

ARTTALK

Taking It to the Streets

During a lecture trip to New Orleans last November, more than a year after Hurricane Katrina, artist **Paul Chan** gazed around the Lower Ninth Ward, convinced for a moment that he had stumbled onto a theater set. "It was uncanny," says Chan. "I was on an empty road. There was a bare tree, silence. I was in the middle of *Waiting for Godot*."

Chan approached New Orleans residents with the idea of producing **Samuel Beckett's** existential drama—which has been performed in contexts

from San Quentin State Prison to Sarajevo—in their city. Artist **Jana Napoli** persuaded



Wendell Pierce will play Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans.

him to stage the play outside, in keeping with the city's tradition of street performances.

Soon Chan, best known for his digital and animated projections, found himself collaborating on a theatrical work with locals, grassroots organizations Common Ground and the Renaissance Project, and public-art nonprofit Creative Time.

The project culminates in four performances of *Waiting for Godot* in New Orleans, which will be staged in two locations: at a Lower Ninth Ward crossroads on the 2nd and 3rd of this month, and in a deserted front yard in Gentilly the following weekend. Both neighborhoods were

nearly destroyed by the hurricane and provide Chan, the play's artistic director, with an apocalyptic setting dominated by creeping vegetation and the eerie emptiness of the houses.

Waiting for Godot in New Orleans is curated by Creative Time's **Nato Thompson** and directed by **Christopher McElroen** of the Classical Theatre of Harlem. **Wendell Pierce**, star of HBO's *The Wire* and son of Gentilly residents, will reprise his role as Vladimir from the Classical Theatre's 2006 production of *Godot*. In that version, which also evoked Katrina's aftermath, the set was a rooftop submerged in a swimming pool. —Michelle Mounts