

Sideways to hit the boards

10 May 2012 by Jancis Robinson

A week today a stage version of Rex Pickett's story of a pair of California buddies bonding, or not, while discovering Pinot Noir in the Central Coast opens at the Ruskin Group Theatre in Santa Monica, California. It will run Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm until 22 July.

[Sideways the movie](#) was of course a huge hit, and was almost single handedly responsible for the turning of American consumer tide from Merlot to Pinot Noir. This stage version came about because Jason Matthews, wine enthusiast and theatre producer, met novelist Rex Pickett at a Pinot event last January. They hit it off and decided to, according to Matthews, 'go on a crazy adventure: turning his original novel *Sideways* into a stage play. The world knows the story from the movie, but the play is the original vision. How Miles and Jack were always meant to be seen. And we mention Jancis in the show!'

Hence my interest, needless to say. If any Californians get to see this production, do let us know about it.

Below is the blurb. Below that, how to book.

REX PICKETT (Playwright) is the author of the novel *Sideways* and its sequel *Vertical*. He has written and directed two feature films -- *California Without End*, *From Hollywood to Deadwood* – and numerous screenplays. In 2000 the film of his short script, *My Mother Dreams the Satan's Disciples in New York* (directed by Barbara Schock), won the Academy Award for Best Live Action Short. In 2004, the Alexander Payne-directed movie *Sideways*, based upon Rex's novel, was released to worldwide critical acclaim, winning over 350 awards from various critics and awards organizations, including 5 New York Film Critics Circle awards, 5 L.A. Film Critics awards, 6 Indie Spirit Awards, 2 Golden Globes, and the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay. It is enshrined with a plaque on the wall of the Writers Guild of America Theater as one of the 101 Greatest Screenplays in the history of motion pictures. Rex is currently writing a pilot for HBO and a script for Barbara Schock called *On Tour with Max*. 'I hate the dispiriting nature of development - ie screenwriting, but the stage is a fresh vehicle for audiences to experience the original story. This team at the Ruskin were so passionate about theater, so certain that "Sideways" based on my novel -- not the film -- would lend itself to the stage, that this time the development process became truly rewarding.'

AMELIA MULKEY (Director) is a director in theater and film. She cut her teeth in filmmaking by working as a producing director's assistant for several television shows including *Saving Grace*, *Army Wives*, and *Lie to Me*. Since then, Amelia has produced and directed several short films including *Unicorn Girl*, which screened at several festivals last year. She graduated Cum Laude with a degree in Art History and Theatre from Loyola Marymount University. Amelia has since worked on several stage productions at San Francisco's New Conservatory Theatre, and has been tapped numerous times to direct CAFÉ PLAYS, the popular Ruskin Group Theatre event which sells out monthly. Other stage credits include *When the Speak of Rita*, *Bash*, *The Laramie Project*, *Denty Crisis*, and *Lend Me a Tenor*. Most recently, Amelia directed a critically acclaimed production of Arthur Miller's *A Memory of Two Mondays* at Ruskin Group Theatre, which received a Backstage West Critic's Choice, an Ovation Recommendation, and 6 nominations including 'Best Director' from The LA Stage Alliance.

RUSKIN GROUP THEATRE has been making an impact on the Los Angeles theatre scene with an eclectic mix of thought-provoking plays, garnering numerous 'recommendations' from local critics. Ruskin's Fostering Imagination program sponsors foster kids in theatre & film classes that produce several original shows each year. The CAFÉ PLAYS, created by RGT are produced monthly and are the culmination of writers, actors, and directors who meet at 9am, where they are given a theme. They then write, produce, and perform a show by 7pm the same day. When celebrating their 8th anniversary, RGT supporters Ed Asner, Dylan McDermott, Chris Mulkey, Olivia d'Abo, and other industry celebrities joined to produce the Best of Café Plays (both shows sold out within hours). Anthony Hopkins and Anthony Franciosa were some of the first teachers at Ruskin School of Theatre.

JOHN RUSKIN (Artistic Director) helmed the critically acclaimed production of *Strange Snow* at RGT. His years of experience include studies at the Yale School of Drama, British American Drama Academy in Oxford, England, and the University of Colorado in Boulder. In New York, Ruskin joined the acting faculty of the Neighborhood Playhouse at the request of Sanford Meisner (who he then apprenticed with) before moving to Los Angeles where he founded his own school of acting and a professional theatre company. The company provides outreach programs to people in need with their 'Healing Through the Arts' project.

MICHAEL MYERS (Producer/Managing Director) has produced more than 65 projects since 2002. He recently directed the world premiere of *Digging Up Dad* and the critically acclaimed production of *Faithful* at RGT. Mike is a co-creator of the Ruskin Group Theatre's well attended CAFÉ PLAYS, the monthly offering of one-acts that are done in 10 ½ hours from conception to staging. He serves as vice-chair of the Santa Monica Arts Commission.

