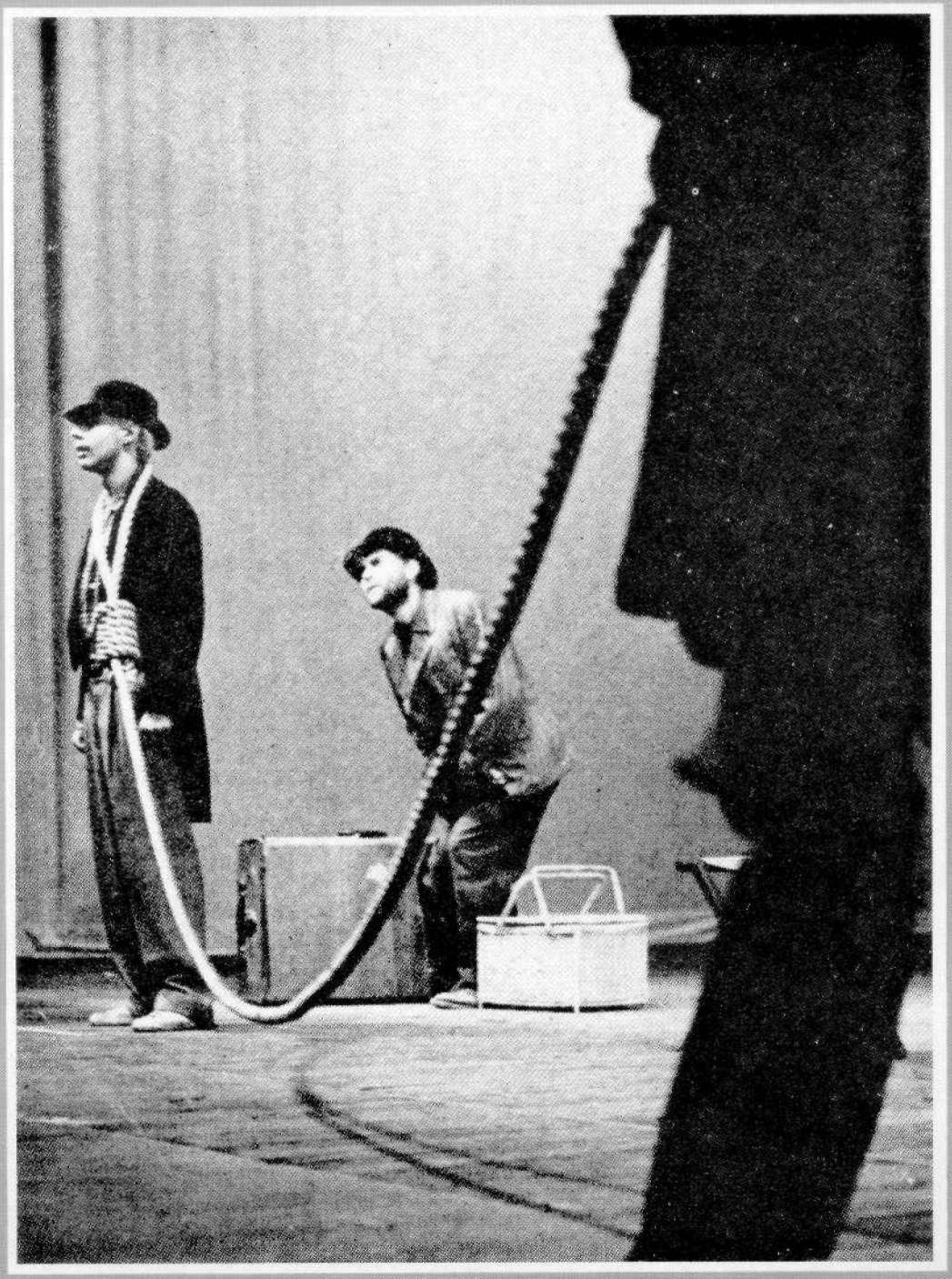
Samuel Beckett

Waiting For Godot



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Samuel Beckett's

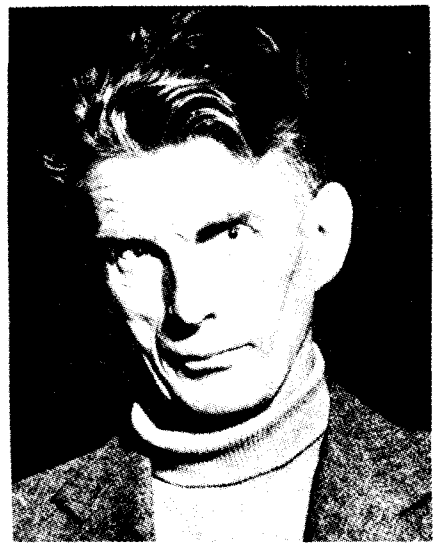
WAITING FOR GODOT

Directed by
Stanley Weese

September 21 - October 3
1983

BECKETT: IS IT ALL GLOOM AND DOOM?

