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**BAY AREA ACTOR TO STAR IN DREAM SHOW:
FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
APRIL 30 – MAY 24 AT EXIT THEATRE, SAN FRANCISCO**

Oakland resident, Ben Ortega, takes on complex, challenging role

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, APRIL 2009 – Oakland resident, Ben Ortega, is set to star in *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* April 30-May 24 alongside co-star Cheryl Smith of San Francisco at the EXIT Theatre, Main Stage, in San Francisco.

Actress/director Michael Haven of Richmond is directing. Tickets and information are available at www.frankieandjohnny-play.com.

“I’ve been aching to do Johnny, the male lead in *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, since I first read the script back in 2001,” says Ortega. “For me, it’s a dream role come true.”

About Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune

A smash 1987 Broadway hit by Terrance McNally (*Master Class, Kiss of the Spider Woman, The Full Monty*) *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* is a bittersweet comedy that combines poignancy and humor as it traces the unlikely romance that develops between two middle-aged “losers”—a tough-skinned waitress and a fast-talking, ex-con, short-order cook. Both bruised by life and gun-shy of true intimacy, they are each facing a lifetime of solitude in an anonymous purgatory called New York City. But as the evening develops, out of Frankie and Johnny’s sometimes touching, sometimes hilarious interplay, the promise of a relationship beyond a one-night stand begins to emerge.

About Ben Ortega

Originally from Peru, Ortega immigrated to the United States to Washington D.C. in 1985 and learned to speak English, in part, from singing along with his favorite Beatles songs while playing drums in local bands. By the late 80s, a new interest caught his eye—stand-up comedy. He began writing his own material and, with the encouragement of friends, took to the stage. “The first time I tried it, I bombed,” he recalls. “But I kept at it because I wanted to prove to myself I could do it and do it well.” In a few months time, he began hosting comedy shows at local clubs around D.C.

The bug bites

Through his club exposure, Ortega was offered a role on a local cable TV program. While taping the show, he met the owner of a theatre company in Virginia who offered him the lead role in his next production...and he was hooked. “There was something I still haven't put my finger on yet about acting that appeals to me very strongly,” says Ortega. “Bottom line, I fell in love with it. Stand-up is limited to just making people laugh. Through acting you can evoke (and provoke) so many more emotions.”

A job offer from the Lawrence Berkeley Lab brought Ortega to the theater-rich Bay Area in 1999. New performance opportunities opened up for the hungry and versatile young actor, and Ortega's career took flight. To date, he has nearly 50 stage plays to his credit, plus a dozen independent films.

The roles are all over the map for the chameleon-like Ortega. He was last seen onstage as George Peterson in the Dreamweavers Theatre's production of *Same Time, Next Year* in Napa, CA. Other favorite roles have included Felix Ungar in *The Odd Couple*, Ken Gorman in *Rumors*, Mark in *The Shadow Box*, the Inspector in *Dogg's Hamlet*, Cahoot's *Macbeth*, Ivor Fish in *Rough Crossing*, George Hay in *Moon Over Buffalo*, Picasso in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*, Zed in *Cinderella Waltz*, Yvan in *Art*, Lt. Daniel Kaffee in *A Few Good Men*, Verdecchia/Wideload in *Fronteras Americanas* (a one-man show), Buddy in *THUNDERBABE*, and Jack in *Incorruptible*. Ortega was also nominated for Best Actor Shellie Awards for his work as Harry Baldwin in *Panache* and Allan Felix in *Play It Again, Sam*, as well as for a Best Supporting Shellie Award for his work as Jack in *Incorruptible*.

A role well worth the risk

But the part of Johnny in *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* has long held a particularly enticing allure. “It's a beautifully written play with real-life situations, humor and passion, romance and tears,” Ortega says about his dream project. “It's about our fear of loneliness, about keeping hope alive, about our need to connect with other people to make life worth living. I identify with Johnny on many personal levels. And, as a performer, I feel this role is an actor's tour de force as it really demands the full spectrum of human emotion. So it's very exciting and very challenging.”

Production dates, times and tickets

Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune will be performed April 30 – May 24. Performances are at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday, and 2 p.m. on Sunday at the EXIT Theatre, 156 Eddy Street, San Francisco. Tickets are \$15-\$20 sliding scale for general admission and \$12 for TBA members, seniors and students, and can be purchased at the door or online at <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/56502>. More information is available online at the production's official Web site at www.frankieandjohnny-play.com.

(Patron discretion is advised: this show contains brief nudity, and adult language and situations.)

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