Waiting for Godot
By Samuel Beckett
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PICT Classic Theatre
presents

Waiting for Godot

by Samuel Beckett

Directed by Aoife Spillane-Hinks

Ken Bolden*
Alan Stanford*

James FitzGerald*
Shay Freund

Martin Giles*
Elliot Pullen

Scenic/Co-Costume Designer
Alan Stanford

Co-Lighting Designers
Cindy Limauro
Christopher Popowich

Production Manager
George DeShetler, Jr.

Props Master
Johnmichael Bohach

Stage Manager
Cory F. Goddard*

Technical Director
Jesse Van Swol

Master Electrician
Keith A. Traux

Assistant Stage Manager
Connor Bahr

Scenic Charge Artist
Jennifer Kirkpatrick

Master Carpenter
Samuel Karas

Assistant Master Electrician
Regina Tvaruzek

Dramaturg
Tyler Crumrine

Waiting for Godot is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH, INC.

PICT Classic Theatre has received permission from Edward Beckett to use the version (script) of Waiting for Godot as edited by Samuel Beckett for the Schiller production and used by the Gate Theatre (Dublin) and in the Beckett on Film series.

*Member of Actors’ Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.
CAST

Estragon .............................................................. Martin Giles*
Vladimir .............................. .......................... James FitzGerald*
Pozzo ............................................................. Alan Stanford*
Lucky ..................................................... Ken Bolden*
A Boy .................................................... Elliot Pullen or Shay Freund

PLACE: A country road, a rock, and a tree
TIME: 1950

WAITING FOR GODOT WILL BE PERFORMED IN 2 HOURS AND 15 MINUTES INCLUDING ONE 15-MINUTE INTERMISSION

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To our guests,

Welcome to our show. I'm delighted that you did not wait to see it!

From childhood we are taught that "patience is rewarded." We must wait for dessert until after we eat our vegetables. We can't go outside to play until we practice the piano. We have to wait to grow tall enough to ride the big rides at Kennywood. We have to wait until Christmas morning to find out what Santa brought us.

One Christmas, my brother and I decided not to wait. We went hunting in the house to find the presents that Santa might have already dropped off before the big day. And we found the treasure trove up in the attic! It seemed exciting; we were so clever. But Christmas Day lacked the surprise and suspense; not so exciting. So the next year, we waited.

Some things are worth waiting for: finding the love of our life to marry; expecting the arrival of a child; saving for the perfect house to buy. Patience does pay off.

At PICT, however, we are in our teen-age years. We want some things now! We are impatient for a theatre that is easily accessible to all and that we can call our permanent home. We are investigating options— we ask for your patience, ideas, and support.

We are also impatient to grow and meet new patrons. We want to fill every seat at every show. So, we ask you not to wait! Please tell your friends, colleagues and other organizations why they should not wait to see PICT in action. Godot might not arrive for the show, but everyone who loves classic theatre should.

Sincerely,

Chuck Moellenberg
PRODUCTION TEAM

Director ............................................................... Aoife Spillane-Hinks
Co-Costume Designer & Scenic Designer .......... Alan Stanford
Co-Costume Designer ........................................ Lindsay Tejan
Co-Lighting Designer .......................................... Cindy Limauro
Co-Lighting Designer ........................................ Christopher Popowich
Resident Stage Manager ................................ Cory F. Goddard
Assistant Stage Manager ................................ Connor Bahr
Production Manager ................................. George DeShetler, Jr.
Technical Director ........................................... Jesse Van Swol
Props Master ....................................................... Johnmichael Bohach
Master Electrician .............................................. Keith A. Traux
Assistant Master Electrician ............................. Regina Tvaruzek
Master Carpenter ................................................. Samuel Karas
Scenic Charge Artist ........................................ Jennifer Kirkpatrick
Dramaturg ......................................................... Tyler Crumrine
Wardrobe Mistress .............................................. Emmi Veinbergs
Lighting Board Operator ................................. Chris Norville

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WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST

Ken Bolden (Lucky) is in his fourth season at PICT. PICT credits: Basil Hallward in The Picture of Dorian Gray, the ensemble in Julius Caesar, Mardian in Antony and Cleopatra, and Major Ross in Sherlock Holmes and the Crucifer of Blood. Pittsburgh Credits: Pittsburgh Public Theater, City Theatre and Quantum Theatre. Film credits: Sorority Row and Fathers and Daughters. Upcoming: Tamara (Quantum Theatre) and The Small Room at the Top of the Stairs (Off the Wall). He is a grateful member of Actors' Equity Association and SAG/AFTRA.

