



# GUTHRIE THEATER

## **Audio Description Notes for *On Beckett***

### **WELCOME**

Welcome to the Guthrie Theater's presentation of *On Beckett*, conceived and performed by Bill Irwin. *On Beckett* is an Irish Repertory Theatre production produced by Octopus Theatricals.

My name is Alyssa Melby, and I will be your audio describer for this performance, which is approximately 90 minutes with no intermission.

The creative team for this production includes:

- Scenic Designer: Charlie Corcoran
- Costume Consultant: Martha Hally
- Lighting Designer: Michael Gottlieb
- Sound Designer: M. Florian Staab
- Tour Production Manager: Luner Eclipse Productions
- Stage Manager: Lisa McGinn
- Tour Lighting Supervisor: Avery Reagan
- Tour Audio Supervisor: Alex Brock

### **SYNOPSIS**

In *On Beckett*, Bill Irwin combines his renowned skill as a master clown and dramatic actor to explore a performer's relationship to the works of Samuel Beckett, incorporating passages from the Irish author and playwright's most renowned works and pairing them with his own commentary and reflections. Irwin recites selections from several of Beckett's novels and plays, including *Texts for Nothing*, *The Unnamable*, *Waiting for Godot* and *Watt*.

Throughout the one-act, one-man show, Irwin utilizes a variety of physical postures, oversized props, lighting arrangements and wardrobe changes to support his performance. For some onstage moments, Irwin is lit so that his face or body is the only visible feature on the dark stage. For others, Irwin dons baggy pants — multiple pairs! — a red nose and comedically large shoes to perform and illuminate the themes of Beckett's work with a clownish demeanor.

### **STAGING**

The set is minimalist and stark. Three floor-to-ceiling black masking curtains line each side of the stage from front to back, spaced 8 feet apart. The curtains angle progressively inward toward a large white scrim on which a few projections will be shown. In the middle of the stage on the left is an all-black wooden podium. To the right of the podium is a black rectangular prism bench.



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## CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

**Bill Irwin** plays both himself and all the characters portrayed in Beckett's passages. He wears an ivory-toned cotton dress shirt open at the neck paired with black pants, a black tuxedo jacket and black leather loafers.

At various moments in the show, Irwin puts on additional clothing items, including baggy gray pants with suspenders, large black clown shoes, black rimmed glasses, a red bow tie, a straw hat and a black bowler hat. Occasionally, props are used in the performance segments, including a cane, suitcase, red nose and piece of rope.

The only thing to denote a change from the "lecture" or "memoir" portions to the "performance" pieces are shifts in lighting, sound and small costume adjustments. The order of the eight performance pieces, with character names, costume descriptions and scene descriptions, are as follows:

1. *Texts for Nothing 1*: In this prose piece with an unnamed character, Irwin dons a vintage black bowler hat and stands a little off-kilter with his left knee cocked inward and left shoulder sloped downward.
2. *The Unnamable*: This is likely Beckett's most famous prose piece with an unnamed character. Irwin moves the podium closer to the bench and pulls out a microphone from the podium. He sits on the bench and holds the mic with a single spotlight illuminating him from above.
3. *Watt*: In this early novel of Beckett's written in English, Irwin transforms into yet another unnamed character by buttoning up his collar and donning the bowler hat again. He is illuminated solely by the front, creating a looming shadow on the back wall.
4. *Texts for Nothing 9*: Here Irwin embodies another unnamed character. He takes off his suit jacket but adds a red silk bow tie and an even fancier black bowler hat. He stands at the podium.
5. *Waiting for Godot*: In this segment, Irwin delves further into the clown aspects of Beckett's most famous play, *Waiting for Godot*. He pulls on oversized gray baggy pants that are held up by suspenders, as well as an oversized tuxedo coat that is at least two sizes too big, and employs classic clown props, including a suitcase, cane, red nose and rope. Instead of performing larger monologues followed by commentary, he quickly moves back and forth between performing smaller bits — a sentence or two — as various characters in *Waiting for Godot* and offering insight about the play. He concludes with a speech by the character Vladimir at the end of the play. The background of the stage is awash in blue with sidelights beaming toward center stage.



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## CAST, CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES (continued)

6. Reflections on Beckett's language: This segment shows us the literal push and pull of Beckett's words on Irwin. Wearing white shoe covers and a straw hat, he equates the language of Beckett to vaudeville while round old-fashioned lightbulbs line the front of the stage.
7. *Waiting for Godot*: In this excerpt from Act One of *Waiting for Godot*, Irwin takes on the character of Lucky by wearing black and gray striped socks, gigantic gray twill "hoop" pants held up by suspenders, black rimmed glasses and oversized black clown shoes with exaggerated round toes.
8. *Texts for Nothing 11*: In the final performance passage, Irwin embodies another unnamed character by taking off the hoop pants, clown shoes, glasses and hat. He sits on a small black suitcase in front of the podium as a single spotlight shines from the front.

## THINGS TO KNOW

- Irwin draws on his experience as an actor and a clown to engage the audience in some of Beckett's most popular works, including *Waiting for Godot*.
- *New York Magazine* called Irwin's performance "utterly delightful," and the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that "a better guide to playing Beckett would be hard to find."
- Audiences may recognize Irwin as Mr. Noodle from "Elmo's World" and Lou Lou Who from the 2000 film adaptation of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.