



# SONOMA COMMUNITY CENTER

[www.sonomacommunitycenter.org](http://www.sonomacommunitycenter.org)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **SONOMA COMMUNITY CENTER TO PRESENT LOCAL PLAYWRIGHT'S "REMARKABLE RETURN OF AMBROSE BIERCE" IN ANDREWS HALL MAY 5 & 6th**

Sonoma Community Center will present "The Remarkable Return of Ambrose Bierce" in Andrews Hall on Saturday and Sunday, May 5th & 6th. The collaboration between local playwright Bart Schneider, acclaimed actor Felix Justice, and director Michael French, pays tribute to one of America's greatest satirists and storywriters of the 19th century.

A force of enormous intelligence and moral urgency, Ambrose Bierce (1842-1913) was branded a misanthrope. For over 25 years, he worked as a newspaperman in San Francisco. According to Schneider, "As a satirist, Bierce was misunderstood. He claimed that satire never thrived in this country because 'the soul of it is wit, wherein we are dolefully deficient.'"

Bierce was famous for his *Devil's Dictionary*, but more famous for disappearing in Mexico in 1913. A former Civil War officer, he claimed to be heading off to fight alongside Pancho Villa.

In his play, Schneider reframes Bierce as a black man, a century after his disappearance. According to Schneider, "The notion of bringing Bierce back as a black man 100 years later is not as arbitrary as it might sound. Bierce was interested in race relations as early as the 1870's, writing repeated columns against the discrimination against the Chinese in San Francisco. His political arguments are particularly relevant today. He railed against a political system that favored corporations over individuals and that was driven by paid lobbyists."

### About the Creative Team

SCC is proud to present this talented performing team. Schneider wrote the part for veteran Bay Area actor Felix Justice, who appeared in his first play, *Sunday*, in 1979.

Justice has appeared as an actor in Bay Area theaters including The Eureka, SF Rep, SF Actors Ensemble, and Mill Valley Center for the Performing for many years, appearing in such plays as *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, *The River Niger*, *Henry the Fifth*, *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act*, *The Public Ear*, and most recently, *Under the Lintel*. In 1989, with Peter Fitzsimmons, he co-founded The Fellowship Theater in San Francisco. Justice has performed *Prophecy for America*, his Martin Luther King, Jr. show, widely, and has toured for more than 20 years, with Danny Glover, in *An Evening with Martin and Langston*.

"I thought of Felix for the part because I knew the role would require an actor with regal stature.

This is a big play for an actor, really a virtuoso piece given its driven, non-stop nature and the difficulty of the clotted language, much of which derives directly from Bierce's writing."

The play will be directed by Michael French. Originally from London, French studied acting at The Drama School and was featured regularly on the fringe circuit in such plays as *A Taste of Honey*, *Richard III*, *Look Back in Anger*, *Betrayal*, and *Bent*. In 1992 he moved to New York where he directed over thirty-five Off Broadway productions. In 2003 French relocated to Boulder, Colorado where he founded the influential theatre company, Theatre 13, and co-wrote and co-produced, *The Buddha Prince*, about the life of the Dali Lama, which has toured the U. S. extensively. In 2011, Mr. French moved to the Bay Area, where he is Artistic Director of The Aluminous Collective.

The playwright Bart Schneider was born and raised in San Francisco. He began writing plays in the late 1970's and had a number produced in Bay Area theaters before moving to Minnesota, in 1983, to work at the Playwright Center in Minneapolis. In 1986, he became the founding editor of *Hungry Mind Review*, a national book and culture magazine, which he edited for fifteen years. Between 1998 and 2008 Schneider published four novels, including *Blue Bossa*, a finalist for an *L.A. Times* Book Prize, and *Secret Love*, a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. In 2001, he became the literary director of the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis. The following year he founded *Speakeasy Magazine*, which he edited until its demise in 2006. Schneider returned to the Bay Area in 2008, moving to Sonoma. In 2011, he founded the small literary press Kelly's Cove Press. His fifth novel, *Nameless Dame: Murder on the Russian River* was recently published.

"The Remarkable Return of Ambrose Bierce" will show Saturday, May 5<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm and Sunday, May 6<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm in the Community Center's Andrews Hall. Tickets are available for \$20 at the Sonoma Valley Box Office, [www.sonomacomunitycenter.org](http://www.sonomacomunitycenter.org).

### Dinner Theater

Theatergoers may also be interested in purchasing tickets for the Center's Community Table Dinner on Saturday night, featuring Chef Azmin Ghahreman of Sapphire Laguna restaurant. Dinner will begin at 7:00 pm, after the Saturday show. Tickets are sold separately at [www.sonomacommunitycenter.org](http://www.sonomacommunitycenter.org).

Sonoma Community Center enriches the lives of the people of Sonoma Valley by fostering a broad range of cultural, educational, and community services, and by ensuring the preservation and restoration of its historic building.

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