

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Bill and Ted's Existentialist Adventure

David Sheward · Monday, October 6th, 2025

The biggest box-office hit of the new, startlingly sparse Broadway fall season is, surprisingly, a revival of *Waiting for Godot*, Samuel Beckett's classic comedy-drama of existential despair. Well, maybe, it shouldn't be such a surprise since the production marks the reunion of Keanu Reeves and Alex Winter, co-stars of three popular *Bill & Ted* film comedies, and the Broadway debut of Reeves (Winter appeared as a child actor in *The King and I* and *Peter Pan*). In addition, this weighty work on the question of man's purpose in the universe has been marketed as a *Seinfeld*-like comedy about nothing, and the director is white-hot Jamie Lloyd whose *Sunset Boulevard*, *Romeo & Juliet*, and *A Doll's House* have been innovative and controversial.



Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves in *Waiting for Godot*.

Credit: Andy Henderson

Is this *Godot* worth the wait and the hype? It depends on your expectations. If you want to see two of your favorite film stars recreating their goofy screen antics, you may be disappointed. If you are familiar with Beckett's text and are anticipating a deep examination of why we are here with some

slapstick thrown in, you will be somewhat satisfied. Lloyd's production is clever and well-paced, mounting the challenges of Beckett's difficult script, wherein, yes, very little happens. But his two leads Reeves and Winter fail to fully flesh out the iconic tramps Estragon and Vladimir who seek to find meaning in the futile task of waiting for the enigmatic Godot. Brandon J. Dirden as the pompous wayfarer Pozzo who briefly interrupts their vigil, is much more vibrant, so much so that this revival would be better named *Waiting for Pozzo*.



Alex Winter, Michael Patrick Thornton, Brandon J. Dirden, and Keanu Reeves in *Waiting for Godot*.  
Credit: Andy Henderson

Reeves and Winter come across as film actors not used to the stage, underplaying their intentions and failing to convince that their characters' bond is essential to their survival. Estragon and Vladimir are symbols of mankind, caught in a desolate no-man's land (represented by set designer Sutra Gilmour's enormous wooden tunnel receding into nowhere), and seeking rescue from a savior (Godot) who never appears. They pass the time with desperate jokes, exchanging of philosophy, and whatever distractions come along (Pozzo and his manservant Lucky—more on them later). They are all each other has and that connection is vital to the play. But the two stars deliver little subtext and do not convince us they need each other. They do summon up a desperately pathetic comic energy in the second act as they slide down the sides of Gilmour's tunnel and Reeves bursts with anguished frustration after Winter informs him for the umpteenth time they can't leave because they are waiting for Godot. Winter also skillfully portrays Vladimir's devastating realization that the title character is not coming.

While the two headliners seem to be playing for the camera, Dirden as Pozzo is larger than life, filling the Hudson Theater, but his theatricality is rooted in character. Pozzo is a self-important bully, swaggering around the desert setting and dominating a desolated landscape. When he returns in the second act, he is mysteriously blind, but still retains a kernel of the pride and rage that previously drove him. Dirden captures Pozzo's comic pomposity and steals the show when he's on stage.



Alex Winter and Keanu Reeves in *Waiting for Godot*.

Credit: Andy Henderson

As for Lloyd's staging, he and his design team make interesting choices. Gilmour's set suggests the vast emptiness of Beckett's view of mankind and Jon Clark's ghostly lighting creates stunningly beautiful effects, particularly as night falls and the two tramps are cast in eerie silhouette. I'm not sure if I agree with all of Lloyd's decisions but at least they make a statement. (Beckett probably would not have approved of this production. He once sued the director and producers of an American Repertory Theater production of his *Endgame* for not adhering strictly to his stage directions and descriptions of the set.) Almost all props are mimed. Lucky, Pozzo's beast of burden who has a lengthy nonsensical monologue to demonstrate his ability to "think," is here played by Michael Patrick Thornton, an actor in a wheelchair. This reverses the usual dynamic with Pozzo pushing Lucky in his chair rather than driving him like a pack mule. This leads to some strange stage business. Lucky's dance is now a few funny arm gestures imitating Bob Fosse's signature choreography. Thornton plays Lucky as an intelligent jester, playing directly to the audience, instead of the usual incoherent, feral madman.

The boy messenger (played by Zaynn Arora at the performance attended) who arrives at the end of each act to announce that Godot is not coming is dressed by designer Gilmour in pristine white contemporary street wear whereas the other four actors are clad in rags. Perhaps this is Lloyd saying the boy is an angel and Godot is an unseen, an unknowable deity? He does have the actors pronounce the name GOD-o rather than the usual Go-DO. Many have interpreted Godot as God, but Beckett dismissed this claim, stating if he meant that he would have called the character God.

Despite the shortcomings of the leads' muted performances and some questionable directorial choices, this *Godot* does have a comic energy and conveys a hint of Beckett's bleak vision of humanity's eternal quandary in seeking meaning where none seems to exist. It's a perfectly passable production, but does not approach stronger ones I've seen such as previous Broadway versions starring Nathan Lane and Bill Irwin in 2009 and Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen in

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2013.

Sept. 28—Jan. 4, 2026. Hudson Theater, 141 W. 44th St., NYC. Running time: two hours and 20 mins. including intermission. [thehudsononbroadway.com](http://thehudsononbroadway.com).

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