

from the FOOTLIGHTS

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“Life shouldn’t be all work and no plays.”

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Footlights to Discuss *Parade* on October 17

Is it possible to create a musical out of a murder? Playwright **Alfred Uhry** and director Harold Prince did so in 1998, with *Parade*, which Footlights will discuss on **Monday, October 17**, at Alfio’s.

The musical – book by Uhry, music and lyrics by Jason Robert Brown – which won two Tony Awards but had only a short Broadway run – dramatizes the story of Leo Frank, a northern Jewish pencil factory manager in Atlanta accused and convicted of killing a Southern white girl, Mary Phagan, who worked in the factory, in 1913. Amid roiling controversy over race, religion, sex, and South vs. North, Frank is convicted and sentenced to death.

Frank’s wife, Lucille, from an old Southern Jewish family herself, believes in his innocence and campaigns for him. In 1915, Georgia’s governor, convinced the entire trial was an enormous miscarriage of justice, commuted Frank’s sentence to life imprisonment, figuring a future governor would investigate further and clear Frank, as the play shows. But an organized mob, led by politicians in Phagan’s home town of Marietta, broke into the state prison, overpowered the guards and the warden, grabbed Frank, drove back to Marietta and lynched him. The final parade in the play is that of the lynch mob.

The Frank trial led, just a month after his conviction, to creation of the Anti-Defamation League. His lynching foretold and heralded a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. And half of Georgia’s 3,000-person Jewish community fled the state.

Ford’s Theatre and Theater J are co-producing *Parade*, which is playing at Ford’s through October 30. In an interview with *Playbill* Uhry explains his impetus for writing *Parade*: “I think *Parade* is pretty seminal about my life. It represents the crosshairs of being both a Jew and a Southerner. And those two things are often at odds. I was much more a Southerner than a Jew in my own head. I’ve written about that, but I think *Parade* sort of explained, not through Leo Frank, but through his wife Lucille, what the position of a good Georgia person of Judaism is, and I think we all learned a lot since about being what you are, which is both. I think the Frank case haunted me all my life, because my mother’s uncle happened to own that pencil factory where the murder took place. Although it happened many years before I was born, my family was deeply involved in the case. I had always heard about it all my

life. I actually knew Lucille Frank. She was an old lady friend of my grandmother’s. She probably patted me on the head a few times.”

Footlights will discuss *Parade* and the Frank case with distinguished American University history professor **Alan Kraut**. His specialty is the immigrant experience, and particularly the experience of those immigrants – and their descendants – who came to the U.S. from Southern and Eastern Europe between the end of the Civil War and the day the gates slammed shut in the U.S. Professor Kraut also chairs the historians’ advisory committee for the Ellis Island National Memorial, which recently oversaw the renovation and expansion – and improved interpretation of the immigrant experience – at the island’s museum.

Mark Gruenberg will moderate our discussion.

Our October 17 dinner-discussion will be at **Alfio’s** in Friendship Heights with dinner at 6:30 p.m. and discussion at 7:30 p.m. Make your reservations with Phyllis Bodin, at 301-986-1768, or phylbo@verizon.net.

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.

If you have to cancel your dinner reservation please let Phyllis know promptly but no later than **noon on October 17**. We may need to charge you for your meal if you fail to cancel your reservation. You may come for the discussion only if you wish.

Copies of *Parade* are available online. It is found in a collection of plays – *The New American Musical: An Anthology from the End of the 20th Century* [Paperback] Wiley Hausam (Editor). Other plays in the anthology are *Rent*, *Floyd Collins*, and *The Wild Party*. Amazon’s price for a new copy is \$14.21. Used copies may be available.

See *Parade*. Various discounts are available. Theater J offers a discount to its subscribers. Both Goldstar and Ticketplace list several performances at half-price, though facility fees are added to the ticket price. Contact Ford’s Theatre for regular and senior price tickets.

November 7: David Mamet's *Race* with CATF Founder and Producing Director, Ed Herendeen

Many DC area Footlights and other theatergoers have discovered a very good reason to take a short drive each July to Shepherdstown, WV – for the Contemporary American Theater Festival (CATF). Brand new – or nearly new – plays have found a home and a growing loyal audience in West Virginia's oldest town.

CATF at Shepherd University in Shepherdstown provides a great opportunity for the writers of those plays. Over the years, both up-and-coming playwrights and big names — like Sam Shepard and Joyce Carol Oates — have premiered works there. Our guest speaker, **Ed Herendeen**, founded the festival in 1991 in partnership with Shepherd University. Hosted on the campus of Shepherd University, CATF sells over 12,000 tickets to its four-week rotating repertory season of five new plays and attracts a national audience from 35 states to the region. The 22nd season of CATF will run July 6-29, 2012.

Herendeen says on average he reads about 75 scripts a year. He also scopes out new plays that other regional theaters are doing. He says, in an NPR interview: “One of the things I've learned over the years, especially working with writers, that it's very difficult to get the first production, but writers tell me it's even more difficult to get production number two. In other words, once your play has had its world premiere, lots of theaters don't want to do it because it's been done. And

Calendar

- Monday, October 17, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Parade* with Prof. Alan Kraut. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768, or phylbo@verizon.net.
- Monday, November 7, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Race* with Ed Herendeen, Founder and Producing Director of the Contemporary American Theater Festival (CATF). At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**

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then how does your play move on? How does your play have life beyond the world premiere?”

Footlights has previously reviewed one of those plays which made its journey from CATF in 2008 to Arena Stage to Broadway: Lydia Diamond's *Stick Fly*. And last season Olney Theatre produced a CATF graduate drama, *Farragut North* by Beau Willimon – now a movie by George Clooney renamed *The Ides of March*.

One of the five plays produced at CATF last season is David Mamet's *Race*, which Ed Herendeen directed. *Race* follows “three attorneys, two black and one white, offered a chance to defend a white man charged with a crime against a black woman.” The plot unfolds as the three lawyers and defendant grapple with the evidence of the case and their own feelings about race. Mamet has said that the “theme is race and the lies we tell each other on the subject.”

Please join us on **Monday, November 7** at Alfio's. Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. The discussion begins at 7:30. Phyllis Bodin will take reservations at 301-986-1768, or phylbo@verizon.net.

About Footlights

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