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Harold Pinter's Other Places (Staged Reading)

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Harold Pinter's Other Places (Staged Reading)

A Celebration of Harold Pinter with Julian Sands

Harold Pinter is a legend of the contemporary theatre. The British playwright won the Nobel Prize for literature. There's an international society for the exploration of his work. His *New York Times* obituary called Pinter "the most influential and imitated dramatist of his generation."

Pinter died of cancer in 2008 at age 78. The cancer was already taking its toll by 2005, when Pinter was awarded the Nobel Prize, not only for his writing but also his humanitarianism and activism, and the writer gave his Nobel lecture by recorded video from his wheelchair.

Also that year, Pinter – who got his start in theatre as an actor – was asked to perform a recital of his poetry for charity, but, because of the effects of esophageal cancer, he felt his voice was not strong enough. Enter British actor of stage, screen and television Julian Sands. Pinter asked Sands to recite the poems under the writer's tutelage.

The recital went well, Sands says, and after Pinter's death in 2008, Sands – with the blessing of Pinter's wife, Lady Antonia Fraser – performed the poetry and some remembrances as a memorial in Los Angeles.

Cue a third titan of the stage and screen, John Malkovich, who worked with Sands to create the one-man show *A Celebration of Harold Pinter*, in which Sands intermingles Pinter's short poems – romantic, personal and political – with commentary from Pinter's colleagues and critics, observations by the playwright's widow and anecdotes of Sands' own. Since performing *A Celebration* at the 2011 Edinburgh Festival, Sands has been touring the show – celebrating Pinter's poetry and passion in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Mexico City, London, Paris, Budapest and other venues around the world.

On Friday, April 21, Sands will bring his one-man show, *A Celebration of Harold Pinter*, to East Tennessee State University at 7:30 p.m. in ETSU's Martha Street Culp Auditorium, sponsored by Mary B. Martin School of the Arts at ETSU. A Q&A with Sands will follow the show.

"Appearing on a bare stage in a black suit and an open-collared white shirt, Sands is poised, serious and striking ..." *Variety* says. "His performance is taut, clean and actorly ... [and] captures the pugnacity, precision and a little of the dry humor of an exacting writer."

"If you read Harold Pinter's plays, and let's be clear: They're magnificent," Sands says on radio's Poet's Café, "but it's hard to have an idea of the personality of the author. The author is an opaque presence, but in the poetry Harold reveals his personal feelings, his political views, his thoughts, his humanity, his tremendous love, his passions ... very openly, without any filtration. [*A Celebration* is] an incredible insight into the powerhouse of intellect and passion that this remarkable man contained."

Sands – known for his more than 100 films including *A Room With A View*, *Oceans 13* and *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* and TV roles in *24*, *Dexter*, *Smallville* and *Ghost Whisperer* – says his interest in Pinter goes back to his high school days when he studied *The Birthday Party*. Later, he starred in *Basements*, a TV adaptation of two Pinter plays *The Room* and *The Dumb Waiter*."

"Harold Pinter had been a sort of hero of mine even as a young student," Sands says in a TV interview. "I had always taken any opportunity to be in his plays ... [then] I had this extraordinary privilege of sessions with this maestro – the only actor he ever worked with on his poetry. It was so personal and intimate and so revealing of the romantic side of his life, the joy the love, the humanity."

The New York Times found *A Celebration* not only entertaining but also haunting. "When [Sands] reads Pinter's poems, as well as the odd prose piece, you feel the playwright's presence," writes reviewer Ben Brantley. "Or should I say Presence, with a capital P?"

Mary B. Martin School of the Arts Director Anita DeAngelis saw the one-man show not only as an opportunity to bring a world-class actor, embodying a theatre legend, to the ETSU campus, but also as a chance to engage ETSU's Division of Theatre & Dance and its students in the "celebration."

The collaboration result is that on Thursday, April 20, ETSU Patchwork Players will perform a staged reading of *Other Places – 3 Plays by Harold Pinter* in Studio 205 of Campus Center Building at 7:30 p.m. free of charge. The reading is under the direction of Theatre & Dance faculty member Melissa Shafer and advising of Department of Literature & Language Chair Dr. Katherine Weiss, acting as dramaturg.

"Anita contacted us to see if we would be interested in doing a Pinter piece," Shafer says. "We had already set our main stage schedule, but we were game to make it a sort of Pinter festival, and it was Dr. Weiss who suggested these three plays – *A Kind of Alaska*, *Victoria Station* and *Family Voices*."

The trio of very short one-acts were written for radio performance, Weiss says, so they are well-suited for a staged reading with actors seated with scripts, rather than full performance. Students from Patchwork Players are also directing the readings, Shafer says, under her oversight. "It will be minimal and low tech," Shafer says, "but since they are radio plays, it works well. And it's really a companion piece and warmup for the Julian Sands *Celebration* on Friday. The plays are not 'ha ha' funny, but they are full of Pinter's unique humor and wit and this is great experience for our students."

During the day Friday, April 21, Sands will do his own tutoring, with a theatre workshop for ETSU students, DeAngelis says. "These kinds of collaborations with campus departments are one of our privileges and part of the legacy of Jim and Mary B. Martin," DeAngelis says. "We love to connect our visiting artists with students and community whenever possible. That makes this visit by an actor of Julian Sands' stature something to celebrate in many ways."

Tickets for *A Celebration* are \$5 for students of all ages with ID, \$15 for seniors 60-plus, and \$20 for general admission. Group rates are available. Admission to *Other Places* is free, but donations will be accepted. The Pinter works contain mature language.

To purchase tickets online or for information about ETSU Mary B. Martin School of the Arts and its events, visit www.etsu.edu/martin_or or call 423-439-TKTS (8587).