

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

AUGUST 2011

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## August 8: Footlights to Discuss Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*

**Samuel Beckett**, perhaps most famous for his *Waiting for Godot*, won the Nobel Prize in Literature 1969 "for his writing, which - in new forms for the novel and drama - in the destitution of modern man acquires its elevation." Beckett has long been considered a leading light - if not the leading light - of Theatre of the Absurd, but *Happy Days*, which he wrote in late 1960 and which premiered in 1961, is the exception to that rule.

The short two act play is "suffused with tenderness, lucidity and humor," according to a review of the production on Amazon.com, where it is available as part of the Beckett on Film DVD Set. (Also available on Netflix.) A biography of Beckett says he wrote it that way at the urging of his girlfriend, Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, whom he married in 1961. She requested a 'happy' play after *Krapp's Last Tape*. On the other hand, the *New York Times* called *Happy Days* "a song of rue that will haunt the inner ear." So take your pick. After a one-month pre-Broadway run (also in New York), *Happy Days* opened on Broadway on Columbus Day 1961, but ran only for two weeks, in repertory with another Beckett play, *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Footlights will sort all this out with **José Carrasquillo**, a longtime friend and ally of Footlights and actor and director in the DC area, who is directing *Happy Days* at the Washington Shakespeare Company, where it opens in late August. Joining José for our discussion is actress **Delia Taylor**, who plays Winnie. (The role of the absurdly optimistic Winnie in *Happy Days* is said to be one of the most challenging for any actress in the history of theater, because it requires her to be at once cheerful, entertaining, pathetic and endearing all while being trapped in a pile of dirt – up to her waist in the first act, and up to her neck in the second.) José's not only directing, but he's playing Willie.

Our dinner-discussion will be at **Alfio's** in Friendship Heights on **Monday, August 8**, with

dinner at 6:30 p.m. and discussion at 7:30 p.m. Make your reservations with Mary Ann Wren at 301-770-4572, or [wjwren@rcn.com](mailto:wjwren@rcn.com).

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. Cash or check; no credit cards. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar. You may come for the discussion only if you wish.

If you have to cancel your dinner reservation please let Mary Ann know by **noon on August 8** so we will have an accurate count for the restaurant. We may need to charge you for your meal if you fail to cancel your reservation.

**Read *Happy Days*.** Look for *Happy Days* at your local library or order from your favorite book store or from one of the many online sources. There are videos online as well. See a production at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mbtziA15guU>.

**See *Happy Days*.** The Washington Shakespeare Theatre Company will produce *Happy Days* August 25 - September 25. Footlights will see it on Sunday, September 18, 2 p.m.

## September 26: *The Habit of Art* by Alan Bennett

**Ted van Griethuysen**, one of the greatest actors in this region for the past 30 years, has a leading role in the upcoming Studio Theatre production of *The Habit of Art*, which is "often wonderfully and sometimes filthily funny (this is not a show for the prudish), but also deeply and unexpectedly moving," according to a review of the play in London.

The play "shows two great artists, towards the end of their lives, united in their belief in the power of the creative impulse," another reviewer wrote in

London. The poet W.H. Auden and the composer Benjamin Britten are the two great ones seeing each other (wholly imagined by the playwright) for the first time in 25 years.

We are fortunate in the reality, however, of having Mr. van Griethuysen accept our invitation to guide us through the play on **Monday, September 26**. Fortunate not simply because he is in the play, but also because of his enthusiasm in sharing his wide knowledge of theater.

The play by **Alan Bennett**, well known for his previous play, *The History Boys*, is having its U.S. premiere at Studio Theatre September 7 and will run until October 16.

Our dinner-discussion will be at Alfio's. Make reservations with Mary Ann Wren, 301-770-4572, or [wjwren@rcn.com](mailto:wjwren@rcn.com).

Copies of the play are readily available online at

used and new book sites, are inexpensive and quickly delivered. You may order from Backstage Books or other local bookstore.

### 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@yahoogroups.com](mailto:footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

We are happy to send postal copies of our newsletter to you, in addition to finding the electronic version online. Let Robin (240-669-6300 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net)) know if you would like to be added to the postal mail list, or conversely that you no longer wish to receive a printed copy.

Copies of newsletters are available online at <http://www.footlightsdc.org/newsletters.htm>.

### Calendar

- Monday, August 8, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of **Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*** with guests **José Carrasquillo**, who will direct the production at the Washington Shakespeare Company, and **Delia Taylor**, who will play Winnie. Mark Gruenberg moderates. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren, [wjwren@rcn.com](mailto:wjwren@rcn.com) or 301-770-4572.
- Sunday, September 18, 2 p.m. performance of ***Happy Days*** at the Washington Shakespeare Company, Artisphere, 1101 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia 22209. Ticket price to be determined.
- Monday, September 26, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of **Alan Bennett's *The Habit of Art*** with guest **Ted van Griethuysen**, who will appear in the upcoming Studio Theatre production. Jerry Stilkind moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Mary Ann.

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