

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MAY 2012

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss *The Whipping Man* on Tuesday, May 15

Footlights meets on May 15 to discuss *The Whipping Man* by **Matthew Lopez**. The story begins with General Lee's surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, in April of 1865 and with it the end of the Civil War. A badly-wounded Confederate officer returns to his home in Richmond, to find it in ruins, but with two former family slaves living there. It is the eve of Passover, the officer's family is Jewish (as are the slaves, as they customarily adopted the religion of the owner) and the three somehow manage a seder, with hardtack and raw collard greens as substitutes for matzo and bitter herbs, to celebrate the historical freeing of the Hebrew slaves from bondage in Egypt. The parallel with what had just happened in this country and the difficulty the three have in adjusting to the new reality, makes for riveting drama.

Playwright **Matthew Lopez**, who is from the Florida Panhandle and who says he actually is sort of an Episcopalian, grew up in a family of Civil War buffs, and was fascinated to learn there were at least 50,000 Jews in the South on the eve of the War and many were slave owners. He found that one synagogue actually limited membership to whites only in its constitution. Wondering how it might feel to be suddenly free after spending a lifetime as a slave, and then his realizing there was a Passover connection, combined to form the basis of his story.

His next play will be about a Puerto Rican family, many of them artists, living on the Upper West Side of New York City, who find their home will be demolished so that Lincoln Center can be built – ironically, as a center for the arts.

Whipping Man cast members **Alexander Strain** and **Mark Hairston** are our guest speakers for the May 15 dinner-discussion.

Alexander Strain (Captain Caleb deLeon) has just finished a revival of his amazing portrayal of Baruch Spinoza in Theatre J's *New Jerusalem*. His credits include *Angels in America*, *Mad Forest* and *Scorched* for Forum Theatre; *My Name Is Asher Lev* for Round House; *Bach in Leipzig* for Rep Stage; a romp as *Caligula* for WSC Avant Bard; and a turn as a very vain Devil in *Something Past In Front of the Light* for Longacre Lea. He directed *One Flea Spare* for Forum and in his spare time he does casting for them.

Mark Hairston (John), a D.C. native, trained at the Globe Shakespeare Theatre in London after receiving his MFA from Rutgers. He has appeared at Arena, Studio (*In the Red and Brown Water*), Woolly, Shakespeare Theatre (most recently the *Much Ado About Nothing* set in 1930s Cuba) and many other local and regional theaters.

Footlights will meet at **Casa Fiesta** for this dinner-discussion. The restaurant is at 4910 Wisconsin Avenue, in Tenleytown, between the Tenleytown and Friendship Heights metro stops. There is usually plenty of street parking if you drive. We will have the upstairs room. The buffet dinner is \$15, including tax and tip. We appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Cash or check, please – no credit cards. Beer and wine are available from the bar. Dinner is at 6:30 and the discussion begins at 7:30 and ends 9 - 9:30. **Make reservations** with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768 or Phylbo@verizon.net. If you have to cancel please let Phyllis know no later than noon on May 15.

The Whipping Man has been published. Order directly from Samuel French in print or e-play at http://www.samuel french.com/store/product_info.php/products_id/8388.

See *The Whipping Man* at Theater J

Theater J is offering Footlights members a \$10 discount on all tickets for all performances (excluding the opening). Use the code FOOTLIGHTS, online at theaterj.org or through 800-494-8497. The code cannot be used at the box office window, and all discount tickets must be purchased in advance. Theater J is located at 1529 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20036. For those who want to see the play after the dinner-discussion, we suggest Sunday, May 20, 3 p.m. Each Sunday matinee at Theater J features a postshow discussion.

Sleuth in June

Join us on **Monday, June 11** when we meet to discuss **Anthony Shaffer's** play *Sleuth* with our friend and most frequent Footlights guest, **Jim Petosa**, who is directing *Sleuth*, his last assignment at Olney Theatre – sadly for us.

Anthony Shaffer (1926-2001) was fascinated by crime and detective stories, games, game-playing, and riddles, as was his good friend Stephen Sondheim (on whom the elder of the two characters in the play is said to be loosely based). *Sleuth* has just two characters – an immensely wealthy, vain, and successful mystery writer, and his next door neighbor (whom he has discovered is his wife's lover). They contrive to keep the audience puzzled, misled, and amused for the duration of this award-winning work. The plot involves a jewel robbery, which is supposed to end in a perfect murder, but which becomes a cat-and-mouse game as the two try to outthink each other.

Sleuth ran for eight years on the London stage and was a sensation when it reached Broadway in 1970. It won a Tony for Best Play, became a film in 1972 with Laurence Olivier as the writer and Michael Caine as the lover – screenplay by Shaffer – and then was filmed again in 2007 with Michael

Caine as the writer and Jude Law as the lover. This time the screenplay was written by Harold Pinter.

Shaffer had already been a successful lawyer, and also an ad executive, when his twin brother Peter, a playwright – *Royal Hunt of the Sun*, *Equus*, *Amadeus* – persuaded him to try his hand at writing a play instead of another TV commercial. The result was *Sleuth*. This play has probably been performed somewhere in the world every day since he wrote it. Both brothers have written successful screenplays for films, and they collaborated on several detective novels, under the pen name of ‘Peter Anthony.’

Our speaker **Jim Petosa** came to Olney in 1985, when it was essentially still a summer theater. He will leave Olney Theatre Center in August of this year with a new main stage, an intimate theater lab, an outdoor amphitheatre for summer performances, housing for visiting artists, a ten-month schedule of plays, and money in the bank. Jim has been the artistic and educational leader of the Boston University School of Theatre since 2002, and was recently named Artistic Director of New Repertory Theatre in Watertown, Massachusetts. In his years in our area he has been Artist-in-Residence at George Washington University, and Guest Artist at Georgetown, Wolf Trap, and Smithsonian. He has

directed plays for Woolly Mammoth, Theatre J, Round House, Studio, Rep Stage, and others. He has served as a faculty member at Catholic University (his alma mater) and been a Visiting Professor at Middlebury College in Vermont.

Jim last spoke to Footlights in June of 2011, when he was directing *Opus* at Olney. He shared stagecraft secrets about such problems as how to make a fake prop violin look so real inside and out that when the stage directions call for the ‘priceless’ instrument to be smashed on stage the audience will gasp in shock. Which they did!

Make reservations for June 11 with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768 or Phylbo@verizon.net. We’ll meet at Alfio’s, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Copies of *Sleuth* may be found in local libraries, bookstores (call first) or ordered online from amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com, dramatists.com, etc.

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

- 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, 240-669-6300 or robinlarkin@comcast.net. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.
- Tuesday, May 15, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *The Whipping Man* by Matthew Lopez, with cast actors **Alexander Strain** and **Mark Hairston**. At **Casa Fiesta**, 4910 Wisconsin Ave, NW, Washington, DC. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768 or Phylbo@verizon.net.
- Sunday, May 20, 3 p.m., performance of *The Whipping Man* at Theater J, 1529 16th Street NW, Washington DC 20036. Use the code FOOTLIGHTS, online at theaterj.org or through 800-494-8497 for a \$10 discount per ticket. Note: \$10 discount is applicable to any performance.
- Monday, June 11, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of Anthony Shaffer’s *Sleuth* with director **Jim Petosa**. At **Alfio’s**, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, 301 986-1768 or Phylbo@verizon.net.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**

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