Martin Esslin in "The New York Times", September 24, 1967



BECKETT

Beckett is, in spite of all, a comic writer - this cannot be stressed strongly enough - as well as a tragic poet. His images may be bleak but his message is certainly not one of hopelessness. He does put characters reduced to bare essentials of the human condition in situations at the extreme edge of existence. But he does this not because he delights in gloom for its own sake, but because characters reduced to the essentials and put into extreme situations will tell us most about the true nature of our own lives.

It has frequently been pointed out that Beckett's heroes have much in common with the great popular comedians of our century: Laurel and Hardy, Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton. It is no coincidence that those great comedians also portrayed men at the edge of society, in extreme situations of poverty. Chaplin's little man was as often disappointed in his hopes as Estragon and Vladimir are in Waiting for Godot, and we usually saw him at the end wandering away into the distance toward another and equally disappointing adventure.

Yet those great popular comic archetypes of our century were never felt to be depressing characters. They embodied the courage, the indestructibility of the little man in the face of the horrors of an industrialized and over-mechanized society. It is because Vladimir and Estragon are from the same tribe as Charlie Chaplin's little tramp and Buster Keaton's stoic that they have succeeded in making their creator famous throughout the world.

Courage and sincerity were the redeeming, hopeful side of the great film comics; courage and sincerity, in a deepened, modified form, are also the elements that nurture hope and consolation in Beckett's plays. Above all, sincerity. There is in Beckett's work a totally uncompromising determination always to face the worst about man and his nature; never to fall for cheap consolations; never to accept any euphemisms, any false hope. Such uncompromising determination to face the truth may produce gloomy answers, but it is, in itself, anything but depressing. For it shows man as capable of facing and confronting the truth. And that becomes something noble and inspiring.

SAMUEL BECKETT: A CHRONOLOGY

1906	Born at Foxrock, near Dublin, on Good Friday, April 13th, as son of Protestant parents
1927	B.A. in French and Italian, Trinity College, Dublin
1928	Paris. Lecturer at the "Ecole Normale Supérieure" Meets James Joyce
1931	M.A. in French, Trinity College, Dublin Publication of his study on Marcel Proust
1932	Begins five years of wandering in Germany, France, England and Ireland
1937	Settles in Paris
1938	The novel Murphy published in London
1941	Joins French Resistance Movement
1953	5th January: first production of Waiting for Godot at the "Théâtre de Babylone" in Paris
1956	The novel Malone Dies published in New York
1957	Endgame
1961	Happy Days. Poems published in London
1964	Works with Buster Keaton on Film.
1969	Awarded Nobel Prize for Literature Breath published and produced in New York
1973	Not I published and produced in London
1976	The Collected Works published in New York
1983	Memory produced in Berlin

A NIGHT AT SAN QUENTIN

From Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd

On 19 November 1957, a group of worried actors were preparing to face their audience. The actors were members of the San Francisco Actors' Company. The audience consisted of 1400 convicts at the San Quentin Penitentiary. No live play had been performed at San Quentin since 1913. Now, forty-four years later, the play that had been chosen, largely because no women appeared in it, was Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot.

No wonder the actors and Herbert Blau, the director, were apprehensive. How were they to face one of the toughest audiences in the world with a highly obscure, intellectual play that had produced near riots among a good many highly sophisticated audiences in Western Europe? Herbert Blau decided to prepare the San Quentin audience for what was to come. He stepped on to the stage and addressed the packed, darkened North Dining Hall - a sea of flickering matches that the convicts tossed over their shoulders after lighting their cigarettes. Blau compared the play to a piece of jazz music "to which one must listen for whatever one may find in it." In the same way, he hoped, there would be some meaning, some personal significance for each member of the audience in Waiting for Godot. The curtain parted. The play began. And what bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London, and New York was immediately grasped by an audience of convicts. As the writer in the columns of the prison paper, the San Quentin News, put it: "They listened; they looked; they stayed; and they left at the end, all shook...".

A reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle who was present noted that the convicts had no difficulties understanding the play. One prisoner told him, 'Godot is Society'. Said another, 'He's the Outside'. A teacher at the prison was quoted as saying: "They know what is meant by waiting . . . and they knew if Godot finally came, he would only be a disappointment. Still, they're waiting for Godot, and will continue and continue to wait."

Since that night in 1957 Godot himself, as well as turns of phrase and characters from the play, have become a permanent part of the private language, the institutional mythology of San Quentin.

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Scene from World Premiere
"Theatre de Babylone", Paris 1953

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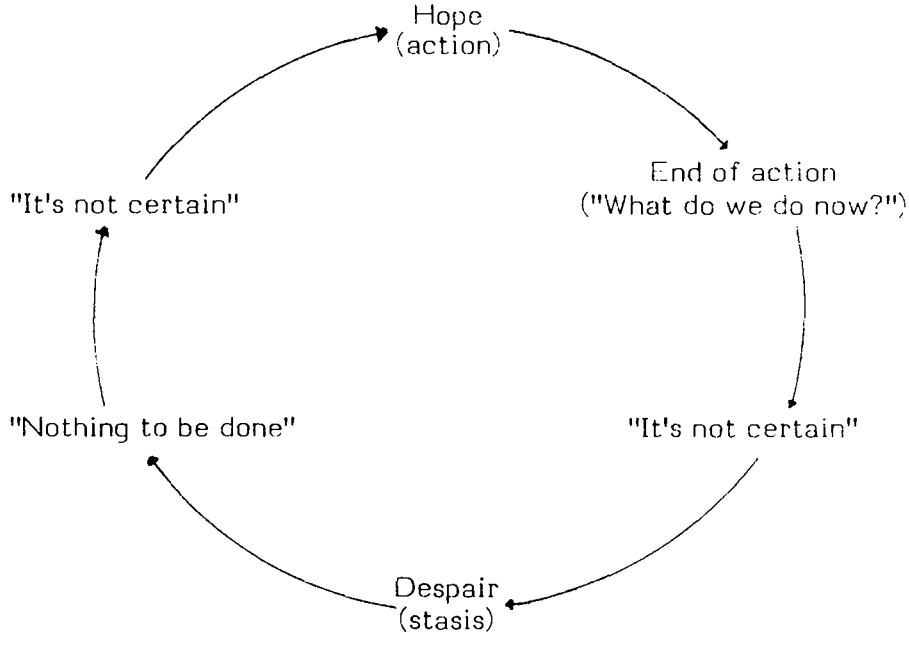
WAITING FOR GODOT

The Director's "back page"

The Concept: The characters are real people in an absurd situation (which is "the human condition") - driven by a need to know in the midst of a universe which is essentially unknowable! (which is both comic and tragic) - and keeping up their courage, while waiting, with various diversions ("Will you not play?").

The plot is not linear (telling a story) but cyclical (the experience of waiting) and turns from hope to despair, kept in motion by a recurring motif ("it's not certain").



The setting should be the antithesis of the Garden of Eden (a desert - slanted strata - tortured tree, bent to the wind, clinging to existence - beyond, the void - and in the void, the great dead world of the moon). The whole to be done in a naive theatrical style (stage boards, cut-out tree, ill-hung cyc, jerky moon, vaudeville/circus costumes, broad make-up).

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The Director's observations to the actors after an early rehearsal

"There's a 50/50 chance that Gogo and Didi are the two thieves of the Gospels, hanging on the Cross alongside of Christ, and waiting for deliverance. Didi the believer, with a crown of thorns on his head, and Gogo the doubter, with nails through his feet.

There's a 50/50 chance that Pozzo is Godot (longing for something that, when it arrives, is not recognized).

There's a 50/50 chance that Pozzo is God and Lucky is Christ and that the first act represents the Old Testament and the second act the New Testament.

It is, however, only a 50/50 chance and is not to be taken as a simple explanation of the play, but if it helps your characterization to imagine you are hanging from a Cross and passing the time while waiting for deliverance, then, by all means, use it."

Marcel Williams

Left to right: Stanley Weese, John Woods, Michael Robinson, Pat Blaney, Bruce Dow (behind) and Luc Corbeil.

