

from the FOOTLIGHTS

APRIL 2012

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss *Dancing at Lughnasa* on Tuesday, April 24

On Tuesday, April 24, Footlights will meet to discuss **Brian Friel's** play, *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990). A memory play set in the fictional village of Ballybeg in Ireland, the story is told as an adult Michael remembers the events of that summer in 1936 when he was seven years old and living with his aunts in their cottage. There are five sisters, all unmarried (including Michael's mother), a brother who was a missionary working in Uganda and who has returned ill with malaria, and Michael's father Gerry who plans to go to Spain to fight against Franco even though the Catholic Church strongly supports that regime. The local cottage industry has shut down, none of the sisters now has an income, and the family lives in poverty and insecurity.

Brian Friel is considered Ireland's greatest living playwright – an "Irish Chekhov" – whose career spans six decades and 30 plays, as well as short stories (some written for *The New Yorker*), radio plays, and many articles for local newspapers about life in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is probably Brian Friel's most successful play; it premiered at the Abbey Theatre, transferred to London's West End, and went on to Broadway, where it won three Tony Awards in 1992, including Best Play. This play is loosely based on the lives of Friel's mother and aunts who lived in the Glenties, on the west coast of Donegal, and it is rumored to have caused some tension within his own family as many felt that he was staging too much of his family's history. In 1998 the play became a movie with Meryl Streep as one of the sisters. Footlights previously discussed another of Friel's plays – *Translations*.

Thirteen of Friel's plays, including *Dancing*, take place in the fictional village of Ballybeg (Gaelic for small town) and mirror the history of the region, and the profound changes which have come to Ireland – both North and South – over the years.

Lughnasa is an ancient Celtic harvest festival, still celebrated nowadays around August first with bonfires and dancing and family reunions. In earlier times it was also when trial marriages could begin, in which a couple had a year and a day either to end the arrangement or finalize the marriage.

Quotidian Theatre (www.quotidiantheatre.org) in Bethesda is producing *Dancing at Lughnasa*, opening

April 20, and continuing through May 20. (Quotidian will perform another Friel play – *Afterplay*, about an imagined future encounter between characters from two Chekhov plays – this summer.)

Craig Allen Mummey, director of Quotidian's production of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, is our guest speaker for our April 24 meeting, at Alfio's.

Craig Mummey has directed many local productions. Just in the past year, he directed *Hair* for the Kensington Arts Theatre; *Lettice and Lovage* for the Colonial Players (Annapolis, MD); and *Blackbird* for Silver Spring Stage.

Make reservations for April 24 with Mary Ann Wren, 301-770-4572 or wjwren@rcn.com. We'll meet at **Alfio's**. Dinner is at 6:30; the discussion begins at 7:30 and ends by 9 - 9:30. Alfio's Trattoria is located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. The restaurant is two blocks from the Friendship Heights metro station on the red line. 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, and the price includes tax and tip. Cash or check, no credit cards, please. We appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar.

If you have to cancel your dinner reservation please let Mary Ann know promptly, but no later than noon on Tuesday, April 24. If we are charged for no-shows, we may have to bill you. You may come for the discussion only.

Copies of the play may be found in local libraries, bookstores (call first) or ordered online from amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, dramatists.com, etc.

Footlights Sees *Dancing at Lughnasa* May 6 at Quotidian Theatre

We'll see *Dancing at Lughnasa* on **Sunday, May 6**, at 2 p.m. at Quotidian Theatre, in The Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh Street, Bethesda, MD 20815. Tickets for Footlights for this performance are \$15. Make reservations with Robin Larkin, 240-669-6300 or robinlarkin@comcast.net. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

See *Working – A Musical* on April 29 at Keegan Theatre

In March, Footlights discussed the musical adaptation of Studs Terkel's famous novel, *Working*. Keegan Theatre is producing *Working* April 14 - May 13. Footlights will see it on Sunday, April 29, 3 p.m. Tickets for our group are \$25. Reserve with Robin Larkin, 240-669-6300 or robinlarkin@comcast.net. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

Keegan Theatre performs at the Church Street Theater, 1742 Church Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036 – in the Dupont Circle area, between 17th & 18th and P & Q Streets, N.W. See www.keegantheatre.com for more information.

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

- Tuesday, April 24, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* with director of the Quotidian Theatre production, Craig Allen Mummey. Mark Gruenberg will moderate the discussion. At Alfio's. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren, 301-770-4572 or wjwren@rcn.com.
- Sunday, April 29, 3 p.m., performance of *Working – A Musical* at Keegan Theatre, 1742 Church St, NW, Washington, DC 20036. Tickets are \$25. Reserve with Robin Larkin, 240-669-6300 or robinlarkin@comcast.net. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.
- Sunday, May 6, 2 p.m., performance of *Dancing at Lughnasa* at Quotidian Theatre, 4508 Walsh Street, Bethesda, MD 20815. Tickets are \$15. Make reservations with Robin Larkin.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
5800 Nicholson Lane, # L07
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