



WAITING FOR GODOT

Tuesday 21 –
Sunday 26
January 2025

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garrick
studio

Hello and Welcome

...to the Garrick Studio Theatre, and the second production in our season of Irish Drama. Four plays and one musical that either have an Irish theme, are written by Irish dramatists, or are set in the Ireland.

Waiting for Godot comes with a reputation: dense, enigmatic, frustrating, and brilliant. It's been labelled everything from a pinnacle of existentialist theatre to a darkly comic riddle about the futility of life. But **Godot** is more than just a theoretical exercise or a monument of modernism. It's human.

At its core, **Waiting for Godot** is about two men, Vladimir and Estragon, trying to pass the time. In that deceptively simple premise lies a whole universe of questions: What are we waiting for? What happens when nothing happens? How do we endure, and why? These questions resonate in a way that feels strikingly relevant today. In an age where waiting has taken on new forms – scrolling endlessly through feeds, holding for customer service, hoping for a text back – it's hard not to feel the strange familiarity of Vladimir and Estragon's plight. They are caught in a perpetual cycle of anticipation, a state we all know intimately.

Beckett's genius lies in his ability to blend the absurd with the profound. Vladimir and Estragon bicker, joke, and struggle with their own physical discomfort, yet these moments of humour never fully distract from the existential weight pressing down on them. Leaning into the tension, you find the comedy in the tragedy and the tragedy in the comedy. It's a delicate balance, but

one I believe speaks to the contradictions of being alive. After all, isn't life itself a kind of absurd performance, full of small triumphs, unbearable monotony, and fleeting flashes of meaning?

One of the challenges of **Waiting for Godot** is the apparent lack of plot. Beckett gives us no clear backstory, no resolution, and no easy answers. **Godot** isn't a puzzle to be solved; it's a mirror held up to the audience. Everyone will see something different in the play, and that's exactly as Beckett intended. For some, it may evoke the despair of waiting for change in an indifferent world. For others, it might feel like a meditation on friendship, survival, or the limits of faith. Whatever your interpretation, I hope you find something that speaks to you.

I was thrilled when Celia Bonner agreed to direct this play, and she has assembled a hugely talented cast who have brought energy and insight, and immense care and curiosity to every moment, transforming Beckett's famously sparse script into something vibrant and alive. Whether this is your first encounter with **Godot** or your fiftieth, I hope it leaves you with more questions than answers – and maybe a little laughter along the way. After all, isn't that what waiting is all about?

Our next production on the Garrick's Main Stage has been described as *"an up-lifting, touching and very funny play that will leave audiences inspired"*. Performed by the **Garrick Ensemble**, our own group of young actors under the age of 30, Simon Stephens' adaptation of Mark



Haddon's International best-selling novel **The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time** is a richly theatrical exploration of a touching, humorous tale. I urge you not to miss what promises to be another memorable production from this gifted corps of performers. And that is just the first in a hugely exciting mix of shows that will challenge, entertain and inspire – a season of stories that will stay with you long after the curtain falls! Pick up one of our Season Brochures today to find out more.

I sincerely hope that you enjoy tonight's production. At the Garrick we are ever thankful for you, our audience. With so many ways to entertain ourselves these days you've chosen to come and support local theatre. We literally could not do this without you. You are our lifeblood and we at the Garrick Playhouse are eternally grateful – thank you! Have a safe journey home afterwards, and we look forward to welcoming you back here very soon!

Joe

Joseph Meighan

Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.

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Godot: Complexity in simplicity

On its surface, *Waiting for Godot* has a simple plot: two people are waiting for "Godot," someone who fails to show up but whose messenger encourages them to keep waiting for him. From this tiny plot comes a large amount of discussion, writing, and debate about the meaning of the play, and about what can be gained from watching it.