WAITING FOR GODOT
by
Samuel Beckett

Directed by
Stanley Weese

Scenography by
J. Amburn Darnell

CAST
(in order of appearance)

GOGO	Pat Blaney
DIDI	Bruce Dow
LUCKY	Michael Robinson
POZZO	Luc Corbeil
THE BOY	Carolyn Soper

ACT I A country road. A tree. Evening

There will be one 15 minute intermission

ACT II Next day. Same time. Same place.

FRONT COVER PHOTO

Scene from 1966 Production of
Waiting for Godot
at the University of California
Santa Barbara

PRODUCTION

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR	Ian Pratt
PROPERTIES	Sherry Darcus
COSTUME SUPERVISOR	Rosemarie Heselton
SET CONSTRUCTION	Don Griffiths, Robert Eberle
LIGHTING EXECUTION	John Henrickson
STAGE MANAGER	Craig Laven
ASSISTANTS TO THE DIRECTOR	Beth French, John Woods
WARDROBE MISTRESSES	Se Keohane, Wiluya
STAGE CREW	The Students of Theatre 250/350
HOUSE MANAGER	Tamsin Kelsey
BOX OFFICE	Carol Fisher, Roseann Janzen and Lyle Moon
BUSINESS MANAGER	Marjorie Fordham
PRODUCTION	Norman Young
PROGRAM BOOK	Joseph MacKinnon

WAITING FOR GODOT

is produced by special arrangement with

Dramatists Play Service Inc., New York

1968 Production of Waiting for Godot, U.B.C.

Lee Taylor as Pozzo with Gregory Reid as Gogo

Marcel Williams

Carolyn Soper and Bruce Dow

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Marcel Williams

Rehearsal Shot
Left to right: Pat Blaney, Michael Robinson, Bruce Dow, Luc Corbeil.

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THREE BECKETT ANECDOTES

When Beckett was asked about the theme of Waiting for Godot, he referred to what he called 'a wonderful passage' in the writings of St. Augustine: "Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned."

When asked who or what Godot stood for, Beckett replied: "I once encountered a large group of people standing on a street corner one afternoon during the annual Tour de France bicycle race, and I asked what they were doing. 'Nous attendons Godot', they replied, adding that all the competitors had passed except the oldest, whose name was Godot."

Q: Is there any one motto that captures the essence of your work?

A: "Fluctuat nec mergitur" ("The ship is being tossed about, but the ship won't sink").

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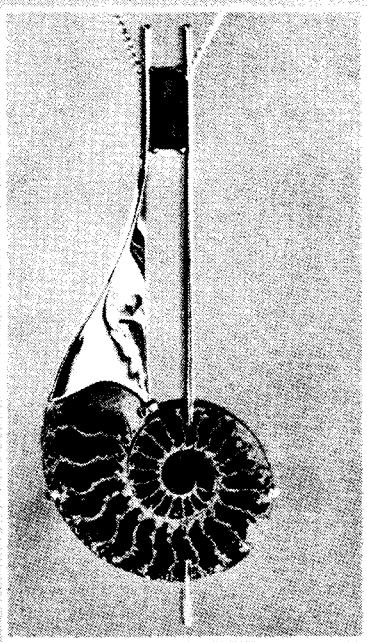

