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STRIKE! The School of Theatre and Dance presents the classic American labor play *Waiting for Lefty*

By Ashleigh Feger September 16, 2021



Waiting for Lefty, by Clifford Odets will be presented September 23-25 at 7:30 p.m. and September 25-26 at 2 p.m. in the Center for the Performing Arts Theatre.

Illinois State University School of Theatre and Dance is happy to present the first in-person production in 18 months. *Waiting for Lefty*, by Clifford Odets will be presented September 23-25 at 7:30 p.m. and September 25-26 at 2 p.m. in the Center for the Performing Arts Theatre.

Odets' play made an impact on audiences when it first appeared on the stage at the Group Theatre in 1935. *Waiting for Lefty* is the story of a meeting of a New York cab drivers' union on the verge of a strike. The union's corrupt leader, Harry Fatt, does everything he can to discourage it, and the mysterious absence of a left-leaning advocate, Lefty Costello, does not bode well for the would-be strikers.

Waiting for Lefty will captivate audiences with its story of a scary and depressing reality. After hearing the heart-wrenching tales of four hard-working cab drivers—each story dramatized before the eyes of the audience before transitioning seamlessly back into the union meeting—the feisty and sarcastic Agate Keller takes the stage and demands immediate action. What will happen when word comes about Lefty's fate?



Sanhawich Meateanuwat

When the play premiered, Americans were experiencing the effects of the Great Depression in varying degrees. For millions, life had significantly changed. Men and women alike, suddenly had to adapt to new ways of living and found themselves emotionally, physically, and financially exhausted. When unemployment rates were at their peak, nearly one-third of New York city's population was left without work, and many who could keep their jobs had to accept drastic pay cuts. While the Great Depression was nearly a

century ago, director Sanhawich Meateanuwat feels that the audience will relate to the performance due to the current state of America. "I believe there's something in this society, American society, that needs to be fixed. We still see people coming out to strike and speak up for their lives (for example, Black Lives Matter, Anti-Asian Hate, and workers' strikes throughout the country). I hope to raise the awareness that protesting is still happening all over the world. People still need to work together as world citizens to make this world a place for everybody to live in, not for just some groups of people."

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic took a toll on the theatre community around the globe. Locally, the School of Theatre and Dance made choices similar to many others: live performances via Zoom and some streaming performances. Theatre artists and audience members alike missed the human interaction, the feeling of the first in-person table read, and the energy actors feel when they hear the audience reacting to a scene. When asked about directing the School of Theatre and Dance's first in-person mainstage production of the year, Meateanuwat described it as heartwarming:

"I feel honored to be directing the first production of the fall season, and I am excited to see the audience and their reactions to the performance." Zoom has become a way of life for many people but Meateanuwat explains, "There is no comparison to doing a show through a visual media to doing a show live on stage. In-person, the actors feed off each other and the characters and emotions are highlighted in a unique way. With Zoom, we can only see faces with limited body chemistry, and you can lose so much of the story." Even with live performances, actors will still be masked. Meateanuwat does not feel that performances will be hindered by this because "Theatre is constantly changing. We adapt and move forward with the obstacles given and find inspiration. If masks are the condition that will allow us to go back to live theatre, then we will work with it."

He also hopes that audiences will leave the production with a sense of empathy for everyone, whether they are in your own backyard or in other countries of the world. Using Clifford Odet's words from *Waiting for Lefty*—"To really begin believing in something? Not to say, 'What a world!', but to say 'Change the world!'"

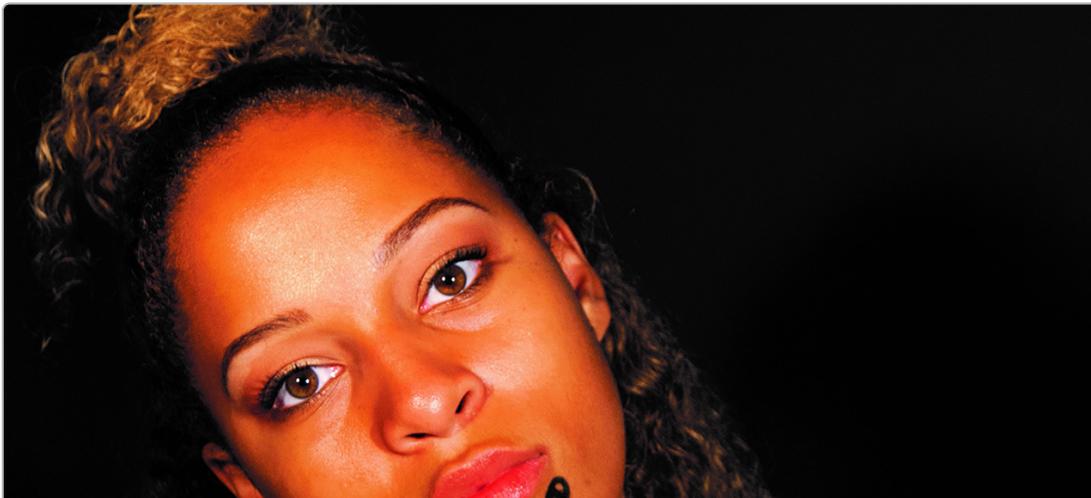
Tickets for *Waiting for Lefty* can be purchased in person at the Center for Performing Arts Box Office Monday-Friday, 11 a.m.-5 p.m., or online through [Ticketmaster](#). Masks will be required for the duration of the performance.



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