While many people have tried to interpret *Waiting for Godot* as being Christian symbolism, a Freudian or Jungian psychological analysis, or even an allegory to the cold war, Beckett himself discouraged this sort of speculation. His introduction to the initial abridged production in 1952 read:

"I don't know who Godot is. I don't even know (above all don't know) if he exists. And I don't know if they believe in him or not — those two who are waiting for him. The other two who pass by towards the end of each of the two acts, that must be to break up the monotony. All I knew I showed. It's not much, but it's enough for me, by a wide margin. I'll even say that I would have been satisfied with less. As for wanting to find in all that a broader, loftier meaning to carry away from the performance, along with the programme and the Eskimo pie, I cannot see the point of it. But it must be possible... Estragon, Vladimir, Pozzo, Lucky, their time and their space, I was able to know them a little, but far from the need to understand. Maybe they owe you explanations. Let them supply it. Without me. They and I are through with each other."

Beckett suggested that the piece was simple, and there was no conscious deeper meaning buried in the play. This has not stopped people from interpreting it in different ways in the many years since it was written.

It is a very polarizing piece of theatre, with plenty of fans and detractors. When initially produced in 1953, critics were kind to the play, with reviews ranging "from tolerant to enthusiastic." Some audiences were less kind, hooting and whistling at the actors during a performance. However, despite the variety of responses to the play, it has become a hallmark of theatre of the absurd, and is generally considered an important and influential piece of theatre in the 20th century.

Beckett's *Godot* was an early piece of theatre of the absurd, preceded by only a couple of plays also written originally in French. His contemporaries, particularly in the London theatre scene, were Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and John Osborne, writers who wrote realistic plays with strong emotional

arcs. In stark contrast to that, *Waiting for Godot* was Beckett's attempt to strip theatre down to its bare essentials. There was no realism in the play. The characters were simple as was the setting. The action of the play was that very little happens. In fact, the two acts of the play more or less mirror each other.

Beckett and *Waiting for Godot* influenced his contemporaries and beyond. Edward Albee, Harold Pinter and David Mamet all have Beckett's imprint on their work. Tom Stoppard went so far as to lift the central plot — or lack of it — of *Godot* and apply it to Shakespeare in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, first produced in 1966. His work has influenced not only writers, but painters and musicians as well.

Beckett's influence can even be seen in television and film, especially in the work of directors of Hal Hartley and Jim Jarmusch.

Productions of *Godot* often reflect what the artists themselves see the play being about. The celebrated 1988 production with Steve Martin and Robin Williams emphasized comedic elements that balanced out the more sombre tone of the play, playing to the strengths of the actors. The 2013 production with Sir Patrick Stewart and Sir Ian McKellen was also very funny and was undoubtedly informed by the personal friendship of the two leads, giving the play a lift of

optimism amid the bleakness of the situation.

Waiting for Godot is a challenging piece of theatre, and one that audiences have loved and hated over the years. Much like modern productions of Shakespeare, individual productions of *Godot* can be vastly different from each other, and sometimes feel as if the audience is seeing an entirely different play. Its simplicity leaves room for interpretation. Audiences are asked to let go of traditional notions of plot and emotional arc, and instead to experience this play — and its simplicity — and see what they can make of it.



Pictured above, top to bottom: A young Geoffrey Rush (Vladimir) opposite his then flatmate Mel Gibson (Estragon) in 1979 at the Jane Street Theatre in Sydney; Robin Williams (Estragon), Steve Martin (Vladimir), F. Murray Abraham (Pozzo), and Bill Irwin (Lucky), in the 1988 Lincoln Center production; Nathan Lane (Estragon) and Bill Irwin (Vladimir) in the 2009 Broadway revival; Sir Patrick Stewart (Vladimir) and Sir Ian McKellen (Estragon) at Theatre Royal Haymarket in 2009.

Introduction

After many years of being involved in theatre, I find myself returning to this extraordinary play with a deepened sense of both awe and humility. Beckett's work remains a cornerstone of modern drama, and yet I am also reminded how elusive and inexhaustible it is. It feels as though *Waiting for Godot* changes with us. The play we encounter as eager students in our twenties is not the same one we meet in the maturity of our sixties. This is its power: it holds a mirror to our shifting lives, refusing to give us easy answers while gently prodding us to reckon with the unanswerable.

