

from the FOOTLIGHTS

APRIL 2014

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

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Footlights to Discuss August Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* on April 17

Footlights turns its attention to another of **August Wilson’s** Pittsburgh Cycle plays, *The Piano Lesson*, on Thursday, April 17.

The Pittsburgh Cycle is Wilson’s series of ten plays that charts the African-American experience throughout the 20th century. Each of the plays in the cycle was set in a different decade of the 20th century, and all but *Ma Rainey* took place in the impoverished but vibrant African-American Hill District of Pittsburgh, where Mr. Wilson was born. *The Piano Lesson* – winner of the 1990 Pulitzer Prize for Drama – is set in the 30s.

In an article about his cycle for The Times in 2000, Mr. Wilson wrote, “I wanted to place this culture onstage in all its richness and fullness and to demonstrate its ability to sustain us in all areas of human life and endeavor and through profound moments of our history in which the larger society has thought less of us than we have thought of ourselves.”

Frank Rich, reviewing the NY production writes: “*The Piano Lesson* is joyously an African-American play: it has its own spacious poetry, its own sharp angle on a nation’s history, its own metaphorical idea of drama and its own palpable ghosts that roar right through the upstairs window of the household where the action unfolds. Like other Wilson plays, *The Piano Lesson* seems to sing even when it is talking. But it isn’t all of America that is singing. The central fact of black American life – the long shadow of slavery – transposes the voices of Mr. Wilson’s characters, and of the indelible actors who inhabit them, to a key that rattles history and shakes the audience on both sides of the racial divide.”

Set in Pittsburgh in 1936, brother and sister Boy Willie and Berniece clash over whether or not they should sell an ancient piano that was exchanged for their great grandfather’s wife and son in the days of slavery. Willie dreams of buying the same Mississippi land that his ancestors once worked as slaves, but in order to raise the capital for this purchase, he must convince his sister to part with a family heirloom, a piano that is both a reminder of the family’s enslaved past and a tribute to their survival. Berniece insists that the piano with its carvings of their ancestors embodying the family’s joy and heartache will stay in her home.

Footlights is very pleased to welcome *Piano Lesson* director **Jamil Jude** and **Jason King Jones**, Associate Artistic Director at Olney Theatre, as our guests. Footlights member Pat Peyser will moderate our discussion.

We will meet at Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Ave NW, in DC between Fessenden and Ellicott Streets. Dinner is a buffet selection of Salvadoran food. \$20 covers the cost of dinner and discussion. Dinner is at 6:30; the discussion begins at 7:30. You may come for the discussion only for \$5.

Make reservations with Mary Ann Wren, wjwren@erols.com or 301-770-4572. Reservations and cancellations will be accepted until noon of the day of the discussion. If you must cancel, please let Mary Ann know as soon as possible since the restaurant needs an accurate count.

Read it. Copies of *The Piano Lesson* are readily available in libraries and bookstores.

See it. Olney Theatre Center is producing *The Piano Lesson* May 7 - June 1. Footlights will see it on **Saturday, May 24, 1:45 p.m.** The performance is in the intimate Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab. Olney Theatre Center is at 2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Road, Olney, MD.

Tickets are \$27.50 and include a post-show discussion. Reserve with Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300. Send your check to Footlights, c/o Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Ln, #L-07, Rockville, MD 20852.

May 12: Freud’s Last Session

Once upon a time (that is in about the first two-thirds of the 20th century) there was a man thought to be an intellectual giant, a man thought to have created a new, provoking and immensely helpful way of looking into the depths of human beings. His name is Sigmund Freud. There was also a scholar in the 1930s who knew some medieval history, could write some science fiction and was known to some handfuls of men and women as a committed Anglican willing to boldly defend the faith. His name is C.S. Lewis.

They never met. Why should they? Would they have had much to say to each other? The author of the play we will be discussing Tuesday, May 13 thinks so. He has created a drama imagining they met at the outbreak of World War II and simply discussed life and death, the

value of religious faith or its irrelevance to living, dealing with incurable, killing diseases, and the like.

And we read and see the play at a time when Freud's stature has been cut down, his reputation shredded and Lewis' work as a children's author celebrated in much of the world and his Christian outlook admired by fundamentalists.

Dealing with the great ideas embedded in these two men before the great reversal in their fortunes will be **Rick Foucheux** and **Todd Scofield**. Rick is one of the busiest actors on Washington's stages for the good reason he is one of the best. We are fortunate that he also has agreed to be one of our most frequent speakers, giving us insights into the craft and history of theater. Todd Scofield will be talking to us for the first time, shortly after his part in the acclaimed revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest* at the Shakespeare Theatre.

Calendar

- **Thursday, April 17**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *The Piano Lesson* by **August Wilson**. Olney Theatre Center's Associate Artistic Director **Jason King Jones** and director **Jamil Jude** are our guests. At Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Washington, DC. Buffet dinner including discussion is \$20; discussion only is \$5. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren, wjwren@erols.com or 301-770-4572.
- **Monday, May 12**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Freud's Last Session* by **Mark St. Germain**. Our guests are **Rick Foucheux** and **Todd Scofield**. 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.
- **Saturday, May 24**, 1:45 p.m. performance of *The Piano Lesson* by **August Wilson** at Olney Theatre Center, in the Mulitz-Gudelsky Theatre Lab, 2001 Olney-Sandy Spring Road, Olney, MD 20832. Tickets are \$27.50 and include a post-show discussion. Reserve with Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300. Send your check to Footlights, c/o Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Ln, Apt. L-07, Rockville, MD 20852.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L-07
Rockville, MD 20852

The play by **Mark St. Germain** will be produced at Theater J May 14 - June 29. We will meet at Alfio's, 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.

The all-inclusive cost for dinner and discussion is \$20. . You may come for the discussion only for just \$5.

Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

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.