

MEDIA CONTACT:

Liz Nunan
Media Contact
925-878-9465
frankieandjohnnysf@yahoo.com
www.frankieandjohnny-play.com

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**BAY AREA ACTRESS TACKLES EMOTIONALLY HONEST ROLE IN
FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
APRIL 30 – MAY 24 AT EXIT THEATRE, SAN FRANCISCO**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, APRIL 2009 – San Francisco resident, Cheryl Smith, is gearing up for one of the most challenging roles of her career in *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* set to open April 30-May 24 at the EXIT Theatre, Main Stage, in San Francisco. Ben Ortega of Oakland will play opposite Smith as Johnny. Actress/director Michael Haven of Richmond directs. Tickets and information are available at www.frankieandjohnny-play.com.

“The challenge is to create a character whom the audience can relate to, care about and root for,” Smith explains. “So it’s up to me to find the humanity of Frankie. That’s what makes this show so exciting and frightening at the same time. The trick will be for me to bring my own humanity to the character while simultaneously getting out of her way. There’s also nudity in the play, which, for many people, might also seem frightening. But, cellulite notwithstanding, it’s the emotional nudity—being willing to show our whole selves to others, the shadow side, the parts that we feel are unlovely and unlovable—that’s more challenging to me.”

About *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*

A smash 1987 Broadway hit by Terrence 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 Cheryl Smith

Cheryl Smith is a San Francisco-based actress who works in theater, film, commercials, industrials and print. “Nothing gives me greater pleasure than theatre,” she says. “I majored in classical music in college, and I sing and play the piano. But my first love is theatre. I love the immediacy of it.”

No stranger to the work of Terrence McNally, Smith was one of eleven actors handpicked by McNally when he wrote *Crucifixion* in 2005. Smith has worked with theater companies throughout San Francisco and beyond. Some of her favorites include Ambit Theatre, with whom she took *The Rape Poems* to the Edinburgh Fringe Festival; EXIT Theatre, Last Planet Theatre, and the New Conservatory Theatre, where she received the Dean Goodman Choice Award for her role in *Kilt*.

Smith is also a writer and has penned stage works for herself and others. She has “acted” for medical students, portraying patients with various ailments and has worked undercover as a patient for a national study of doctors’ inclination to prescribe drugs. An avid traveler, Smith has visited some 47 countries.

A new experience

This will be Smith’s first opportunity to perform in a show with only two people in the cast. “There are no other story lines or plots—just Ben and I,” says Smith. “But what makes *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* so compelling is that it’s a universal story. It’s about loving, trusting and taking the risks that come with having a relationship. We all want to love and be loved. It sounds simple but can be the hardest thing of all to do, especially as we get older and have suffered the slings and arrows of middle age.”

Co-star, Ben Ortega, first spotted Smith in a show in 2002. Deeply impressed with her performance, he suggested director Michael Haven read her for Frankie. There was an instant chemistry between Ortega, Smith and their director, and the casting was finalized on the spot.

“Frankie knows herself and doesn’t hide who she is”, says Smith. “She’s forthright and honest. And yet her honesty is one of the ways she protects herself. In her middle age she knows her limits and we watch her struggle in her choice to protect or risk. Not an easy choice. For her or for us. But a necessary one.”

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 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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