

from the FOOTLIGHTS

APRIL 2010

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss Neil LaBute's *Reasons to Be Pretty* on Wednesday, April 14

A blown-up photo of a praying mantis is on the cover of the Studio Theatre playbill for Neil LaBute's play. The best known "habit" of the female of this species is to bite off the head of the male copulating with her. And so begins our play.

But, humans do it. The female of the species also uses her jaws. But to make furious bursts of a seemingly never-ending cursing-out of a clueless, defensive live-in boyfriend.

This is LaBute's last take in his trilogy on the American pursuit of prettiness. No one is left unmarked, unhurt, unchanged. Perhaps the clueless, defensive ex-live-in boyfriend (our hero) learns something from having his head bitten off – perhaps. At the very least he gives us the great satisfaction of getting even with his arrogant, muscular, good-with-the women, so-called best friend.

Reasons to Be Pretty was the first of LaBute's plays to be staged on Broadway, to generally good reviews a year ago. Ben Brantley, the New York Times critic, called it a "wonderfully acted production" that might be "the sentimental sleeper of a season..." He also said "Mr. LaBute is writing some of the freshest and most illuminating American dialogue to be heard anywhere these days."

An aimless young man who has done some community college work, Greg reads more books than people. He gets our deep sympathy because he is a decent man who wants to do the right thing once he seems to understand what he wants and what Steph, his ex-girlfriend, wants. She, too, has do some traveling to go from fury to understanding what she wants and being unsure, apparently, who might help her meet her needs. These are some of the major reasons that LaBute has called *Reasons to Be Pretty*, "the first coming-of-age story I've written."

But not all reviewers were buying that story line. Elisabeth Vincentelli of the New York Post said in her review: "Setting the action against a working-class backdrop was a potentially daring move, but as with so many things in the show, LaBute hedged his bets: Greg's predilection for Poe and Hawthorne suggests his higher aspirations, but it's also an underhanded way to ensure a theater audience will be sympathetic to his plight."

Our guest will be Sarah Wallace, dramaturg and associate literary manager of Studio, back by popular demand. She spoke to us a year ago about the absorbing *Rock 'n' Roll* by Tom Stoppard, and last Fall about the puzzling *Moonlight* by Harold Pinter. Her patience, energy and knowledge

helped us focus our thoughts on these plays and we can count on more of that April 14.

We have been in touch with David Muse, director of *Reasons to Be Pretty*, and he hopes he can come to our dinner-discussion. He cannot be certain because he will be auditioning actors for a new project. He came to *Reasons* right on the heels of an acclaimed version of *Henry V* at the Shakespeare Theater Company. He is the associate artistic director there, having directed six productions for the company. This is his fourth production at Studio, which have earned 10 Helen Hayes Awards and won four. He has done plays at Arena Stage and in New York.

Jerry Stilkind will moderate our discussion.

We'll meet at Alfio's, 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.

Phyllis Bodin will take reservations. She may be reached at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. 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.

Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. Please plan to arrive by 6:15. The program begins at 7:30 and ends at 9-9:30. You may come for the discussion only, if you wish. If you have to cancel, please let Phyllis know as soon as possible, and definitely by noon on April 14, so we have an accurate count for Alfio's.

Read *Reasons to Be Pretty*

Look for *Reasons* at your library or order from Backstage Books, 545 8th Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003. Phone 202-544-5744 or e-mail backstagebooks@aol.com.

See *Reasons to Be Pretty*

Reasons is now playing at The Studio Theatre, 1501 14th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005 through May 2. If you are interested in seeing the 2 p.m. matinee on Saturday, April 17, we need ten people to make a group. Group tickets will be \$50-41. Contact Robin ASAP, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300. Time is short to make a group reservation.

May 20: *The Amazing Sophie*

Our play for discussion on Thursday, May 20 will be *The Amazing Sophie* written by DC playwright Allyson Currin and produced by The American Century Theater (TACT). *Sophie* relates the story of Sophie Treadwell (1885-1970),

a playwright, actress, director, journalist and novelist whose professional career spanned almost 60 years.

TACT's website says: " Sophie Treadwell ought to be known to everyone: she was a trailblazing female journalist, a brilliant playwright (*Machinal*), a novelist, director, actress, and a courageous fighter for the rights of women. That she is almost forgotten today is a tragedy TACT hopes to remedy with its World Premiere of a brand new play exploring Treadwell's many battles, defeats and triumphs, authored by celebrated D.C. playwright Allyson Currin."

(Footlights members may recall our discussion of *Machinal* with Lee Mikeska Gardner in June 2004. See our newsletter http://www.footlightsdc.org/news2004/jun_04.htm.)

Playwright Allyson Currin will be joining us on May 20. Ms. Currin is a talented theater professional with an extensive resume that includes accomplishments as a playwright, teacher, actress, director and theater administrator. She has been twice nominated for a Helen Hayes award for Outstanding New Play and is a professor at George Washington University.

We will meet at Alfio's. Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

See *The Trip to Bountiful* May 2

On Sunday, May 2 at 2 p.m., we will attend the performance of *The Trip to Bountiful* at Quotidian Theatre Company, at The Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh Street, Bethesda, MD 20815. Tickets are \$12.50 and include a post show discussion. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

Horton Foote Tribute Postponed

The Writer's Center and Quotidian Theatre's tribute to the late Horton Foote, scheduled for April 26, has been postponed.

About Footlights

For more information about Footlights, check our website, <http://www.footlightsdc.org>. To subscribe to our e-list go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join> or send any message to footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Calendar

- Wednesday, April 14, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Reasons to Be Pretty* by Neil LaBute. Dramaturg **Sarah Wallace** is our guest speaker. Director **David Muse** may join us. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- Saturday, April 17, 2 p.m., performance of *Reasons to Be Pretty*, at Studio Theatre, 1501 14th Street NW, Washington, DC 20005. Reserve with Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300. (We need 10 people to get group tickets.)
- Sunday, May 2, 2 p.m., performance of *The Trip to Bountiful*. A post-show discussion is included. Tickets are \$12.50. At Quotidian Theatre, The Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh St, Bethesda, MD 20815. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852.
- Thursday, May 20, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *The Amazing Sophie* by **Allyson Currin**, our guest. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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