

Entertainment

# Don't wait: See 'Godot' in Redwood City now

Get thee to The Dragon for this excellent production



Kimberlee Wittlieb / Dragon Theatre Robert Sean Campbell as Lucky, Jim Johnson as Vladimir, Ronald Feichtmeir as Estragon, and Michael Champlin as Pozzo, from left, in "Waiting for Godot" at Dragon Theatre in Downtown Redwood City, September 16 through October 2, 2016.

By **JOANNE ENGELHARDT**

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**HIGHLIGHTS** ▾

Whether or not you've ever seen "Waiting for Godot" before — even if you haven't seen it but have heard of it or read it in school — the time to see this

little play about nothing (and everything) is right now at the Dragon Theatre in downtown Redwood City.

That's because this production, with Jim Johnson and Ronald Feichtmeir as the bowler-wearing, Laurel and Hardy-like duo of Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo) is as good as it gets. Both are exquisitely cast and darned-near perfection in those roles.

The first thing to realize when seeing Dragon's "Godot" production is that you've probably been mispronouncing "Godot" all your life (assuming you've ever mentioned Samuel Beckett's iconic 1948 play). Most playgoers at Friday night's opening admitted to pronouncing the word as "ga DOH." But Beckett wrote his original version in French with the title "En attendant Godot." When asked, he explained that the illusive Godot's name should be pronounced the French way, i.e., with the accent on the first syllable: "GO-doh."

The only other really important information to have is that Beckett felt most people make far more of "Godot's" plot than he intended. He once told an actor that the play can be summed up in one word: symbiosis, which Webster defines as "a cooperative, mutually beneficial relationship between two people or groups."

No need to get into all that existential mumbo jumbo, because symbiosis is what the playwright intends. Isn't that good enough?

It's best to concentrate on the pristine performances of the two leads, as well as the ferocious, stage-stealing shenanigans of Michael Champlin as Pozzo. Champlin charges onto the set midway in Act 1 just as things start getting a little tedious between Tweedledee and Tweedledum.

Pozzo is arrogant, self-absorbed and devoid of any feeling for his bedraggled, put-upon servant with the unfortunate name of Lucky (he's not). Wearing a scraggly long white wig and makeup that give him sunken eyes and light white skin, Robert Sean Campbell turns his entire body into the semblance of a subservient, depressed and devoted slave. He does Pozzo's bidding, no matter how humiliating, without hesitation. Yet when he gives a long monologue facing the audience, it becomes clear that his exceptional intelligence has gone to seed.

There's one additional character: The Boy, nicely performed by young Jack Champlin (whose father plays Pozzo).

Feichtmeir has made a career of taking on quirky, tic-laden roles in many Peninsula theater productions. That's why it's surprising that Johnson has out-ticked Feichtmeir in "Godot." Johnson comes off as gently agitated,

constantly moving, chattering endlessly about whatever he's thinking, gesturing wildly and, basically, commanding the audience's rapt attention.

By contrast, Feichtmeir seems almost normal.

But there's no getting around the fact that director Jeanie Smith saw gold when she paired the two of them. She also chose to bring out the playfulness, the silliness and the plentiful comedy of "Godot." That's the right choice, because Beckett without humor can be deadly.



Kimberlee Wittlieb / Dragon Theatre  
Ronald Feichtmeir as Estragon, left, and Jim Johnson as Vladimir are brilliant in delivering Samuel Beckett's astounding dialogue in "Waiting for Godot" at Dragon Theatre in downtown Redwood City, Sept. 16 through Oct. 2, 2016.

An example: Vladimir (Johnson) exclaims "Never neglect the little things in life," as he casts a quick glance at the male sex organ. Later, when Estragon says he's hungry, Vladimir offers him a choice of carrots or turnips. Estragon asks for carrots, so Vladimir pulls out just one tiny speck of carrot from the pocket of his shabby jacket.

Mostly, though, these two friends who never quite remember whether they did the same things yesterday that they are doing today, acknowledge hopelessness with phrases like "Nothing to be done," "Time has stopped," and "Nothing happens. Nobody comes, nobody goes."

Two of the most amusing bits come in Act 2, which Johnson opens by trying to recall the words to a song that starts "The dog came in to the kitchen ..." When he can't remember the next line, he shakes his head and starts over.

Sounds like nothing, but Johnson milks it for all it's worth. Later, he and Feichtmeir do a number with three hats that is as funny as it is nonsensical.

At play's end, Estragon moans "I can't go on like this," to which Vladimir, deadpan, replies, "That's what you think." Priceless.

Campbell, who plays the hapless Lucky, also gets credit for the relatively bare stage: A long, low wooden box for sitting, five angular arty pieces (by Jesse Ploog) hanging haphazardly around the set, a wood 2×4 with twigs representing a tree and, on two occasions, a bold full moon. Patricia Tyler did all five characters justice with earthy, appropriate costumes, especially Johnson's rag-tag holey knit vest and Campbell's ghost-like sheet outfit.

Gordon Smith's sound and Dan Garrett's lighting also contribute to this stellar production.

The verdict? Whether or not Beckett is a favorite, this version should work for anyone. Sadly, it only runs two more weeks, so best to snatch up tickets while they're still available.

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## Theater review

What: "Waiting for Godot"

Where: Dragon Theatre, 2120 Broadway St., downtown Redwood City

When: 8 p.m. Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m. Sundays

Through: Oct. 2

Tickets: \$15-30; 650-493-2006 or [www.dragonproductions.net](http://www.dragonproductions.net)

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