

COVERSTORY

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'Ed Asner as FDR'

THE BROADWAY IN GREAT FALLS SERIES 2012 FINALE IS SUNDAY

By JAKE SORICH
Tribune Staff Writer

At age 83, seven-time Emmy winner Ed Asner still has a lot to say about national politics and the causes he believes in.

In his latest project, Asner embodies Franklin D. Roosevelt in a way he hopes makes people realize how toxic the current political landscape has become.

Asner told the Tribune that he hopes his current project inspires people to take action.

"That's what I'd really like to do, get people marching again," he said. "Too many people don't care about their country, and I think this country is off the mark. We need to re-establish human values."

"Ed Asner as FDR" matinee plays at the Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts theater Sunday at 3 p.m. and is the final Broadway in Great Falls series show of the season.

Asner, former Screen Actors Guild president and Emmy-winning actor for his role as Lou Grant, said he uses the role of FDR to remind people how a true leader got things done in a bygone era.

"In a way I'm essentially preaching to the choir because they already know what I'm about," he said. "But in a sense I'm reminding them of what Camelot was like at one time and what we should expect and demand of the first citizen who is representing us."

An outspoken liberal, Asner said he can't remember a time since FDR when a progressive president followed through with his beliefs without backing down.

"I've found most of our presidents to either be nonprogressive or they were progressive and they weren't active sufficiently, they were too laid back," he said. "They're always emphasizing the word 'compromise.' I would like to see a president who leads that battle (of progressiveness), but I don't think we've ever had one."



Emmy winner Ed Asner performs as FDR in the Broadway in Great Falls season finale on Sunday. COURTESY PHOTO

ESSENTIALS

What: "Ed Asner as FDR," the Broadway in Great Falls 2011-2012 series finale.

When: Sunday at 3 p.m. **Where:** The Mansfield Center for the Performing Arts theater

Admission: Tickets are \$39.50 or \$44.50. Group discounts are available for 15 or more people. Tickets can be purchased online at ticketing.greatfallsmt.net, at the door or by calling 455-8514 today from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

In this one-man production, Asner takes the audience through FDR's fireside chats; his controversial packing of the Supreme Court; his personal life with Eleanor; his affair with Lucy Mercer; his courage to break the Neutrality Act; his manipulation of Congress to get the country to institute a draft; Pearl Harbor and what's been called a benevolent dictatorship of the U.S. presidency from 1933 to 1944, which made him the first and only man to be elected

to four terms.

Asner said he doesn't imitate FDR as much as he portrays him in his own style.

"I can't look like FDR no matter how hard I try, and I don't think vocally I can sound like him," Asner said. "I try to employ the upstate New York accent he had and hope for the best."

He said it took some time getting used to being the only person on stage but now he's grown accustomed to it.

"In the beginning when I first got out there after 10 minutes I'd think 'I've still got another hour and a half, and I'm out here alone,'" he said. "It was frightening, but now I've gotten used to that. I'm always eager to get to the end, but I take it in stride, and the reception is always quite heartwarming."

Asner said in the 1980s people speculated he would enter politics himself, a notion he said he considered but never seriously pursued.

"People first accused me of using the office of the Screen Actors Guild president to emulate Ronald Reagan and his later ascent into public life and the presidency," Asner said. "I then made a statement at the time that I could not be very good in

politics because one has to compromise with some of those types of people that occupy Congress or wherever, and I don't think I could have tolerated that."

Asner has worked with some of the biggest names in Hollywood such as Mary Tyler Moore, John Wayne, Will Ferrell, John Ritter, Betty White, Tom Selleck, Kevin Bacon, Morgan Freeman and Paul Newman.

Asner is the only actor to win an Emmy in a comedy series and later for playing the same character in a drama series. He played Lou Grant in the "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" starting in 1970 and in the spin-off drama "Lou Grant," which ran from 1977 to 1982.

In his 55 years of acting, Asner has starred in a large array of movies, TV shows and

animated features including his Emmy-winning role in the miniseries "Roots," his role as Carl Fredrickson in Pixar's "Up," the role of Guy Banister in Oliver Stone's "JFK" and his portrayal as Wilson White on "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip."

He's also provided the voices for J. Jonah Jameson on the 1990s animated television series "Spider-Man," Hudson on "Garbage," Jabba the Hutt on the radio version of "Star Wars," Roland Daggett on "Batman: The Animated Series" and Cosgrove on "Freakazoid."

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