James FitzGerald (Vladimir) is a featured artist for the 2014 Season and is in his thirteenth production for PICT. Other Pittsburgh credits: Charles Ives in Charles Ives Take Me Home (City Theatre), End of the Affair and Mouth to Mouth (Quantum Theatre), 1776, Royal Family, Born Yesterday, Midsummer Night's Dream, and Our Town (Pittsburgh Public Theater), Candide (Opera Theatre), and Heads (Pittsburgh Playhouse). Chicago credits: Marriot's Lincolnshire Theater, Chicago's Second City, ETC., The Royal George, Apple Tree, and other Chicago venues including 16 seasons with Chicago Shakespeare Theater. Regional credits: Cape May Stage, Milwaukee Rep, the Nebraska Shakespeare Festival, North Carolina Shakespeare Festival, and Baltimore Shakespeare Festival. Off Broadway: Rose Rage, directed by Edward Hall. Awards: Recipient of two Joseph Jefferson Awards (Best Supporting Actor), a Jeff Citation (Best Actor), and an OE Award Nomination (Best Supporting Actor).

Shay Freund (A Boy) is in his first season at PICT. He recently won best monologue in the lower division of the Pittsburgh Public Theatre's Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest for his portrayal of Flute (as Thisbe) in A Midsummer Night's Dream. Shay will be in the sixth grade and attends the Gideon Study Center. Shay also stays busy with Boy Scouts, swimming, and church. He is excited to be performing at PICT Classic Theatre and he thanks God for his family and many, many blessings!

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WHO'S WHO IN THE CAST

Martin Giles (Estragon) is in his thirteenth season with PICT. 
PICT credits: he directed A Skull In Connemara, performed in Lady Windermere's Fan, The Kreutzer Sonata, The Gigli Concert, Uncle Vanya, and Beckettfest, and wrote and directed Beautiful Dreamers. Other credits: last year he directed John Gabriel Borkman and Parlour Song, acted in Dream of Autumn (Quantum Theatre). Awards: 2002 Post-Gazette Performer of the Year. Martin has taught acting at Carnegie Mellon University, Point Park University and Ohio University.

Elliot Pullen (A Boy) is in his first season at PICT. Credits: Wally Webb in Our Town (Pittsburgh Public Theater), Charlie Bucket in Charlie and the Chocolate Factory (Little Lake Theater), The Tempest (Pittsburgh Shakespeare in the Park), Young Company Ensemble, and various performances with Pittsburgh Youth Shakespeare Troupe Falstaff’s Fellows. Awards: 2012 finalist, 2013 honorable mention, and 2014 winner of Pittsburgh Public Theater's Shakespeare Monologue & Scene Contest (lower division scene). Elliot is 12 years old, and he is a homeschooled sixth grader from Mt. Lebanon. He would like to thank his family, friends, and theatre mentors for their love, support, and encouragement.

Aoife Spillane-Hinks (Director) is in her second season at PICT. PICT credits: Our Class. Other credits: Broken Promise Land (RTE Drama on One and national tour), Marvel (Project Arts Centre), Opera Slam: Die Fledermaus (Project Arts Centre), Be Not Afraid of Greatness, and Document (Abbey Theatre Community and Education), The King’s Feet (Chalk Talk Theatre/Dublin Fringe Festival), The Yellow Wallpaper (Then This Theatre), Plaza Suite (Rough Magic), Hamlet (Second Age), and Boston Marriage (Gate Theatre). Aoife holds a BA from Harvard University and an MA in drama and theatre studies from NUI Galway. She is co-founder of Then This Theatre.

