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FRANKIE AND JOHNNY IN THE CLAIR DE LUNE
TO OPEN APRIL 30—MAY 24 AT EXIT THEATRE, SAN FRANCISCO

SAN FRANCISCO, CA, APRIL 2009 – This spring, the EXIT Theatre in San Francisco will host Terrence McNally's raw, poignant comedy, *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, starring Ben Ortega of Oakland, and Cheryl Smith of San Francisco. A smash 1987 Broadway hit, the play is directed by Bay Area actress/director, Michael Haven of Richmond and is set to run April 30-May 24, 2009.

Written by one of America's pre-eminent dramatists (*Master Class, Kiss of the Spider Woman, The Full Monty*) *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* is the hard-hitting, but ultimately redeeming romance of a waitress and a short-order cook, both on the cusp of middle age, both facing a lifetime of solitude in an anonymous purgatory called New York City.

Author McNally brings Frankie and Johnny together through a sort of kismet, a cosmic kinship forged through two lives of hardship that coincide at certain key points. The only thing holding them together is Johnny's unshakable belief that together they can build something greater. Sometimes touching, sometimes hilarious, they banter and spar their way through an evening of what may either turn out to be just another one-night stand...or the happily-ever-after ending both desperately long for, but are afraid to believe could really exist.

About the performers

Ben Ortega (Johnny) studied acting at UCLA and privately with Lisa Chess. Appearing steadily on Bay Area stages and beyond since 1996, Ortega 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*.

“*Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* is a beautifully written play with real-life situations, humor and passion, romance and tears,” says Ortega, who has wanted to do the part of Johnny since falling in love with the script back in 2001. “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.”

Cheryl Smith is a San Francisco-based actress who works in theater, film, commercials, industrials and print. She was one of eleven actors chosen by Terrance McNally when he wrote *Crucifixion* in 2005. Cheryl 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; the EXIT Theatre, Last Planet Theatre, and the New Conservatory Theatre, where she received the Dean Goodman Choice Award for her role in *Kilt*. Cheryl 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. She holds a degree in Music Therapy and has travelled to 45 countries.

About the director

Frankie and Johnny at the Clair de Lune marks actress/director Michael Haven’s directorial return to San Francisco. A well-known East Bay presence, Haven just finished directing *Witness for the Prosecution* for CCCT in El Cerrito after returning from Colorado Springs where she directed *Later Life*, *Inventing Van Gogh* and *Goodbye Charlie*. Some of Haven’s other favorite past projects include *How the Other Half Loves*,

The Three Musketeers, Cinderella Waltz and Brilliant Traces. Haven was nominated for a Shellie Award for her direction of *Comedy of Errors* for Role Players Ensemble, and nominated for a Solano County Arty Award for her direction of *When Shakespeare's Ladies Meet* for Solano Rep.

Michael Haven first met Ben Ortega when she cast him in *Moon Over Buffalo* at the Altarena Playhouse in 2000. She went on to cast and direct Ortega in four more shows and also appeared on stage with him in *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* at Masquers Playhouse in Richmond. “I have the utmost respect for Michael as a person and trust her completely as a director,” says Ortega. “I feel we work well together because we really understand one another's visions.”

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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