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Play Explores Prostate Cancer with Laughs



*Ed Asner stars in *A Man and His Prostate* at the Bucks County Playhouse March 30 to April 1. | Photos via amanandhisprostate.com*

By Marissa Stern

It's not a funny topic on the surface, but the play *A Man and His Prostate* is a "gag riot."

That's according to the actor playing the titular "Man" in the production, Ed Asner. Asner, a seven-time Emmy winner and prolific actor, started working on the play with its writer, Edwin "Ed." Weinberger, a year and a half ago. But the pair's relationship goes back way further than that: Weinberger, a Philly native and creator of *Taxi*, was a writer and producer on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* — on which, of course, Asner starred as Lou Grant.

The two also collaborated on the recent publication of a book, *The Grouchy Historian: An Old-Time Lefty Defends Our Constitution Against Right-Wing Hypocrites and Nutjobs*.

The one-man show recounts Weinberger's real experience vacationing in Italy and suddenly finding himself spending a week in a Florence hospital, undergoing preparation for prostate cancer surgery.

And while it covers uncomfortable topics, the subject matter is important, educational and, most of all, funny.

Per Weinberger — who's garnered many accolades of his own such as three Golden Globes and nine Emmy Awards — on the theater's website, Asner "was born to play this role of an old codger who won't take any of life's injustices sitting down."

"Once you begin talking about private parts, I guess the safest procedure is to create a comedy," said Asner by phone ahead of the four local performances, which run [March 30 through April 1 at Bucks County Playhouse](#).

But aside from the laughs *A Man and His Prostate* brings, for him, the educational component is key. About one in seven men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer during his lifetime, according to the American Cancer Society. It is the second leading cause of cancer death in American men, behind lung cancer.

"It's a pretty prevalent condition," Asner said, "and the information [the play] spreads while at the same being a gag riot is a remarkable achievement for Ed. Weinberger.

"It's very little talked about and should be advertised a lot more," he added of prostate cancer. "Our job is entertaining and getting the information out there, and I think we succeed very well at both."

He was struck that despite the subject matter, some of the organizations they approached about the play when they first began writing it "never picked up the cudgel."

"It's interesting to me that [it's] such a successful play both in information and humor, and people were afraid to touch it," he said.

However, just a few days before the Philly show, he will perform the play in Rochester, Minn., in performances sponsored by the Department of Urology of the Mayo Clinic.

The audience's enjoyment of the play gives him great satisfaction, as he's performed it across the country. He hopes it gives those who attend "an appreciation of their health and a desire to verify it further."

That it's a one-man show provides some key differences for the actor from other productions he's been in. "I only need one suitcase," he quipped.

Plus, he gets all the limelight as he takes the stage.

"I love myself so much that I'm so delighted that nobody's there with me," he joked. "I'm greedy, I don't like to share."

As the play is the story of Weinberger's real experience, there are a few Jewish references and jokes peppered throughout the play — including a Jewish reference in regard to a “succession of curious farts” his character has at one point, though he argued that has more, ahem, wide spraying appeal.

“That’s not Jewish, that’s universal. Farting is a universal occurrence,” he said.

Flatulent humor aside, he is particularly looking forward to performing at the Bucks County Playhouse — a theater he visited after he moved to New York in the 1950s.

“That’s the place where actors worked, so I wanted to check it out and I certainly liked what I saw down there but I never got a chance to perform there,” he said. “So finally many years later, I finally get to come back.”