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## Entertainment & Life

### Andy Vineberg: Ed Asner mines humor from serious subject in one-man show at Bucks County Playhouse



Ed Asner stars in "A Man and his Prostate" next weekend at the Bucks County Playhouse. "I think I'm perfect for the show," Asner says of his starring role in "A Man and his Prostate."

The perennially busy actor stars in "A Man and his Prostate," a comedy about a friend's near-death experience.

Ed Asner isn't quite as busy these days as the Internet Movie Data Base suggests he is. That would be impossible.

Asner's IMBb page lists 46 different film and TV projects since the start of 2016.

"A lot of that is (bull), though," the acting legend said in a phone conversation from his home in Southern California. "I can't tell which ones are invalid or dormant, but they were put out there for a reason — I was involved at one time or another. And I am busy, thank God."

Indeed. At 88, Asner is showing no signs of slowing down and is still having a blast making people laugh, especially in a one-man stage show he's been doing the last couple of years in which he spends much of the time talking about his prostate.

Actually, somebody else's prostate.

"A Man and his Prostate," onstage for four performances next weekend at the Bucks County Playhouse in New Hope, is the creation of Philly native Ed Weinberger, a nine-time-E Emmy-winning writer and producer whose eye-popping résumé includes "The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson," "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" and "Taxi."

Weinberger wrote the play based on a real-life experience, in which he was rushed to the hospital for prostate cancer surgery while vacationing in Italy.

If you think that sounds like a depressing subject for a play, you're wrong, Asner insists.

"It's so provocative, it's witty, and the audience is fun, too," he said. "I should be paying money to be doing the show."

Weinberger and Asner go back to their days on "Mary Tyler Moore," in which Asner famously played TV news producer Lou Grant. They also wrote a book together last year, "The Grouchy Historian."

When it was time to cast the part, Weinberger had one man in mind.

"Asner was born to play this role of an old codger who won't take any of life's injustices sitting down, as he prepares himself for surgery," he writes in the show's promotional material.

Asner doesn't disagree.

"I think I'm perfect for the show," he said. "And I think that he knew how to establish the right balance of bitching and humor. He spares nothing about his concerns about whether he's gonna live or die, and he uses it to gain as much sympathy as he can."

Despite the humor, Asner said the show doesn't shy away from the seriousness of a health issue that is the most common cancer among men, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"With all the laughter, it does impart important lessons we should abide by and observe," he said. "A salient point in my presentation is that every 16 minutes, a man dies of prostate cancer in the United States. If that ain't enough to make you wake up, then you're dead."

Asner certainly doesn't need to be taking on new roles at this point. With seven Emmys (the most by any male performer), an iconic character that worked in two different TV genres (after "Mary Tyler Moore," he starred in the hour-long drama "Lou Grant," in which he became a newspaper editor) and a new generation of fans thanks to family favorites "Elf" and "Up," his place in entertainment lore is secure.

But Asner, who toured in the one-man show "FDR" this decade, is still looking to challenge himself. He's writing his autobiography, has an upcoming guest appearance in the Canadian TV series "Forgive Me" (for which he previously won a Canadian Screen Award) and is set to begin work in June on "Tiger

Within," a feature film about a Holocaust survivor who befriends a homeless teen. And he's not ruling out future stage work.

"Well, if I've exhausted the prostate audience, yeah," he said. "Anything to stay busy. It's my only reason for existence. I have no other purpose."

He's even hoping to become as trendy as 96-year-old Betty White, one of his "Mary Tyler Moore" co-stars, who, for a while, was everywhere you looked on TV.

"I see that she kind of house-bound right now," he said. "I'm going to use this time to catch up to her." (Judging by IMDb, he's already well past her, at least in terms of total roles).

Asner, who's as entertaining in conversation as he is onscreen, had plenty of other things to say about his life and career:

**On playing Lou Grant:** "I was a high school journalist and one day my teacher who I loved very much came by and asked if I was thinking of journalism as a career. I said, yeah. He said, 'I wouldn't, you can't make a living.' So I decided to become an overnight sensation as an actor. It was kismet that when I did succeed as a character in television, it involved journalism."

**On whether he knew how special "Mary Tyler Moore" would become:** "All I knew was the scripts were the best I'd come across, and I couldn't wait to do them each week. I expressed this to Gavin (MacLeod) and Ted (Knight), it didn't matter if we got canceled or not, we had the chance to do these gorgeous scripts."

**On how his therapist helped him make the transition from comedy to drama in "Lou Grant":** "I asked my shrink what she thought and she said, 'Why do you grimace?' I realized we had certain laugh lines in the hour show but we couldn't laugh ourselves, and I adopted this grimace every time I did a laugh line. You'd think I had one of those tic diseases. I slapped myself silly and corrected myself. It was the best lesson I got from my shrink."

**On people who are surprised he's still acting:** "I take great glee in jiggling around in front of them that I am alive. Not only that, I'm eager to show them how deft and capable I am now, that's the trick."

**On people who are on the fence about seeing "A Man and his Prostate":** "If they're on the fence about it, then they're stupid. It's wonderful entertainment that features humor and imparts a very important lesson for men over 40."