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Waiting For Godot

by Winnie McCroy

EDGE Editor

Thursday Dec 5, 2013



Shuler Hensley, Patric Stewart, Billy Crudup and Ian McKellan (Source:Joan Marcus)

As part of their two plays in rep along with Harold Pinter's "No Man's Land," English actors Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellan give the vaudeville treatment to Samuel Beckett's existential "Waiting for Godot."

The bleak absurdist classic about the futility of life finds McKellan as Estragon, here presented as a homeless-caliber filthy man, who beds down in a ditch every night and is beaten up by local toughs, and can never get enough food or sleep.

In the opening scene, he struggles to remove a boot, gives up and says, "Nothing to be done." The statement would well serve as the play's tagline.

Stewart shines in the role of his longtime friend Vladimir, slightly less tattered and scores more optimistic about the arrival of Godot, who promises to bring with him supplication, presumably of the monetary variety.

The play finds the two men waiting on a country road for the arrival of the elusive Godot, and employing various constructs to pass the time. "Let's contradict each other," says Estragon, in one such game.

Although the two embrace often and share the bonhomie of intimates, the play is ambivalent (and non-apologetic) regarding whether the men are lovers. But with McKellan in the mix, the presumption is stretched.

As Estragon and Vladimir discuss religion and the story of the repentant thief crucified next to Jesus Christ, the interpretation lends itself to a reading that they are waiting for God. Estragon finds his comforts in sleep, food, and in the promise of physical relief. Vladimir, on the other hand, stands throughout most of the play, and is concerned with more philosophical matters.

With the arrival of the portly Pozzo (Shuler Hensley), rendered here as a Southern buffoon who purports to own the land upon which the men wait, the dynamic changes. As in "No Man's Land," Hensley again plays the blustering thug, representing the excesses of the rich with his chicken legs and wine, and his capricious violence toward his hired man, Lucky.

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As monikers go, "Lucky" falls in the same ironic vein as a bald man who is known as "Curly." In a long, stringy blond wig, Billy Crudup plays this put-upon servant as chattel, a long rope tied around his neck, his arms weighed down by the rich man's belongings.

Lucky personifies the plight of the poor perfectly, scraping and bowing, afraid to put down the boss' things for fear of being fired, grateful for every scrap they get. Vladimir loudly protests Lucky's treatment, saying, "It's a scandal to treat a human being like that!"

Crudup mutters and mumbles like a man long denied, and gets his best action when he is pressed to "think," and delivers a parody of intellectualism. Vladimir, also poor, is not too proud to steal the man's chicken bone away from him, but when he moves to sympathy for Lucky, is rewarded with a bloody kick to the shins.

This cut serves as a marker of time passed in Act Two. After Godot fails to show at the end of Act One, his boy arrives with the message that he will surely arrive tomorrow. So they have nothing to do but wait.

But when Pozzo and Lucky show up in Act Two, Pozzo professes that he is blind; a mute Lucky now guides him. All four end up in an inert pile in the middle of the stage for quite some time, debating



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revenge, rewards and the recollection (or not) of what happened between the four on the previous day.

Vladimir, who is consumed with mental anguish (as represented in his frequent habit of checking inside his hat) is driven mad by the inconsistencies, especially when Godot's boy appears again, but has no memory of the message he delivered the night before.

At the end, we realize that despite his promises, Godot will not likely appear tomorrow -- or any other day. Vladimir and Estragon wearily promise each other that they will remember to bring rope tomorrow, so that they may hang themselves from the tree. But neither makes any move.

"Waiting for Godot" is primarily a play about the futility of life, of waiting endlessly for something that will not likely come to pass. But in their vaudevillian presentation, Stewart and McKellan make something wonderful happen, and seem to enjoy themselves while doing it.

Stephen Brimson Lewis does an amazing job with the set design, which appears as a shambled country road with a tree, but imitates a post-war setting, with rubble everywhere, crumbling arches and an off-stage ditch over a short rock wall, where Estragon climbs into the action at the beginning of each act.



"No Man's Land/Waiting for Godot" runs through March 30 at the Cort Theatre, 138 W 48th St. in New York. For information or tickets, call 212-239-6210 or visit <http://www.twoplaysinrep.com>

Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she writes about local restaurants in her food blog, <http://brooklyniscookin.blogspot.com/>

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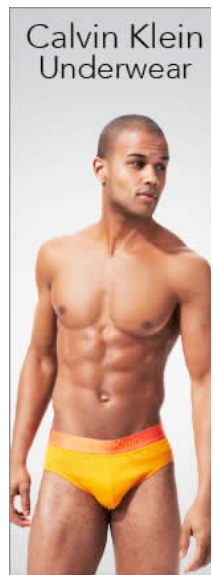


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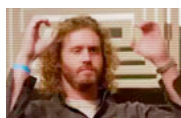
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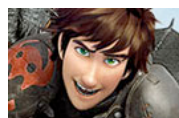
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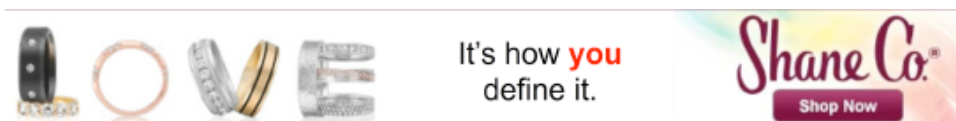
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