

from the FOOTLIGHTS

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

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

Summer is a time when many theatergoers branch out from our local theater fare to visit theater festivals around the country and beyond. But a short drive away, in Shepherdstown, WV, the Contemporary American Theater Festival (CATF) offers the opportunity to see five new – or nearly new – plays. It's an easy day trip to take in a play or two. Spend a couple of days there and you can see all five.

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 for our dinner-discussion on November 7, **Ed Herendeen**, founded the festival in 1990 in partnership with Shepherd University, with the mission to produce and develop new American theater. 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.

In 1999, CATF received the Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. Ed was honored with the College of Fine Arts Distinguished Alumni Award in Theater from Ohio University (from which he received his MA in Directing); has served on the Admissions Committee for New Dramatists and as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts; and, in 2011, was voted onto the board of Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for American theaters.

To put together a season, 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 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 a CATF production in 2008 to Arena Stage and now 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. In a *New York Times* interview, Mamet says "In my play a firm made up of three lawyers, two black and one white, is offered a chance to defend a white man charged with a crime against a black young woman. It is a play about lies. All drama is about lies. When the lie is exposed, the play is over. *Race*, like sex, is a subject on which it is near impossible to tell the truth." *Race*, the play, gives us a tutorial on the relationship between racial tension and racial privilege, the utter unreliability of the legal system to find the truth, and the media's irresistible impulse to spin a story, especially a salacious one. And as we read or see *Race*, in a truth-is-stranger-than-fiction moment, we think we've heard this story before. We have: the now dismissed case against Dominique Strauss-Kahn. Mamet's play came first.

Footlights has discussed two Mamet plays previously - his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Glengarry Glen Ross*, and *American Buffalo*.

Please join us on **Monday, November 7** at **Alfio's** in Friendship Heights. 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.

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 November 7**. 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.

Read *Race*

Copies of *Race* are available online at the usual spots - amazon.com, etc. Check your local libraries as well, or order from your favorite bookstore.

December

Footlights will take a break in December. Look for us in January.

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.

Calendar

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

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