

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

NOVEMBER 2009

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## November 9: *Lost in Yonkers* by Neil Simon

Playwright **Neil Simon**'s life sounds like fiction: 34 plays, screenplays for 20 films, five wives, 17 Tony nominations, two Emmys, and a Pulitzer Prize for Drama. He was born on the Fourth of July, quit his job as a mail clerk to write radio scripts and ended up – with Woody Allen and Mel Brooks among others – writing for Sid Caesar's phenomenal TV program *Your Show of Shows*. Broadway was next: his first play, *Come Blow Your Horn*, opened in 1961, and ran for almost 700 performances. He is the only known playwright ever to have four shows playing at the same time on Broadway. Neil Simon may hold the record forever as America's most prolific and popular playwright.

His own life experiences became material for his plays. Remembering the days of writing for Sid Caesar made *Laughter on the 23rd Floor* a smash hit. When his brother Danny divorced and moved in temporarily with a divorced friend, *The Odd Couple* was born. The trilogy *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Broadway Bound* are semi-autobiographical.

Footlights' play for discussion on **Monday, November 9** – *Lost in Yonkers* – is a sort of conclusion to these stories. It is a far more serious play, however, and this time the family is portrayed as truly dysfunctional. The play won both the 1991 Tony for Best Play and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. *Lost in Yonkers* is Neil Simon for grown-ups. The jokes are there just as always, but so is a resolution swept up in heart-tugging emotions that require some maturity to fully appreciate. Critics note both the deep levels of pain that Simon explores in his characters and the humorous dialogue from certain characters, which ultimately helps the play to strike a balance between tragedy and comedy.

Central to *Yonkers*' emotional warfare are Grandma Kurnitz and her adult child-like daughter Bella Kurnitz, played in Theater J's current production by Tana Hicken as Grandma Kurnitz and **Holly Twyford** as Bella. We are honored to have Holly Twyford as our guest speaker for our discussion. She has appeared in over 30 local productions, playing roles as diverse as Shakespeare's Hamlet and a dog in Lee Blessing's *Chesapeake*. Holly is a ten-time nominee and a three-time winner of the Helen Hayes Award.

We'll meet at **Alfio's** on **Monday, November 9**. 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.

Once again, Footlights and The Ushers are joining forces for the dinner-discussion on November 9 and for the subsequent theater trip to see *Lost in Yonkers* on Sunday, November 29. Robin Larkin and Joel Markowitz will moderate the discussion with Holly Twyford.

To reserve for dinner, contact Mark Gruenberg, [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com) or 202-898-4825. The cost for dinner is only \$13 for a choice among 6 entrees, plus salad, bread, beverage and ice cream, and includes tax and tip. We suggest an additional \$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 November 9, so we have an accurate count for Alfio's.

*Lost in Yonkers* is available at Backstage Books, 545 8th Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003, (202-544-5744 or [backstagebooks@aol.com](mailto:backstagebooks@aol.com)). Call first. Your local library may have copies, too.

## November 29: See *Lost in Yonkers* at Theater J

We'll see *Lost in Yonkers* on **Sunday, November 29 at 3 p.m.** at Theater J, 1529 16th Street NW, DC. Tickets for Footlights and The Ushers members are \$35. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852. Please make payment by November 9, the date of our discussion. Let Robin know your check is on its way, [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net) or 240-669-6300.

Following the play and post-show discussion we will have dinner at the Dupont Italian Kitchen, 1637 17<sup>th</sup> St, NW, DC. Please let Joel Markowitz know you want to attend, [Joel@ushers.us](mailto:Joel@ushers.us) or 703-447-8805

## December 2: *Stick Fly* by Lydia R. Diamond

Mark your calendars now! We will have playwright **Lydia Diamond** as our guest speaker for our dinner-discussion at Alfio's on **Wednesday, December 2**, at 6:30 p.m. Arena

Stage will produce her play, *Stick Fly*, in January 2010.

*Stick Fly* was a great hit at the 2008 Contemporary American Theatre Festival (CATF), held at Shepherdstown, WV, each July. Many of us saw it there.

Funny and passionate, *Stick Fly* is a probing family drama and an up-to-the-minute take on privilege and perception. *Stick Fly* is a story of racial tensions as played out in the story of an elite African American family, the LaVays, at their beach house at Martha's Vineyard over a weekend. The race of the characters factors largely into the narrative that unfolds, but it doesn't end up being the crux of the play. This is not a *message* play.

Playwright Lydia Diamond astutely examines African-American social aristocracy in a work called "an impressively ambitious play" (*Chicago Tribune*) and "a refreshingly vital story about relationships and richly complex characters" (*Variety*).

Lydia Diamond currently teaches playwriting at Boston University's School of Theatre. She is a Huntington Playwriting Fellow and a Resident Playwright at Chicago

Dramatists. Her plays include *Stage Black*, *The Gift Horse*, *Stick Fly*, and *The Inside*. Lydia's adaptation of Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* was presented by Theatre Alliance several seasons ago to critical acclaim.

Phyllis Bodin will take reservations for our dinner-discussion of *Stick Fly* on December 2. She may be reached at [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net), or 301-986-1768.

Order your copy of *Stick Fly* from Backstage Books.

### **Last Call to See Charles Mee's *Full Circle* at Woolly Mammoth on Sunday, November 8**

We'll see *Full Circle* on **Sunday, November 8, at 2 p.m.** at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company, 641 D Street, NW (7<sup>th</sup> & D), Washington, DC 20004, a short walk (1-2 blocks) from either the Archives or Gallery Place Metro stations. Tickets are \$40 and include a post show discussion. Send your check to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852. We'll meet at the theater prior to the performance where Robin will distribute tickets.

### **Calendar**

- Sunday, November 8, 2 p.m., performance of *Full Circle* at Woolly Mammoth, 641 D Street, NW (7<sup>th</sup> & D), Washington, DC 20004. Tickets are \$40. 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.
- Monday, November 9, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Lost in Yonkers* by Neil Simon. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. **Holly Twyford** is our guest speaker. Reserve with Mark, [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com) or 202-898-4825.
- Sunday, November 29, 3 p.m., performance of *Lost in Yonkers* at Theater J, 1529 16th St NW, Washington, DC 20036. Tickets are \$35. Send your check to Robin.
- Wednesday, December 2, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Stick Fly* by Lydia Diamond. At Alfio's. **Lydia Diamond** is our guest speaker. Reserve with Phyllis, [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net) or 301-9861768.

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