At first glance, *Waiting for Godot* seems deceptively simple. Two men, Vladimir and Estragon, wait on a barren stage for someone – or something – called Godot. Their waiting is punctuated by moments of humour, despair, and surreal absurdity. And yet, behind its stark language and sparse setting, the play brims with life. It captures something fundamental about the human experience: the search for meaning in a world that often feels indifferent to our hopes and struggles.

Over the years, I've come to see *Waiting for Godot* not as a play about despair but as a play about endurance. It is about the quiet heroism of staying – staying together, staying hopeful, staying alive – even when the world gives you little to hold onto. Vladimir and Estragon's relationship is, for me, the heart of the piece. They squabble and tease, grow frustrated and tender, yet they never abandon one another. In their flawed, fumbling friendship, we see the profound necessity of human connection.

This production is informed by the times we live in – a world marked by uncertainty, upheaval, and waiting of many kinds. Whether waiting for justice, for love, for peace, or simply for tomorrow, we all inhabit a version of Vladimir and Estragon's condition. And yet, Beckett reminds us of the importance of laughter in the face of it all. There is so much humour in this play – physical comedy, wordplay, and moments of sheer absurdity that can catch you by surprise. It's not the kind of laughter that erases the darkness, but one that co-exists with it, reminding us of our resilience.

This cast and creative team have brought immense care and curiosity to every moment. Together, we've aimed to honour Beckett's vision while finding our own connection to the work. Beckett wrote the play not long after the end of the Second World War, and this has informed our production in a way all that the cast have found helpful.

My hope is that this production will leave you feeling not just the weight of waiting, but also the beauty of persistence, the solace of companionship, and the strange, bittersweet comedy of being human.

Celia

Celia Bonner

Director, Waiting for Godot.

The Cast

Vladimir (also called 'Didi') **Richard Sails**
Estragon (also called 'Gogo') **Ben Thomas**
Pozzo **Robert Crumpton**
Lucky **Jamie King**
A Boy **Noah Charlton-Jones**

The Production Team

Director **Celia Bonner**
Set Design **Barry Purves**
Stage Manager / Props **Dave Jones**
A.S.M. / Rehearsal Prompt **Steve Williamson**
Lighting Design **Geoff Stafford**
Lighting Operation **Jo Myers**
Sound Coordination **James Merrington**
With sincere thanks to **Ian Kitney**

Information believed to be correct at time of going to press...

The Director

Celia Bonner

Before Celia moved to Manchester from her native London she was told by a colleague that she should join the Altrincham Garrick, so she did. She has been connected with the theatre ever since, though for years her work in broadcasting prevented her from much involvement. She has acted and directed both on the main stage and in the studio. Favourite acting roles include *Mrs Danvers* in *Rebecca*, *Miss Shepherd* in *The Lady in The Van* and *Jessie* in *Calendar Girls The Musical*, as well as *Esther Price* in *The Price* in the studio. Among favourite plays she has directed are *The Madness of George III* and *My Boy Jack*. Her most recent production was co-directing Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at Wilmslow's Green Room Theatre. She is delighted to be back in the Garrick Studio directing this exciting, enigmatic play.



**TELL US
WHAT
YOU
THINK!**

We value your feedback and invite you to share your thoughts about the Altrincham Garrick Playhouse. Have you enjoyed a recent performance, or perhaps there's something we could improve? Are there specific plays, musicals, or shows you'd love to see on our stage? Any visiting acts you'd like to recommend? We would love to receive your reviews and suggestions.

This season, we've partnered with Star Feedback to make it easy for you to share your opinions. Simply scan the QR code (right) and let us know what you think. Thank you for helping us create the best experience possible!


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The Company



Richard Sails *Vladimir*

Richard joined the Garrick back in 1980 when he first moved up North. Favourite productions include **Funny Peculiar**, **Blithe Spirit**, **'Allo 'Allo** (all directed by Diana Harker; funny, that!), **A Man for All Seasons**, **Hobson's Choice**, **Educating Rita**, **Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell**, **Return to the Forbidden Planet**, **Noises Off** and **The History Boys**. He has also immensely enjoyed playing in the Garrick Studio over the years, including **Gregory Solomon** in **The Price** and two Terry Johnson plays – **Hysteria**, playing **Sigmund Freud**, and **Insignificance**, playing **Einstein** (unnamed but unmistakable!) The Garrick's change of emphasis has prompted him to spread his net and he has recently much enjoyed, inter alia, **Shadowlands** at CHADS and **The Messiah** at Wilmsow Green Room. To return to the Garrick Studio for this wonderful classic is an absolute joy.