Alan Stanford (Pozzo/Costume Designer/Scenic Designer) is in his seventh year at PICT. He was for more than thirty years a principal and leading actor with the renowned Gate Theatre, Dublin, where he recently directed his adaptation of Pride and Prejudice. He founded Ireland's Second Age Theatre Company. 
PICT credits: Blithe Spirit, Don Juan Comes Back from the War, Lady Windermere's Fan, and The Kreutzer Sonata. Other credits: The School for Scandal (Point Park Conservatory), works by Shakespeare, Molière, Noël Coward, Oscar Wilde, Shaw, Beckett, and Brecht.
WHO’S WHO ON THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Connor Bahr (Assistant Stage Manager) is in his first season at PICT. Regional credits: Catch Me If You Can, The Courier, Infinite Ache and Waiting For Godot. Education: Point Park University. Thank You: Justin Fortunato, Robert Neumeyer, Aoife, Alan, James, Marty, Ken, Cassidy, and Cory.

Johnmichael Bohach (Props Master) is now in his second season with PICT as props master and has also provided the set designs for Blithe Spirit and Sherlock Homes and the Crucifer of Blood. Other design credits: The Devil's Arithmetic, The Importance of Being Earnest, Turn of the Screw, The Great Gatsby, The Elephant Man, The Glass Menagerie, and Tuesdays with Morrie, (Prime Stage); Riders to the Sea, Lizbeth, and Three December (Microscopic Opera) and Letters to Sala, Tartuffe, Bare, and Jekyll & Hyde (Stagedoor Manor, Loch Sheldrake, NY). Johnmichael is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with BAs in theatre arts and architectural studies. www.jmbsetdesigns.com

Tyler Crumrine (Dramaturg) is in his first season at PICT. He is a Pittsburgh-based dramaturg and the editor of Plays Inverse Press, a small press publishing company for dramatic literature. His writing on Irish playwright Martin McDonagh has been recognized nationally by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where he has also studied as New Play Dramaturgy Intensive fellow. His most recent work has appeared in the education and accessibility materials for Pittsburgh's City Theatre.

George DeShetler, Jr. (Production Manager) is in his third season at PICT. He began at PICT as the props master in 2012 and came on in July 2013 as production manager. Other Pittsburgh credits: Production manager at Prime Stage Theatre and temporary staff carpenter at CMU School of Drama. Regional credits: Arena Stage, Imagination Stage, Contemporary American Theater Festival, and Indiana Repertory Theatre. George graduated from Otterbein College in Westerville, Ohio, with a BFA in theatre design and technology.

Cory F. Goddard (Resident Stage Manager) is in his tenth season with PICT. PICT credits: Heartbreak House, Stuff Happens, Lieutenant of Inishmore, House & Garden, Salome, In the Next Room or the vibrator play, and the Beckett, Synge, Pinter, and Chekhov Festivals. Other Pittsburgh credits: Quantum Theatre, Bricolage, Kelly Strayhorn Theater, and The REP. Cleveland credits: Parade, The Laramie Project, Grey Gardens, and the non-Equity premieres of Brooklyn, Phantom of the Opera, and [title of show]. Cory is a graduate of Baldwin Wallace College. He would like to thank Rebekah, George, Vicky, Phill, Alicia, Liz, and the Wetness.

Dr. Stephen Guinn (Article Contributor) is an organizational psychologist and author of more than 25 articles and book chapters on applying organizational psychology to business. He is pleased to contribute to the conversation about Waiting for Godot, one of his favorite plays.
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WHO'S WHO ON THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Jennifer Kirkpatrick (Scenic Charge Artist) is in her second season at PICT. **PICT credits:** Sherlock Holmes & the Crucifer of Blood, A Skull in Connemara, Don Juan Comes Back from the War, and Lady Windermere's Fan. **Other credits:** scenic artist for Lives of the Saints, and You Can't Take It With You (Carnegie Mellon University), and scenic artist for Stage Door (Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center). Jennifer is a graduate of Ohio University with a BFA in production design and technology.

Samuel Karas (Master Carpenter) is in his first full season at PICT Classic Theatre. **PICT credits:** PICT intern 2011, Young Katurian in Pillowman, and Lucius in Julius Caesar. **Academic credits:** scenic designs for The Fantasticks, Noises Off, and The Best Christmas Pageant Ever. He is also acting as the Technical Director for Opera Theater of Pittsburgh for the 2014 Summer Festival. Samuel graduated from California University of PA with a BA in theater and a BS in technology education.

