

from the FOOTLIGHTS

NOVEMBER 2013

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

November 18: Footlights to Discuss World Premiere of *Our Suburb* with Theater J’s Ari Roth

Thornton Wilder’s classic *Our Town* sets a high bar for any playwright who aspires to discuss the same themes. (Footlights discussed *Our Town* in November 1997.) That’s what **Darrah Cloud** tries with her *Our Suburb*, a world premiere Theater J is putting on – and that’s what Footlights will discuss with Theater J Artistic Director **Ari Roth** on **Monday, November 18**. But there’s a twist.

Wilder set his play in the mythical and typical New England town of Grover’s Corners sometime in the late 1800s. But Cloud and director Judith Ivey work with a fictional story set in a very real suburb and time and place – Skokie, Illinois, in 1977 – and with a national event hanging over its head: A planned American Nazi Party march through what was, and is, a heavily Jewish suburb. (Jewish Chicagoans laughingly call Skokie “the world’s largest *shtetl*.”)

That makes Skokie anything but a typical suburb. And the romance between two Skokie teenagers, Ricky and Thornton, one Christian and the other Jewish, adds an extra layer of complexity and discussions around their respective dinner tables.

The romance builds throughout the play, and the march and tensions over it enter in the second half. Those tensions extended beyond Skokie: The American Civil Liberties Union, true to its charter and purpose, went to court to defend the right of the neo-Nazis to march – and the Illinois ACLU chapter, which also had a heavy Jewish leadership, split bitterly right down the middle over the move. The question of defending the neo-Nazis raises a second question: What is hate speech and should it come under U.S. Constitutional protections of freedom of speech?

Catherine Spreen, one of 125 students who saw a staged reading of part of *Our Suburb*, during the Kennedy Center’s Page to Stage festival earlier this year, summarized the play in a blog commentary:

“*Our Suburb* demonstrates the struggles of daily life, like choosing a college, dealing with gender or racial inequality, and the memories of the past that are still haunting in the present. The play takes place in Skokie, a suburb with a rich history of Jewish culture and an awareness of the 1st Amendment and the possibility of neo-Nazis assembling. Although Judaism is an important component, and also adds humor, there is a lack of focus on the neo-Nazi threats. The performance instead focuses

on young love, the divisions existing in a community, and the repetition of ordinary life.”

Footlights will discuss the play with Ari on Monday, November 18, at Alfio’s Trattoria, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, Maryland, on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, a short walk from the north entrance of the Friendship Heights metro stop on the red line. Street parking is limited if you drive, but valet parking is free at Alfio’s. Dinner is at 6:30; the discussion begins at 7:30 and ends at 9. Mark Gruenberg will moderate our discussion.

The all-inclusive cost for dinner and discussion is \$20. Dinner is a green salad, choice among six entrées, and spaghetti, green beans, bread and butter, ice cream, and tea or coffee. Alfio’s salad bar may be substituted for the entrée if you wish. Cash or check – no credit cards, please. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar. You may come for the discussion only, for just \$5.

Make your reservations with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768, or phylbo@verizon.net. Reservations and cancellations will be accepted until noon of the day of the discussion. If you must cancel please let Phyllis know as soon as possible since this is a seated dinner and the restaurant needs an accurate count for the place settings.

Read *Our Suburb*. A working edition of the play is available only to Footlights members planning to attend the November 18 discussion. E-mail Robin Larkin, robinlarkin@comcast.net for your copy. Please respect copyright restrictions and do not forward to others.

See *Our Suburb*. Theater J will produce the play December 19 – January 12. Footlights will see it on a date to be announced.

See O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* November 17

Footlights sees Eugene O’Neill’s *The Iceman Cometh* with post-show discussion included at Quotidian Theatre 2 p.m. Sunday, November 17. Our tickets are \$15. This production is gathering rave reviews, so do not delay. Reserve with Robin, 240-669-6300 or robinlarkin@comcast.net, and send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

Quotidian Theatre performs at the Writers Center, 4508 Walsh Street, in Bethesda, just off Wisconsin Avenue and a few blocks south of the Bethesda metro stop. There is a public parking lot across the street from the Center (parking is free on Sunday) and there are many restaurants close by.

December 2: Serge Seiden, Ted van Griethuysen Discuss Richard Nelson's *The Apple Family Plays*

Footlights welcomes back Studio Theatre's **Serge Seiden** – he is directing *The Apple Family Plays* – and actor **Ted van Griethuysen** to our **Monday, December 2** dinner-discussion at Alfio's. Longtime Footlights member Dorothy Marschak will moderate our discussion. Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

Playwright Richard Nelson is familiar to Footlights as the Tony Award-winning playwright/adaptor of *James Joyce's The Dead*. He has now written a series of four plays – one each year since 2010 – about the fictional, liberal Apple family of Rhinebeck, NY. From New York's Public Theater: "The compelling plays are about family, politics, change, and the way we live today. They resonate with remarkable immediacy and relevance. Each of these plays originally premiered on the night on which it is set.

In *That Hopey Changey Thing*, the Apples reflect on the state of their family and discuss memory, manners and politics as polls close on mid-term election night 2010 and a groundswell of conservative sentiment flips Congress on its head. In *Sweet and Sad*, a family brunch stirs up discussions of loss, remembrance and a decade of change."

See *That Hopey Changey Thing* with Footlights at 3 p.m. Saturday, December 7. Tickets are \$35. Postshow discussion included. Add ***Sweet and Sad*** at 7 p.m. for \$30. (Whole Foods box supper available between performances. Each play is roughly 90 minutes.) Reserve with Robin Larkin, 240-669-6300 or robinlarkin@comcast.net.

About Footlights

To learn more about Footlights, visit our website at <http://www.footlightsdc.org>. To subscribe to our e-list, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or simply e-mail footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

Calendar

- **Sunday, November 17**, 2 p.m. performance of *The Iceman Cometh* at Quotidian Theatre, The Writers Center, 4508 Walsh Street, Bethesda, MD. Tickets are \$15 and include the post-show discussion. Reserve with Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300. Send your check to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.
- **Monday, November 18**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Our Suburb* by Darrah Cloud with **Ari Roth**. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Dinner including discussion is \$20; discussion only is \$5. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- **Monday, December 2**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *The Apple Family Plays* by Richard Nelson. Our guests are **Serge Seiden**, director of the two plays, and actor **Ted van Griethuysen**. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.
- **Saturday, December 7**, 3 p.m. performance of *That Hopey Changey Thing* at Studio Theatre, 1501 14th St, NW, DC. Tickets are \$35 and include postshow discussion. Add ***Sweet and Sad*** at 7 p.m. for \$30. Reserve with and send checks to Robin.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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