

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

MAY 2011

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

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## May 24: *Tennessee Continuum* – a pair of one-acts by Tennessee Williams

The vulnerable, manipulative Blanche Du Bois, teetering on the edge of sanity, is one of the most memorable characters in one of the greatest of American plays, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Tennessee Williams wrote *Streetcar* in 1947. But, three years earlier he revised his one-act play about an older unmarried woman, who is poor, who says she had a lover and a child but with no sex involved, and who depends on the kindness of others because she no longer inhabits reality. He called it *Portrait of a Madonna*.

In the almost archetypal genteel South before World War II, a proper, strictly raised daughter who had the responsibility of caring for an aged mother, who sensed the social pressure to be sexual and yet found no morally sanctioned expression of these feelings, finally moves into madness as her only means of living. *Portrait* can be seen as a kind of study for a larger work (*Streetcar*), just as a painter might do a series of sketches before putting all his thoughts and feelings together in a full canvas.

Some theater historians, scholars suggest that Williams intended *Portrait* for a small theater whose audience would be intense theatergoers focused on character and dialogue. That makes the play ideal for the Washington Shakespeare Company, one of the oldest small theaters in the region, and for us, the 16-year-old and still the only theater discussion group in the region open to all.

Then there is the second short Williams play of the night, *The Gnädiges Fräulein* (Gracious Woman). Perhaps the best way to describe the play is to quote at length from the program of a theater in Philadelphia that did the play a year ago: It is "an absurd exaggeration of island life in 'the southernmost point of Terra Firma.' Here, the local gossip columnist Polly pens the 'southernmost write-up of the southernmost gangbang' in between lectures to the Audubon Society on the coccaloony bird, a creature that swoops down on the set with a Hitchcockian terror of cawing crows and the scream of a single-engine airplane.

"Today Polly can be found digging up dirt at 'the big dormitory' boarding house under 'the rooftop of God,' a place where 'the dark angel checks the residents' dog tags' at night. The residents include a Permanent Transient named Molly, a perfume-spraying, blond-pigtailed male-Pocahontas named Indian Joe, and the titular Gnädiges Fräulein, a washed-up vaudeville performer who formerly entertained the crowned heads of Europe by catching fish in her mouth."

What are Chris Henley, the artistic director of Washington Shakespeare Company, and the director he chose for this play, Jay Hardee, going to do with that? This will be the

seventh time Chris has joined us to discuss a play he is producing or directing, which is a testament to the quality of the plays he brings to life and to the clarity of how he talks about them. Jay Hardee has acted in a good number of and directed some of the productions at the theater. Lynn Sharp Spears is directing *Portrait*. We welcome all three and look forward to a lively discussion. Jerry Stilkind will moderate.

Please join us on **Tuesday, May 24**, at Alfio's for our dinner-discussion of these overlooked Williams' one-acts. Alfio's Trattoria is located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Avenue, in Chevy Chase, MD. The restaurant is two blocks from the red line Friendship Heights Metro station. Street parking is limited but valet parking is free. The cost for dinner is only \$13 for salad, bread, choice among six entrees, ice cream, and coffee or tea. The price includes tax and tip. We appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar. Phyllis Bodin will take reservations for our dinner-discussion. You can reach her at 301-986-1768, or [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net). You may come for the discussion only if you wish.

Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. and the discussion begins at 7:30, ending no later than 9:30. If you have to cancel your dinner reservation please let Phyllis know by noon on May 24 so we will have an accurate count for the restaurant.

### Read the Plays

*Portrait of a Madonna* can be found in a collection of some of Williams' plays entitled *27 Wagons Full of Cotton*. This collection could be ordered at any bookstore or online. The play is also available by itself online through the Dramatists Play Service. *Gnädiges Fräulein* can also be ordered online through Dramatists Play Service. It is in the collection *The Theater of Tennessee Williams*, vol. 7. The plays may be found in the DC library system, as well.

### See *Tennessee Continuum*

The WSC now has a beautiful new theater in the Artisphere in Rosslyn, the former home of the Newseum, 1101 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA. It is two blocks from the Rosslyn metro stop, and offers free parking in the building garage. *Tennessee Continuum* will play in repertory with Tom Stoppard's *Night and Day* from May 12 – July 3. Footlights will see the Williams plays on **Sunday, June 19, at 2 p.m.** Tickets for our group are \$15. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, # L07, Rockville, MD 20852. Let Robin know your check is on the way – 240-669-6300 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net). We will go across the street to China Garden for dinner after the talk with the cast. Meet in the lobby.

## June 6: *Opus* Discussion with Jim Petosa

“Sex, drugs and chamber music! . . . an absorbing new play by **Michael Hollinger**,” a New York Times critic wrote at the Broadway premier of *Opus* almost four years ago. “*Opus* considers the matter of music making with an intimate, appraising eye . . .,” the review went on. “Much like the fictional string quartet that is its subject, Michael Hollinger’s drama *Opus* plays all of its notes with an utmost precision and delicacy,” the New York Post critic wrote.

Hollinger is writing about a world he knows well – he is a trained violinist. However, he has become a playwright whose work is being done all over Washington this season, from *Red Herring* at the Washington Stage Guild to the adaptation of *Cyrano* currently at the Folger. As we will learn in the discussion and then at the production of *Opus*, there is good reason for doing his plays.

Equally important is the return to Footlights of **Jim Petosa**, the artistic director of the Olney Theatre Center who gave himself the job of directing *Opus*. Jim has been one of our most frequent guests because he puts on plays that we want to see and because he is one of the most knowledgeable and articulate directors in the Washington region. Jim also heads the School of Theatre at Boston University.

## Calendar

- Tuesday, May 24, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Tennessee Continuum* by **Tennessee Williams**. Our guests are **Chris Henley**, Artistic Director at WSC, **Jay Hardee** and **Lynn Sharp Spears**, directors of the plays. At Alfio’s, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis, 301-986-1768 or [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net).
- Monday, June 6, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Opus* by **Michael Hollinger**. Our guest is **Jim Petosa**. At Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington DC 20016. Reserve with Phyllis.
- Sunday, June 19, 2 p.m., performance of *Tennessee Continuum* at WSC, Artisphere, 1101 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA. Tickets are \$15. Reserve with Robin, 240-669-6300 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net). Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852.
- Sunday, June 26, 2 p.m., performance of *Opus* at Olney Theatre, 2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Rd., Olney MD 20832. Tickets are \$30. Reserve with and send your check to Robin.

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

We are returning to **Casa Fiesta**, 4910 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington DC 20016 – one of our old favorites because of its delicious Central American buffet – for this discussion. But, this time we are taking over the whole street level dining room. The rest rooms are upstairs but the downstairs where we will eat is accessible to the handicapped.

Casa Fiesta’s buffet is \$15, including tax and tip. Make your reservation for **Monday, June 6** with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768 or [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net). We meet at 6:30 for dinner; the discussion begins at 7:30.

Find *Opus* at your local library or order from bookstores or online.

We’ll see *Opus* on **Sunday, June 26, 2 p.m.** at Olney Theatre. Orchestra group seats are \$30, and include a postshow discussion. Reserve with Robin, 240-669-6300 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net). Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

## About Footlights

To learn more about Footlights, visit our website: <http://www.footlightsdc.org>. To subscribe to our e-list, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or e-mail [footlightsdc-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:footlightsdc-subscribe@yahogroups.com).