Cindy Limauro (Co-Lighting Designer) designs for opera, theatre, dance, and architecture. **PICT credits:** Sherlock Holmes & the Crucifer of Blood, Garden (part of House & Garden), Antony and Cleopatra, Pride and Prejudice, The Shaughraun, School for Scandal, Heartbreak House, Henry IV, The Dead, Travesties, A Woman of No Importance, and the world premieres of Beautiful Dreamers and Henry. **Other credits:** Aida, Madama Butterfly, La Traviata, Falstaff, La Boheme, Samson & Dalila, The Magic Flute, Tosca, Fidelio, Carmen, and Lucia di Lammermoor for Pittsburgh Opera, La Traviata (Baltimore Opera), Turandot, The Threepenny Opera, La Boheme, and the world premiere of Pasatieri's The Three Sisters (Opera Columbus). With her design partner in C & C Lighting, Christopher Popowich, she has designed the new lighting for the Gulf Tower Weather Beacon as well as the award-winning lighting designs for the Randy Pausch Memorial Bridge and the Hunt Library. She is Professor of Lighting Design at Carnegie Mellon School of Drama.

Christopher Popowich (Co-Lighting Designer) is in his sixth season at PICT. **PICT credits:** A Skull in Connemara, Julius Caesar, End Game, and the Beckett Festival and Empire Series. **Regional credits:** Madame Butterfly (Columbus Opera), Wagner's Ring Cycle (Opera Theater of Pittsburgh), and Henry V on a Trapeze (Burning Coal Theater Company). **Other Projects:** The Randy Pausch Bridge and the Hunt Library (CMU) and the Gulf Tower. **Awards:** 2010 Electric League Award (for the Randy Pausch Bridge) and 2012 Electric League Award (for the Hunt Library).

Lindsay Tejan (Co-Costume Designer) is in her sixth season at PICT. **PICT credits:** Sherlock Holmes and the Crucifer of Blood, Our Class, The School for Lies, In the Next Room or the vibrator play, and Jane Eyre. **Previous credits:** The Great Gatsby, Walk Two Moons, Turn of the Screw (Prime Stage), Women of Troy (Veritas Vita Collaborative), Talk to Me Like the Rain and Let Me Listen, Torrent, The Fog (Raymond Laine One Act Festival), and Once on This Island (Perry High School). **Costume Design/Wardrobe Supervisor credits:** Room Service (Point Park), Arsenic and Old Lace (Geneva College), and Medea and Man of La Mancha (Palm Beach Atlantic University). **Upcoming costume designs:** Woman and Scarecrow (PICT Classic Theatre) and Day Room Window with Bonnie Cohen.
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Regina Lee Tvaruzek (Assistant Master Electrician) is in her second season at PICT. PICT credits: lighting intern for Kreutzer Sonata, Lady Windermere's Fan, A Skull in Connemara, and Don Juan Comes Back from the War. Other Pittsburgh credits: Assistant light designer for Pittsburgh Opera's La Boheme and Prime Stage Theater's The Devil's Arithmetic. She designed for the Young Playwrights Festival at City Theater, and in NYC for Middle Voice Theater Company's workshop of Room For One by Alec Silberblatt. Regina holds a BA from Seton Hill University and thanks her professors, family, colleagues, and friends for being the greatest teachers there are.

Jesse Van Swol (Technical Director) is a third-generation theatre carpenter and has worked in theatre for almost 20 years. PICT credits: House & Garden, The Importance of Being Earnest, and The School for Lies. Other Pittsburgh credits: shop foreman at City Theatre and technical director for Prime Stage, and has worked with Bricolage, barebones, Quantum Theatre, and several other companies throughout Pittsburgh. Jesse's work has been featured in American Theatre Magazine on multiple occasions and playwright Christopher Durang has told him "I'm glad you stayed in theatre." He would like to thank his wife Naima and son Damien for their continued support and understanding.

Emmi Veinbergs (Wardrobe Mistress) is in her first season at PICT. Recent credits: The Raymond Laine Memorial One-Acts, The Alchemist's Lab (Pittsburgh Playhouse) and Huck Finn (Playhouse Jr). She is a rising senior musical theatre major at Point Park University.
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NOTES FROM THE DRAMATURG

by Tyler Crumrine

Since *Waiting for Godot* first premiered in 1953, audiences have been flipping to the center of their programs in search of one thing—answers. Answers to questions like: Who is Godot? How should I feel about this? What does it all mean? What did I just see?

