

## *Waiting for Lefty*

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*Waiting For Lefty*, Montana Rep Missoula's opening production, has a special resonance for Greg Johnson, artistic director of Montana Repertory Theatre.

The play, written by Clifford Odets of The Group Theatre, conjures for Greg memories of his roots in the professional theatre. While studying for his master's degree at NYU in the 1970s, Greg had the privilege of working with Peter Kass, master teacher of acting. Kass was a member of The Group Theatre, one of the seminal theatre companies created in the 1930s that revolutionized the role of theatre in America. Formerly the home of light entertainment, Broadway had been ready for a change. The Group Theatre, along with The Theatre Guild, Orson Wells' The Mercury Theatre, and Eugene O'Neill, created that change, and American theatre developed a social consciousness. While never losing sight of its entertainment quotient, American theatre became relevant to the time, reflecting the hopes and dreams of Americans of all colors, creeds, and socio-economic strata. The Group Theatre, led by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford, led the way in forging this new theatre. More often than not, Clifford Odets was their voice. During those fervent years, Odets' assistant was Peter Kass. Kass went on to a distinguished career in film and on Broadway, and he later helped found the actor training program at NYU. Greg was privileged to be in one of the program's early classes. He worked with Kass for three intense years, learning most of what he knows about acting and directing. Based on his experiences at NYU, Greg formed a world view centered on activist theatre—theatre that reflects the needs and desires of the community.

Because of Peter Kass, Greg is one degree separated from Clifford Odets. For the past thirty years that activist spirit, transferred from Odets via Kass, has informed everything Greg has done, achieved, and taught in the theatre. The idea that theatre is immediate, dangerous, fervent, relevant, and glorious all came from those years when NYU was the hotbed of progressive thought in theatre. As much as possible Greg has worked to perpetuate the tradition of The Group Theatre during his past three decades as actor, director, and teacher.

MRM is excited and proud to present our first Odets production. None could be more pertinent than *Waiting for Lefty*, a play whose raw, transformative power helped put Odets and The Group Theatre on the map.

Our production is dedicated to the memory of Peter Kass.