness of Emily Bronte that she found acceptable, so Beckett was elevated from fourth to third) depicted in a stained-glass window at Medoff’s home because of their influence on him as a reader and a writer.

“This play (‘Waiting for Godot’) haunts me,” said Medoff. “Acting in it again gives me the pleasure of investigating it every day and getting to do this with these dear friends, all of whom I adore as actors and human beings, as well as working under the direction of one of my three daughters, all of whom have been directing me to a greater understanding of the universe since they were born,” he said.

Edwards, 61, who plays Pozzo, has been working in plays and movies with Medoff for more than 40 years, since Medoff cast him as the Puerto Rican delivery boy in “The Gingerbread Man,” by Neil Simon, at LCCT in 1972. “I have been directed by Mark many times and he is a mentor and friend,” said Edwards. “To finally act with him after all these years is such a treat. I have acted with Dick, have directed him and been directed by him - to be with him onstage for this particular play is a highpoint in our professional

and personal relationship. Brandon is one of my dearest friends and collaborators - now, finally, he is my slave, onstage at least. I worked with Jessica when she was about 12 in 'Rock Wedding' and we survived (I like to think quite gloriously) the near-disaster of "Showboat" at the Fresno Grand Opera, where, thanks to Jessica's suggestion to the director, I stepped into a suddenly vacated main role two days before opening. What a fabulous business, this show business!" he said.

"I usually don't go for this weird, avant-garde crap, but this show is actually funny," said Brown, 44, who plays Lucky. Medoff first directed Brown in "The Sound of Music" during the Doña Ana Lyric Opera's 1991-92 season, and the two have collaborated on a number of other plays, musicals and movies since then. Most recently, Brown appeared as "Red" in a scene from "When You Comin' Back, Red Ryder?" performed as part of a September tribute to Medoff that raised more than \$100,000 for the Mark Medoff Lecture Series at NMSU.

Grace Marks' first comment about "Waiting for Godot" was a question for Medoff: "What does this mean?" Her grandfather's answer: "Whatever you want it to mean. Maybe The Boy (the character Grace plays) is Godot." "I'm glad I'm doing this because otherwise I would be really bored over Christmas break," said Grace, a seventh grader at Zia Middle School. "It's such a fun, interesting play, and I get to befuddle my grandpa."

The set and costume design are by Las Cruces artist Tiffany Figueroa, lighting design by University of Houston theatre professor and Medoff friend Steven Wallace, sound design by Bruce Ven. Ann-Marie Elders is the stage manager.

As part of the on-going maintenance and enhancement of the Rio Grande Theatre, which is owned by the City of Las Cruces, the city is purchasing a new lighting system for the theatre that will be installed by mid-December, in plenty of time for "Waiting for Godot" in early January.

"Waiting for Godot" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday, January 6-10, 2015, and at 2:00 p.m. Sunday, January 11 at the Rio Grande Theatre, 211 N. Main St. in Las Cruces, N.M. Tickets are \$15 for balcony seats, \$20 for the main floor, and \$5 for students with valid ID. Tuesday, January 6 is "Pay-As-You-Wish" night. Tickets are \$2.50-\$25, thanks to support from Spence Asset Management in Las Cruces. Reserve tickets can be purchased online (processing fees apply) at www.RioGrandeTheatre.com.

Tickets will also be available at the Rio Grande Theatre box office 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m., Monday-Friday, and at the door one hour before each performance.

For more information, contact DAAC Executive Director Kathleen Albers at 575.523.6403 or kathleena@daarts.org.