And almost as many people have tried to answer them: He’s God. He’s the absence of God. You should love it. You should hate it. You should both love AND hate it. It isn’t worth your time. It’s a modern masterpiece. It’s overrated rubbish. It’s the most significant play of the twentieth century. There are entire volumes of criticism devoted to completely opposing points of view, and each answer claims to be more comprehensive than the last.

The difficulty of *Waiting for Godot* is that it isn’t particularly interested in answers. It’s far more concerned with the opposite—how people endure without answers. The play is less about “Godot” and more about “waiting.” About what happens when a character is stripped of nearly everything—status, possessions, even memory—and offered nothing but the awful responsibility of time and a vague promise that change might be on the way.

The situation of the play is tragic, but it’s important to remember that it’s also a comedy. That there isn’t just one man waiting, but two. And what’s more, two friends. Friends who may not remember much, but do remember each other. And while they may threaten to leave each other, ultimately neither moves.

As much as *Waiting for Godot* is about the passage of time and the wickedness of waiting, it’s also about companionship. About the humor, madness, and hope that can come from spending a significant amount of time in close proximity with another human being. About friends who, despite a growing sense of futility, still encourage, distract, and refuse to abandon each other. Friends who, despite disappointment, resume a daily struggle against a seemingly hopeless situation.

Vladimir and Estragon are emblematic of the human condition, but only so much as we all are. They’re people, and, more importantly, tramps. They’re people removed from pretense, left only with the absolutes of life—annoyance, hunger, hope, despair, boredom, pity, and desperation. They’re two men who, deprived of any past or future, must contend only with the present. And who, like us, sometimes have trouble telling whether they’re happy or not. Whether they should stay where they are or simply move on.

So what does *Waiting for Godot* mean? It depends. What conversations did you have over lunch? Who did you have them with? What changes are you waiting for? What affirmation? What hope? *Waiting for Godot* is an invitation to wait alongside two men no more in the know than we are, as wicked as that waiting may be, and see what laughter, tears, or revelations come in the meantime. And then, like Estragon, to afterward either “forget immediately or never forget.” Who knows? You just have to wait and see.

On Character Names and Their Possible Origins

VLADIMIR: Derived from the Slavic elements *volod*, meaning "rule," and *mer*, meaning "great," Vladimir’s Russian roots are generally translated to mean “regal” or “king.” The
name’s second element has also been associated with \textit{mir}, meaning "peace" or "world," leading some to interpret the name as “king of all men” or “man of the people.”

**ESTRAGON:** French for “tarragon,” an aromatic and culinary herb. In Beckett’s own words, “Estragon is inert and Vladimir restless.”

**POZZO:** \textit{Pozzo} means “hole” or “well” in Italian, sometimes interpreted as “empty.” Pozzo is also a name befitting a clown. The most significant reasoning for Pozzo’s name, however, may just be that it’s sonically similar to Godot’s, making for a nice bit of mistaken identity upon his entrance.

**LUCKY:** The most frequent interpretation of Lucky’s name is that it’s meant to be ironic. When Beckett was asked about the name, however, he replied, "I suppose he is lucky to have no more expectations."

**GODOT:** The most common reading is that Godot is meant to mean God, but Beckett outright denied that interpretation saying “if by Godot I had meant God I would [have] said God, and not Godot.” He did suggest that the name has some ties to slang for the French word for boot, \textit{godillot} or \textit{godasse}. Frequently Godot is seen as more of a general symbol, however, meaning different things to different people.

**Samuel Beckett: A Brief Introduction**

It’s impossible to talk about writers in the twentieth century without talking about the World Wars, and Samuel Beckett’s story is no different. Born April 13, 1906 in the Dublin suburb of Foxrock, Beckett was quickly entranced by language. He studied French and Italian from an early age and graduated top of his class at Trinity College in modern languages in 1927. Beckett then traveled on fellowship to France, where he met and befriended fellow Irish expatriate James Joyce, under whose encouragement he published his first essay, short story, and poem in 1929. After a brief stint teaching, which he hated, he turned to writing professionally. He settled in Paris permanently, published one collection of short stories and another of poems over the next few years, and his first novel, \textit{Murphy}, in 1938.

In 1939, however, everything changed. Hitler invaded Poland and Beckett joined the French Resistance, filling his days and nights with secret rendezvous and constantly waiting for agents who were rumored to come but frequently never came. When his cell was betrayed to the Nazis, he then fled to southern France, staying in hiding and continuing to write until he could volunteer as a translator for the Red Cross after the war.

