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KATRINA 'GODOT' A GO

Wendell Pierce to star in hurricane-themed adaptation of classic play in New Orleans



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Theater Guy

Theater news in New Orleans just keeps getting better and better.

The Classical Theatre of Harlem's acclaimed "Katrina" production of Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" will be staged here later this fall, starring, as it did off-Broadway, New Orleans stage, screen and TV star Wendell Pierce.

Even more exciting, the performances will be free, outdoor, site-spe-

cific stagings in the Lower 9th Ward and Gentilly.

And at least two of the tragi-comedy's five roles will be cast locally from auditions next week.

Without changing a line of dialogue, director Christopher McElroen gave the Beckett classic a jolt of contemporary immediacy by changing the site from "a country road" by a bog and a

THEATER, from C-1

bare tree to a rooftop, surrounded by water. The production received rave reviews (The Village Voice called it "Wading for Godot") and stunned audiences when it was staged last year. New York Times critic Neil Genzinger suggested that "the mysterious, perpetually awaited Godot, often thought of as God, is actually FEMA."

Lines in the play took on new meaning:

► "So there you are again . . . I thought you were gone forever."

► "Six hours, and never a soul in sight."

► "To treat a man like that . . . a human being . . . it's a scandal!"

► "To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment in time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not."

Pierce said he wanted nothing more than to bring the production to New Orleans and, despite nonstop film and TV commitments, Pierce is a man of his word, as we learned from his wondrous 2001 production of "Jitney," which he produced and starred in at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, his alma mater:

Partnered in the venture with the Classical Theatre of Harlem are international visual artist Paul Chan; Creative Time, the New York-based nonprofit, public arts organization; and a number of local groups: the University of New Orleans, Xavier University, Dillard University, the 9th Ward Renaissance Project, the Neighborhood Story Project and four high schools.

Pierce will again play the role of Vladimir, who, with his hapless cohort Estragon, waits in vain, day after day, for Godot. The other characters are the cruel master Pozzo, his mistreated servant Lucky, and a boy who arrives twice to say that Godot will not come today, but maybe tomorrow . . .

McElroen will hold auditions for the roles of Lucky and the Boy on Thursday, from 4 to 7 p.m., at the Louisiana Artworks annex at the Union Passenger Terminal, 1001 Loyola Ave., at Howard Avenue. (Use the main entrance, taking the stairs on the immediate right to the second floor.)

Lucky can be any age from 30s to 60s.



Wendell Pierce in The Classical Theatre of Harlem's production of 'Waiting for Godot'

The boy can be any age from 10 to 13.

Actors of all ethnicities are encouraged to try out and should prepare a brief (two-minute) contemporary monologue.

"Waiting for Godot" is scheduled to be produced Nov. 2 and 3 in the Lower 9th Ward and Nov. 9 and 10 in Gentilly.

A series of community dinners and discussions will be held in different neighborhoods with the producers and cast in October, and a "shadow" fund, matching the production dollar-for-dollar, will be given to local organizations for rebuilding efforts in neighborhoods where the play is presented. Master classes will be part of the project, too.