Jamie King *Lucky*

Jamie previously worked with director Celia Bonner on the Green Room Theatre, Wilmslow's production of **The Two Gentlemen of Verona** in 2024, and was keen to be directed by her again – especially in **Waiting for Godot** – having studied Beckett at University, and seen incredible productions of his **Endgame**,

Waiting for Godot and **Happy Days**.

Here at the Garrick Playhouse, Jamie has appeared in **Queers**, **Dick Whittington**, **Shakespeare in Love**, **Our Town**, **A Christmas Carol**, **Sleeping Beauty**, **Let the Right One In**, **Jane Eyre** and, most recently, **Jack and the Beanstalk**.

Their other acting credits include **High School Musical**, **Suddenly Last Summer** (Pontio Arts), **Hindle Wakes** (Green Room Theatre, Wilmslow), **Bloom** (NiamosRadical Arts Centre) and **A Midsummer Night's Dream** (Manchester Pride/Antimatter Productions).

Their directing credits include **Talking Heads** (Bangor University), **The Peace Talks** (also writer – short film) and writing credits include **12 Scenes of Christmas** (Liberty Rep) and **The Resignation Speech** (Questors' Theatre, Etcetera Theatre).



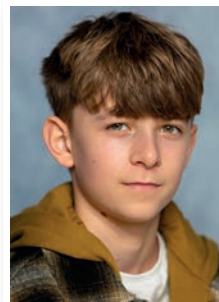
Ben Thomas *Estragon*

Ben J. Thomas trained at ALRA North on the post graduate programme. Theatre credits include **Je Suis Charlie** (Rough Boy Mcr), **666 Comments** (Aliki Chapple Productions), **The Well** (ER Productions), **The Gambit** (Rampant) and **Of Mice and Men** (Arty Fact Theatre Co.). Screen credits include **Funny Woman** (Sky Studios) and **Emmerdale** (ITV). He is very delighted to be making his debut at the Altrincham Garrick in such an exciting and challenging role.



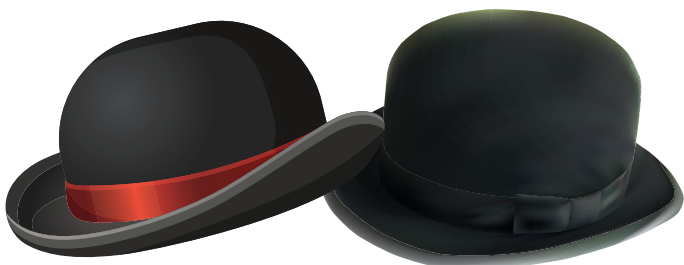
Robert Crumpton *Pozzo*

Robert last appeared at the Altrincham Garrick as the eponymous role in **The Winslow Boy**, when he was 13! He trained as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London. Robert's theatre credits include: **Henry V** (Oxford Playhouse), **Attempts on Her Life** (Underbelly, Edinburgh Fringe), **Romeo and Juliet** (Nottingham Playhouse), **The Emperor Jones** (The Gate, Notting Hill); five national/international summer tours with the open-air British Shakespeare Company; leads in **Rope** and **Everyman** (The Madrid Players); **Betrayal**, **Crave**, **Miss Julie**, **The Glass Menagerie**, **Present Laughter**, and the title roles in **Hamlet** and **Macbeth** (English Theatre Madrid). Television: **El Ministerio del Tiempo** (HBO/La 1), **In From the Cold** (Netflix), and the Spanish soap opera **Servir y Proteger** (La 1). Film: **The Vault**, **Cracking the Shakespeare Code**. He is very happy to be back on stage in Greater Manchester, having moved back from Spain in 2023.