Before the war, and partly under the influence of Joyce, Beckett had already shared the mindset that writers needed to find new forms and language for a new world. After WWII, it seemed even more necessary. While Joyce solved this problem by inventing his own language, Beckett, on the other hand, switched languages entirely. After the war he wrote exclusively in French, and by abandoning the English language, he was able to abandon the entire inheritance of English literature. He freed himself from its allusions, excess, color, and style, gaining instead a simplicity and objectivity that allowed him to attempt a much more direct expression of “being.” He was able to strip his language of pretense, focus instead on the shape and sound of words, and, in University of Toronto scholar Nick Mount’s words, “start literary history at zero with Beckett.”
It was during this post-war period that Beckett wrote *En attendant Godot*, which he later rewrote in English himself as *Waiting for Godot*, a play that would become one of the best-loved and most accessible works of his career. It was also the first of many plays that would eventually earn him the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded in 1969 “for his writing, which—in new forms for the novel and drama—in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation.”

**Samuel Beckett (1906-1989)** is widely recognized as one of the greatest dramatists of the twentieth century. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969. Mr. Beckett is most renowned for his play *Waiting for Godot* which launched his career in theatre. He then went on to write numerous successful full-length plays, including *Endgame* in 1957, *Krapp’s Last Tape* in 1958, and *Happy Days* in 1960. Mr. Beckett received his first commission for radio from the BBC in 1956 for *All That Fall*. This was followed by a further five plays for radio including *Embers, Words and Music*, and *Cascando*. Like no other dramatist before him, Mr. Beckett’s works capture the pathos and ironies of modern life yet still maintain his faith in man’s capacity for compassion and survival no matter how absurd his environment may have become.

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Why does this 66-year old play continue to draw actors and audiences?

*Waiting for Godot* comes across as a modern play even though it was written in 1948. It’s an intellectual play that provides theatergoers a challenging perspective on the meaning of life. The play does not have a linear plot line, and it is initially unclear what is going on with characters who do not seem to be going anywhere. At the end they are exactly where they started, leaving the audience unsettled and often perplexed as to the intent of the playwright.

It helps to understand the era that Western Europe and author Samuel Beckett experienced prior to the play’s being written. Two world wars had destroyed previous political, cultural and religious orders. Much philosophical and political questioning arose, and the old answers were no longer acceptable.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* can be seen as a search for understanding and meaning for life in a world whose foundations had crumbled. The confusion, pain and anguish expressed through the characters in *Waiting for Godot* reflect the struggle for answers, and, seeing no way forward, these characters do not have the confidence to act. The first spoken line in the play is “nothing to be done.”

Beckett, born in Dublin in 1906, studied and eventually settled in Paris, joining James Joyce’s literary circle. He remained in Paris during the Nazi occupation in World War II and worked for the French Resistance. After the war, Beckett wrote essays, poetry and novels to much acclaim, receiving the Nobel Prize for literature in 1969.

*Waiting for Godot* premiered in the United States in 1956. It was not enthusiastically received, either at its Miami premiere or in a later New York production. Audiences, especially in the U.S., where one is expected to act on problems, were often frustrated by the themes of the play, particularly the emphasis on the impossibility of taking any action, even suicide.

Reading or watching the play, we are immediately struck by the way its structure reflects the modernist point of view of its time. Beckett's play resembles painting’s abstract expressionism in its rejection of naturalistic theater, utilizing limited scenery, a nontraditional plot structure, and minimal dialogue.

Modernism, which grew rapidly after World War I and had a rebirth after World War II, rejected certainty in any form — political, cultural, or religious. It saw the past as obsolete and desired to find new paths. In all forms of art, it was an expression of how to make sense of the meaninglessness of human existence in light of the two world wars, the atomic bomb, and the dehumanizing effects of modern technology.

In addition to Beckett, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Jean Genet are classic modernist authors, all of whom were strongly influenced by French existentialism. Camus’ 1942 essay,
“The Myth of Sisyphus,” likely influenced Beckett’s writing. Camus affirmed life's absurdity and stated there was only one true philosophical question for man: When confronted with the ultimate meaninglessness and indifference of the world, should he commit suicide?