MIKE REILLY (Producer/Production Manager) has a long history as a director/producer at the Ruskin. Directorial credits include *The Lonesome West*, *Cowboy Mouth*, *Lobby Hero*, and *Brilliant Traces*. Mike has over 20 years of experience as a producer, director and teacher, and he has been an integral part of the Ruskin Group Theatre's producing team. Recently, he co-produced the Ruskin hit shows *Faithful*, and the world premiere of *Jesse Boy*.

JASON MATTHEWS (Producer) is currently the inaugural Writer-in-Residence at the Ruskin Group Theatre. His debut full-length comedy *Four Night Stand* was produced in Spring 2010. Jason's work has been produced more than 50 times nationwide, in playwriting festivals and readings, and exclusive one-act productions. An aspiring wine enthusiast, Jason met Rex at a Pinot Tasting, where they first hatched the crazy idea of adapting *Sideways* for the stage.

OUR ENSEMBLE INCLUDES:

JONATHAN BRAY (Jack) has appeared with Frank Langella in *The Father* and with Nathan Lane and Sarah Jessica Parker for The Roundabout Theatre's benefit performance of *Once In A Lifetime*. Most recently he appeared as The Narrator in Craig Wright's *The Pavilion* and as Valene in *The Lonesome West*. TV credits include episodes of ABC's *Man Up* and Showtime's new comedy *House of Lies*. Jonathan stars in *The Walkaround*, a mockumentary about auto shows, set to premiere at the Indie Spirit Film Festival in 2012.

JOHN COLELLA (Miles) is a 2012 Indie Soap Award Winner - Best Actor in a Comedy for his Web Series, *Vampire Mob*. Film credits include: *Hotel Noir*, *Girl Walks Into a Bar* (1st Major Motion Picture made exclusively with and for YouTube), *The Chicago 8*, and *The Swear Police* (LA Comedy Shorts Film Festival winner). He has also been seen on *Criminal Minds*, *Desperate Housewives*, *CSI: NY*, *American Dreams*, *Will & Grace*, *The West Wing*, and *NYPD Blue*. Theatre credits include: *Cyrano* in *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Italian American Reconciliation*, *Faithful*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (abridged), and *Lobby Hero*.

JULIA McILVAINE (Maya) last appeared at the Ruskin in *A Memory of Two Mondays*, and was seen as Duenna in their production of *Cyrano*. In New York, Julia appeared in *Henry VIII* at the Public Theatre's NYSF, *Pride's Crossing* at Lincoln Center, and Marsha Norman's *Trudy Blue* at the Manhattan Theatre Company. For CBS, ABC and Fox, she has appeared in four television pilots, and movies for Hallmark Hall of Fame. Julia is a graduate of the USC School of Theatre.

CLOE KROMWELL (Terra) was seen as Roxanne in *Cyrano* and in the role of Teresa in John Patrick Shanley's *Italian American Reconciliation*, both produced at the Ruskin. Her film credits include the shorts *Goodbye, Nice to Meet You*, *Dadlands*, and the feature film *Moustache*.

HAMILTON MATTHEWS (Brad-The Boar Hunter) was last seen at the Ruskin in Arthur Miller's *A Memory of Two Mondays*. He is an accomplished singer and studied vocal performance at the Westminster Choir College in Princeton, NJ. He recently finished work in a production of *Dark Side of the Moon* with the Next Stage Theatre.

WHAT: SIDEWAYS THE PLAY

Written by: Rex Pickett

Produced by: John Ruskin, Michael Myers, Mike Reilly, Jason Matthews

Directed by: Amelia Mulkey

Presented by: Ruskin Group Theatre

WHERE:

Ruskin Group Theatre, 3000 Airport Road, Santa Monica, CA 90405
(ample free parking)

HOW:

For reservations call (310) 397-3244 or <http://www.ruskingrouptheatre.com>

Follow the Ruskin Group Theatre on Twitter @RuskinGroupThtr, and like us on Facebook.com/RuskinGroupTheatre. For news, behind the scenes info and ticket deals please follow *Sideways the Play* on Twitter @SidewaysthePlay.

WHEN:

Opening 18 May 2012

Running: Fridays and Saturdays at 8 pm, and Sundays at 2 pm

Closing performance: 22 July 22 2012

HOW MUCH:

\$25

Description: Rex Pickett has adapted the play from his own novel, the story of two friends - Miles and Jack - and their journey across the Santa Ynez wine country, on one last blowout trip before Jack gets married. Miles and Jack must face their uncertain futures, just as soon as they figure out how to survive their chaotic present.