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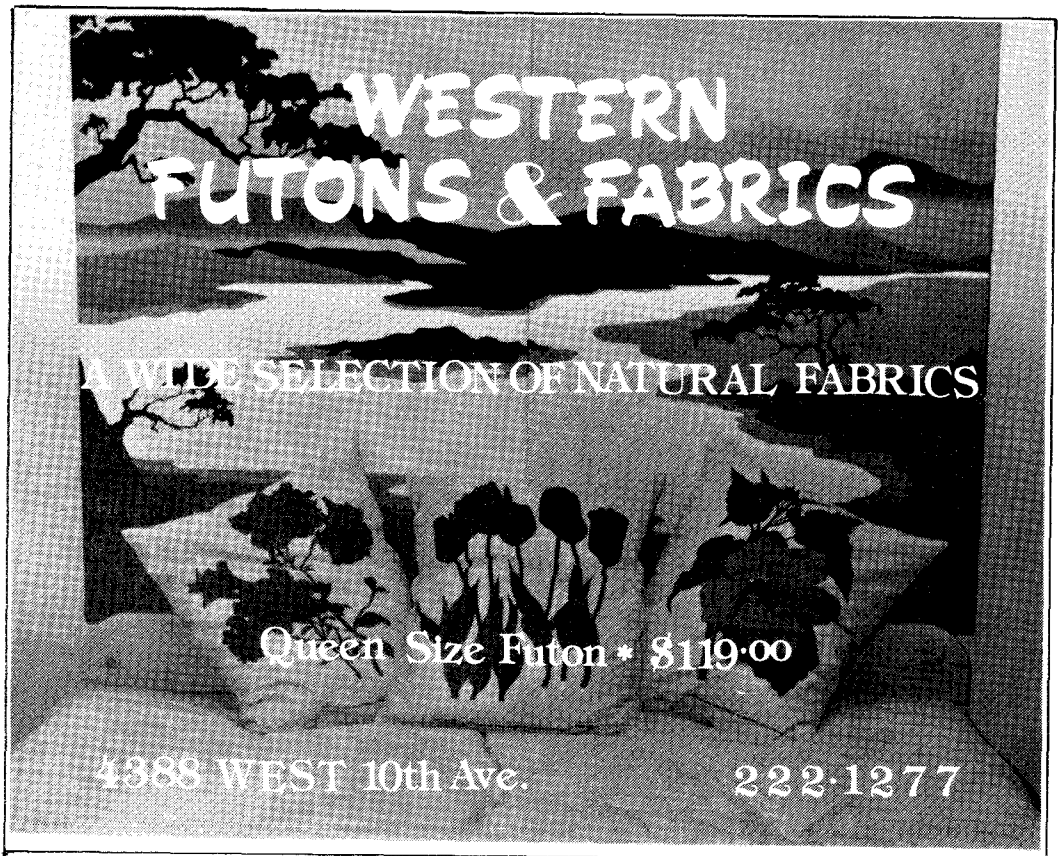

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B.F.A. in Acting and in Technical Theatre/Design

The University and its Setting

The University of British Columbia, established in 1915, has a present enrolment of 30,000. It is located six miles from downtown Vancouver on a campus that is regarded as one of the most beautiful in North America. The Vancouver area offers a flourishing cultural scene and provides excellent opportunities for summer and winter sports.

The Department of Theatre

Over the years the Department of Theatre at UBC has assembled a very strong faculty of specialists. Their teaching covers all aspects of the theatre, both as a practical craft and as an academic discipline: Acting, Directing, Design, Technical Theatre; Theatre History, Dramatic Literature, Theory; Film Production and Film Criticism.

Degrees range from the B.A. and B.F.A. over the M.A. and M.F.A. to the Ph.D.

The B.F.A. Programme

In its continuous attempt to strengthen its curriculum, the Department is now offering a B.F.A. in Acting, a B.F.A. in Design and a B.F.A. in Technical Theatre. These new programmes give the exceptionally talented student a thorough training of professional scope, without neglecting any academic values. The programme consists of a carefully arranged combination of classroom work, private tutorials and stage exposure. Its breadth and focus make this B.F.A. one of the strongest and most comprehensive on the continent.

The Facilities

The departmental complex houses two fully equipped and professionally manned stages: the 400 seat Frederic Wood Theatre with its season of large-scale productions, and the 90 seat Dorothy Somerset Studio, which offers a series of chamber plays each year. Both theatres have become an integral part of Vancouver's artistic life. Students in any of the B.F.A. programmes will be expected to participate in these productions according to their expertise.

The University Library now has over two million volumes, including a rich collection of periodicals; its theatre collection is undergoing a vigorous and systematic expansion.

The Departmental Reading Room has its own collection of relevant critical and reference material.

Entrance Requirements

In order to maintain the highest standard, only the most promising applicants will be accepted into the programme. Thus, apart from the regular entrance requirements set down by the University, the Department will judge the candidates' potential by either audition (Acting) or portfolio (Technical Theatre/Design).

Faculty Involved in the B.F.A.

John Brockington, Don Davis, Brian Jackson, Peter Loeffler, Ian Pratt, Charles Siegel, Donald Soule, Klaus Strassmann, Stanley Weese, Norman Young, Arne Zaslove, J. Amburn Darnall, and Steven Thorne.

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Canadian Premiere of Waiting for Godot
1957 U.B.C., with John Brockington (right) as Pozzo

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