This viewpoint informed the work of a number of playwrights in addition to Beckett, including Genet, Harold Pinter, Vaclav Havel, and Edward Albee, first grouped by critic Martin Esslin into the Theater of the Absurd. Like Camus’ Sisyphus, these playwrights’ characters are often trapped in a meaningless routine with no escape. They are unable to take action and cannot even communicate or connect with each other.

Beckett’s characters, however, are wistfully hopeful that there is some way out of the meaninglessness of their existence, and when they are not consciously waiting for Godot to save them, they are contemplating how to commit suicide, although not successfully.

What does Waiting for Godot mean for us today? We live in a much more affluent and stable world than Europe of the 1940s. The threat of terrorism causes us to confront the precariousness of life and the randomness of death, but we rarely talk of the absurdity of life or its being a struggle against a meaningless death.

Today we generally regard technology as a boon, and people cannot wait to obtain the latest electronic gadget. Nearly everyone has a smartphone that makes communications easy. Why, we could simply text or email Godot and ask him when he is stopping by. Who is this Godot dude anyhow? We could Google him and discover that his name has no relation to God (according to Beckett), although he does promise the possibility of salvation.

Does the play still resonate with us? Is it alien or simply historical, marking another time and place? Or is it to be seen simply as the story of a couple of bums in need of a homeless shelter and counseling?

Long before Google, man searched for meaning in the human experience. The Greeks and Romans taught philosophical inquiry as a means of determining how to live a desirable and meaningful life. Today we consult life counselors, or perhaps become adherents of the latest yoga teacher. Religion seems to have revived in the Middle East, the U.S., and even in Russia. It remains a popular means of explaining the world, while we have become skeptical of government or political ideologies being able to provide answers. Some people turn to science and technology to solve our problems and provide new meanings for our lives. Others find solace in astrology, and still others simply keep busy with their work and social activities. There are always smartphones to check, social networks to engage, or many channels of television to watch. For the most part we simply ignore the question of life’s meaning or try not to think about it. That is, of course, why we have the theater – to act as a reminder.

The existentialists insist that life requires taking responsibility for making choices and assert the primacy of the individual's free choice to provide meaning in life. For Kierkegaard, an existentialist Christian, belief in God was a leap of faith and one he took knowingly because he thought it was the best choice. He insisted on the importance of living life passionately despite the probability of uncertainty. Camus echoed the importance of facing death and doing battle with the meaninglessness and indifference of the absurd universe that we are born into. We must take responsibility for the course of our lives, doing so with recognition of life’s ultimate absurdity. Doing so without false hope allows us to achieve a meaningful life.

Waiting for Godot causes us to reflect. Like Beckett’s characters we have choices: we can wait for Godot, or seize the day and appreciate the moment. One thing we can count on - the choice is ours.
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The Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin
Esslin coined the now-iconic phrase in 1961, and his book is the first full-length
study of the theatrical movement that shatters typical stage conventions and
experiments with sound, language, meaning, and silence in unexpected ways.

Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett, James Knowlson
Journey with Beckett from a remote corner of suburban Dublin to his final days
in Paris, with many twists and turns along the way. Interviews with the author’s
friends and family flesh out this portrait of the notoriously reclusive playwright.

Reassessing the Theater of the Absurd, Michael Bennett
Bennett’s critique of Esslin’s classic scholarship argues that absurdist
plays are ethical texts that contain useful information on how to live a
good life. This provocative challenge to the established way of looking at
Beckett and his contemporaries provides plenty of food for thought.

The Bald Soprano, and Other Plays, Eugene Ionesco
If you enjoy tonight’s performance, you may want to explore Ionesco,
another absurdist playwright who, like Beckett, began writing plays later in
life. This volume contains four of the Romanian writer’s early works.

Theater of the Avant-Garde, 1890-1950, Bert Cardullo and Robert Knopf, eds.
Theatre of the Absurd was just one of the many movements in avant-garde stagecraft
that shaped the twentieth century. Cardullo and Knopf’s collection of essays paints
a vivid picture of the larger cultural context in which the Absurd came to be.

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A scene from PICT Plays...with Mystery & Mayem (2013 Gala). From Left to Right: James FitzGerald, David Whalen, Karen Baum, Alan Stanford, special guest Jack Gleeson and Gayle Pazerski.

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