

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MAY 2009

"Life shouldn't be all work and no plays."

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

May 18: Tom Stoppard's *Rock 'n' Roll*

Yeah, baby, he's rocking. The old wizard has salted this political play with songs from the sixties by The Beach Boys, Bob Dylan, The Grateful Dead, Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, The Rolling Stones, and The Velvet Underground. It's about the relationship between art and politics—in this case, politics in Czechoslovakia from the Russian occupation in 1968 to the fall of the communist regime in 1989.

As in other Stoppard plays, *Rock 'n' Roll* doesn't observe the classic unities. It operates on several levels and over more than one generation. It's easier to understand if you read it before you see it. (Backstage Books – 545 8th St., SE, Washington, DC 20003; Phone: 202-544-5744; E-mail: backstagebooks@aol.com – has copies of the play.) By all means come to the Footlights meeting on **Monday, May 18 at Alfio's** for our May dinner-discussion. Footlights member Frank Pierce will moderate. Studio Theatre dramaturg **Sarah Wallace** and **Prof. Brian Richardson** of the University of Maryland will be our guest speakers.

Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. Alfio's is located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815 (phone: 301-657-9133) – two blocks from the Friendship Heights Metro. Street parking is limited but valet parking is free at Alfio's. To reserve, contact Mark Gruenberg at 202-898-4825 or press_associates@yahoo.com. The cost is only \$12 for a choice among 5 entrees, plus salad, bread, beverage and ice cream, and includes tax and tip. We suggest a \$5 contribution to Footlights. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. and ends at 9-9:30 p.m. You may come for the discussion only, if you wish. If you have to cancel, please let Mark know as soon as possible, and definitely by noon on May 18, so we have an accurate count for Alfio's.

The Plastic People of the Universe

Stoppard was born in Czechoslovakia, but his family left when he was still a baby and he didn't visit the country again until 1977. Like the character Jan in the play, he was living in England and wanted to see how artists and writers were faring in Czechoslovakia. Did they go along with the regime and its phony "people's culture," or did they link up with the dissidents and risk imprisonment or exile?

One answer was supplied by a rock group called The Plastic People of the Universe, who cared nothing about

politics and simply wanted to be left alone. They weren't left alone, because the authorities saw them as a threat. They were arrested and put on trial as criminals. Vaclav Havel, a playwright who later became president of Czechoslovakia, took up their cause. He saw their trial as "an attack by the totalitarian system on life itself, on the very essence of human freedom and integrity."

As we know, the dissidents eventually toppled the communist regime. But The Plastic People of the Universe didn't care about that so long as they were free to play their music. As their leader wrote, "we live in an atmosphere of complete agreement: the [authorities] don't want us, and we don't want anything to do with the [authorities]. This eliminates the temptation that for everyone, even the strongest artist, is the seed of destruction: the desire for recognition, success, winning prizes and titles, and last but not least, the material security which follows."

– Frank Pierce

Rock 'n' Roll at Studio Theatre

Footlights will see *Rock 'N' Roll* on Saturday, May 23 at 2 p.m. at Studio Theatre, 1501 14th St., NW, Washington, DC (at P St.). Tickets are \$48 for orchestra seats. A limited number are available. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

Footlights to Discuss Noël Coward's *Design for Living* June 3

If there was one thing Noël Coward was known for in his long career, it was charming plays with a "bite" to them. And if there was another, it was droll wit. On **Wednesday, June 3**, come to discuss both qualities with **Akiva Fox** of the Shakespeare Theatre Company, which is producing Coward's *Design for Living* May 12 - June 28. We'll meet at 6:30 p.m. at Casa Fiesta Restaurant, 4910 Wisconsin Ave., NW, between Ellicott & Fessenden Sts. The Salvadoran/Mexican buffet is \$15. You may come for the discussion only at 7:30, if you wish.

STC Artistic Director Michael Kahn describes Coward's style as follows: "The master of 20th-century English comedy, Noël Coward continued the style of William Congreve and Oscar Wilde with this hilarious and sophisticated look at love, friendship and the joys and perils of fame. Filled with Coward's trademark sparkling wit, *Design for Living* follows three glamorous

Bohemians—Otto, Leo and Gilda—as they fall in and out of love with each other. Moving restlessly from Paris to London to New York, the three both pursue and repel each other in an ever-more-maddening love triangle...a provocative and surprisingly moving modern comedy classic.” Make reservations for our June 3 dinner-discussion with Mark Gruenberg at press_associates@yahoo.com or (202) 898-4825.

See *Design for Living*?

Group discount tickets are \$52.25 (A seats) or \$47.25 (B seats) at the Lansburgh – 30% off regular price. We need to purchase a minimum of 10 tickets. Before we advance \$522.50 of Footlights funds to the Shakespeare Theatre, we must know that we have 10 people committed. We’d like to go on Saturday, June 6 at 2 p.m. Shakespeare Theatre’s free Classics in Context on *Design for Living* is

scheduled at 5 p.m. just after that performance. If you would like to be one of those 10 (or more!) ticket buyers, please contact Robin by Sunday, May 10.

We’re Looking for a Few Good Plays...

Actually, unlike the Marines, we’re looking for many good plays to discuss next year, the 16th season of Footlights, the modern drama discussion group. September is already set: *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which will be playing at Round House. But after that, we’re open, because many of the theaters’ schedules are, too. If you know of a modern play – or playwright – whom you particularly want us to discuss, call or e-mail Mark. (That’s how we got playwright Karen Zacarías to discuss her new premiere, *Legacy of Light*: Barbara Reithmaier approached us with the idea, we encouraged her, and she did the rest.)

Calendar

- Monday, May 18, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Rock ’n’ Roll* by Tom Stoppard. At Alfio’s, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815.
- Saturday, May 23, 2 p.m., performance of *Rock ’n’ Roll* at Studio Theatre, 1501 14th St., NW, DC (at P St.). Tickets: \$48.
- Wednesday, June 3, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Design for Living* by Noël Coward. At Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Ave., NW, DC.
- Saturday, June 6, 2 p.m., performance of *Design for Living* at the Lansburgh, 450 7th Street NW, DC. Contact Robin.

Reservations:

- Dinner-discussions – Mark Gruenberg, press_associates@yahoo.com or 202-898-4825.
- Performances – Robin Larkin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852. Please indicate for which play or plays you want tickets.

Robin Larkin for FOOTLIGHTS
5800 Nicholson Lane, # L07
Rockville, MD 20852