Noah Charlton-Jones *The Boy*

Noah is delighted to have been cast as **The Boy** to work alongside the wonderful cast and team of **Waiting for Godot**. This may be a debut appearance in The Studio, however Noah is no stranger to the Garrick's Main Stage, having previously appeared in **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang** (Jeremy), **The Vicar of Dibley** (Archie), **Merrily We Roll Along** (Frank Jr) and **A Vicar of Dibley Christmas** (Angel). Noah is also a member of GAPA (The Garrick Academy for Performing Arts) and has appeared in their productions of **Matilda Jr** and **Cinderella** and will appear in the forthcoming production of **The Addams Family**. Noah is a keen young actor and dancer, attending weekly training in Drama, Musical Theatre, Dance and LAMDA. He hopes you enjoy tonight's show!



Theatre of the Absurd

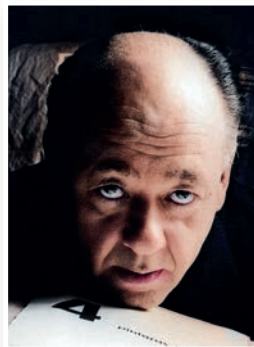
At first glance, it seems like nothing happens in *Waiting for Godot*, which is why this play has been quite rarely produced. However, when examined carefully, *Waiting for Godot* can be extremely useful when beginning to understand not just the internal struggles of the play, but the Theatre of the Absurd.

Never a formal literary movement, the term "Theatre of the Absurd" first appeared in a work by literary critic Martin Esslin. Esslin's work, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, concentrated on four Francophone playwrights of the 1950s and 1960s, the writers Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, Jean Genet, and Eugene Ionesco, and later Harold Pinter, while also touching on the work of a number of other European playwrights. Esslin felt that each of these playwrights was depicting the human situation as "absurd" in the same way that French philosopher Albert Camus defined it in his 1942 work *The Myth of Sisyphus*: indecipherable, meaningless, and purposeless. Where other playwrights had sought to discuss the "absurd" human condition, Esslin felt, the Absurd playwrights merely presented it to their audience as a given fact.

Plays of the Theatre of the Absurd represent a breakdown of cultural certainties. In a world devastated by two world wars and awaiting potential nuclear annihilation, nothing could be depended on. The characters often pass through their plays in a state of confusion, overwhelmed by the irrationality and strangeness of their settings. Language becomes not meaningful communication, but mere attempts to describe the wilderness and confusion of Western culture. In many plays, like in *Waiting for Godot*, language as a rational means of human interaction is destroyed altogether, and characters spout nonsense and have entire conversations without traditional meaning. The playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd completely repudiated the typical logic and causality of Western theatre: one event in a play might provoke any of a multitude of completely unexpected and out-of-place reactions from the characters, such as Pozzo going blind after losing his watch.



of the century, centred on the violent, vulgar, and childish figure of Ubu. The first play was so shocking to the audience when it premièred that it had to be re-staged as a puppet play in order to escape being completely shut down. The Theatre of the Absurd also may have taken inspiration from the nonsense poetry of earlier writers like Lewis Carroll, François Rabelais, and Edward Lear.



Like its one theatrical predecessor, the Theatre of the Absurd did not find initial popularity with everyone. *Waiting for Godot* was more successful than others, but did not go over well with American audiences, many of which walked out after the first act because "nothing happened."

Today, *Waiting for Godot* is considered one of the greatest plays written in the past century. Although the Theatre of the Absurd came about as a response to a specific epoch in history, today's theatre still employs devices first used by absurdist playwrights. Edward Albee wrote, "For just as it is true that our response to colour and form was forever altered once the impressionist painters put their minds to canvas, it is just as true that the playwrights of *The Theatre of the Absurd* have forever altered our response to the theatre."

For this reason, the playwrights and other artists of the period frequently rejected traditional forms of art outright. They strove to create art that was strange and shocking to the audience; art that would startle people into questioning their conventional values. The only forerunner to this kind of theatrical havoc was the Ubu cycle of plays by Alfred Jarry. These plays, written around the turn

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett was born on April 13, 1906 in Dublin, Ireland. He was a natural athlete and showed early signs of an interest in writing. Beckett went to Trinity College, where he studied French, English and Italian. He took a teaching post in Paris, where he met a fellow Irish author, James Joyce. The two became firm friends and Joyce became a huge influence on Beckett's early authorship. Beckett helped with the research that would result in Joyce's novel, *Finnegan's Wake*, and he became a huge supporter of Joyce during the controversy surrounding *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*.

Beckett's early writings were far from what eventually would make him famous. He primarily wrote essays and literary criticisms. His first published work was a defence of his friend James Joyce. In 1930, he left Paris and returned to Dublin to work at his old school Trinity College, but soon found no fulfillment in an academic career. He travelled Europe over the next eight years, writing short stories, poetry, and even a novel. In addition, he continued to write essays and critical reviews. Following the death of his father, he spent time in England to undergo psychiatric treatment. Beckett's travels were cut short when he was stabbed and nearly killed in Paris in 1938. James Joyce helped him recover and Beckett remained in Paris, which he would call home for the rest of his life. He was an active member of the French Resistance during World War II. He continued to write, but soon he began writing primarily in French and began to shift his work in a new direction.

In 1945, Beckett began to actively strike out from under Joyce's shadow. The two men remained close, but Beckett was compelled to move in a different direction, focusing less on knowing, and more on ignorance and impotence as primary themes. His process focused on removing what he thought to be superfluous and unnecessary. *Waiting for Godot* became Beckett's most famous expression of this. Of all Beckett's work, it is the most popular and frequently performed all over the world. Beckett himself translated the play into English and worked closely with the artists in all of Godot's initial productions.

Samuel Beckett had gained fame and notoriety, but he continued to write plays, essays and poetry. His plays continued to demonstrate his desire to minimise. Besides *Waiting for Godot*, the plays *Krapp's Last Tape*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* became some of his best known works. As his life and career progressed, Beckett continued to slowly strip at the structure of realism and make his work even more compact. He shunned publicity and lived a very private life. Fame and wealth were of little interest to him. Upon winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1969, he promptly gave away all the prize money and continued to keep to himself.

His later works continued to attack the realist tradition and paved the way for playwrights like Pinter and Stoppard, and other writers, poets and musicians to mirror Beckett's minimalism. His later plays were whittled down to essential elements and were even more unusual. For example, *Not I* was set in total darkness with only a mouth being lit.

His final work, the 1988 poem *What is the World* ("*Comment Dire*"), was written while in a nursing home and hospital. His wife Suzanne died in July 1989, and Beckett himself died December 22, 1989. He was buried in Paris with his wife, in the Cimetière de Montparnasse. They share a gravestone that follows his wish that it be, "*any colour, so long as it's grey.*"

Tuesday 25 - Sunday 30 March

"The only way to get rid of temptation
is to yield to it" Oscar Wilde

A MAN OF NO IMPORTANCE

Music by
Stephen Flaherty

Lyrics by
Lynn Ahrens

Book by
Terrence McNally

Directed by
Barry Purves

Musical Direction by
Ceri Graves



In Dublin in 1964, bus conductor and Oscar Wilde fan Alfie has ambitions to stage *Salome*, despite the objections of the church hierarchy at St. Imelda's, where his amateur theatre group is based. When a newcomer to town, Adele, joins his passengers, he realises he has found the right person for the title role and starts to assemble his cast.

Meanwhile Alfie's sister Lily mistakes her brother's interest in Adele as romantic - she longs to have him off her hands so she can be free to marry. Little does Lily realise that Alfie's love "dare not speak its name" and the object of his affections is in fact bus driver Robbie.

As opening night draws near, secrets come spilling out which threaten to shake this little community to its core. But camaraderie and the redeeming power of theatre offer a thread of hope in this story of friendship, forbidden love and finding our place in the world.

Winner of the 2003 Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical, *A Man Of No Importance* is the second successful collaboration by the team of Terrence McNally, Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty, all of whom won TONY Awards for *Ragtime*.

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Mark Haddon

Adapted for
the stage by
**Simon
Stephens**

Winner of 5
TONY Awards

Directed by
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