

from the FOOTLIGHTS

JUNE-JULY 2014

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

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June 24: Footlights to Discuss Noël Coward's *Private Lives*

On Tuesday, June 24, at Alfio's, Footlights will discuss *Private Lives*, Noël Coward's fast-talking, manners-breaking comedy. Originally produced for the stage in 1930, Coward's play makes its Shakespeare Theatre Company debut.

Our guest for the evening will be **Drew Lichtenberg**. Currently the Literary Associate and Resident Dramaturg at the Shakespeare Theatre Company, Drew holds a MFA in Dramaturgy and Dramatic Criticism from Yale Drama School. He teaches at the Catholic University of America where he is a lecturer in Dramatic Structures and Dramaturgy. He has appeared as a guest teaching artist at Georgetown University, George Washington University, Carnegie Mellon University and the ACTF Festival at the Kennedy Center. He has also served on funding panels for the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture (Cleveland), the D.C. Commission for the Arts and Humanities and the Baltimore Cultural Alliance. You may read his informative essays on his blog, <http://drewlichtenberg.com>. We are delighted to have him join us and share his insights into the life of author Noël Coward and his play, *Private Lives*. Stephanie Olshan will moderate our discussion.

Playwright and actor Noël Coward prospered through the worst of the Great Depression, enjoying a lifestyle most people could only dream about. A dedicated traveler, he went on a series of extended journeys to escape the pressures of show business. During one 1929 stay in Singapore, he awoke with a mental image of longtime friend Gertrude Lawrence in a white gown. Within a matter of days, he finished the first draft of *Private Lives* which proved to be a highlight in both of their careers. Coward and Lawrence co-starred with a then unknown Laurence Olivier, playing to packed houses in both London and New York. To avoid boredom, Noël set a policy of playing no more than three months of performances in London, and the same in New York. No matter how producers begged for longer commitments, he stuck to these limitations for the rest of his career.

Private Lives is a timeless comedy about Elyot Chase and Amanda Prynne. Glamorous, rich, reckless – and divorced. Five years later, their love for one another is unexpectedly rekindled when they take adjoining suites of a French hotel while honeymooning with their new spouses, Sybil and Victor. Designed as a triumphant vehicle for Coward and

Gertrude Lawrence, this insightful look at the war between the sexes has been revived periodically by some of the biggest names in the business. For several years, the unlikely casting of Tallulah Bankhead as Amanda packed houses all across the country. The now legendary teaming of Richard Burton and Liz Taylor in the 1970s was a glamorous fiasco, and many will recall the "less than dignified" Joan Collins tour that snuck in and out of London a while back.

July 7: *Gidion's Knot* by Johnna Adams

The Gordian knot in myth could only be untangled by someone destined to be the future king of Asia. Alexander the Great solved the problem by pulling out his sword and slicing through the knot – and did indeed go on to rule half the world. Many problems are not so easily solved.

Johnna Adams's play *Gidion's Knot* is 80 minutes of trying to unravel another puzzle: was fifth grader Gidion a young genius whose bloodthirsty saga of revenge against his teachers was sheer poetry and something to make his literary mother proud, or a troubled kid badly in need of help before he did something more violent than simply write about rape and disembowelment? The teacher chose to suspend him from school and the child committed suicide.

Gidion's grieving but somewhat aggressive mother and his teacher talk about this at a parent-teacher conference, which takes place as scheduled even though the teacher certainly did not expect the mother to keep the appointment and is obviously extremely uncomfortable.

Although Texas native Johnna Adams has written more than 20 plays she says she is still considered an "emerging playwright" and does wonder when she will ever "emerge." Perhaps this play – which had its world premiere just across the Potomac River at the Contemporary American Theatre Festival in Shepherdstown, WV in 2012 and has been produced since then at theaters all over the country – will be the spark.

Ms. Adams says the play was inspired by the Columbine massacre and the more than 40 school shootings which have happened since then. Forum Theatre has already addressed the problem once this season with Steve Yockey's dazzling *Pluto* in which time stands still for the mother of a school shooter as she tries to deal with the tragedy.

Join us on Monday, July 7, at Alfio's, when our guest speakers will discuss the play, and try to help untangle the knots: was Gidion bullied or was he the aggressor, should the teacher have realized that this child was truly disturbed and spent time trying to help him even at the expense of the other children in her class, and why was the mother so oblivious to his problems. (Why was that loaded gun so handy, and why did Gidion turn it on himself rather than on his schoolmates?)

Our guest speakers will be **Michael Dove**, co-founder and artistic director of Forum Theatre; **Cristina Alicea**, who will direct the play; and actresses **Caroline Clay** and **Katy Carkuff** who will bring this strange parent-teacher conference to life. Mary Ann Wren will moderate the discussion.

Reservations and meeting location for June 24 and July 7 dinner-discussions. We will meet at Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD, 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. Dinner is a green salad, choice among six entrées, and spaghetti, green beans, bread and butter, ice cream, and

Calendar

- **Tuesday, June 24**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Private Lives* by **Noël Coward**. STC Literary Associate **Drew Lichtenberg** is our guest. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Dinner including discussion is \$20; discussion only is \$5. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren, wjwren@erols.com or 301-770-4572.
- **Monday, July 7**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Gidion's Knot* by **Johnna Adams**. Guests are **Michael Dove**, co-founder and artistic director of Forum Theatre; **Cristina Alicea**, director, and actresses **Caroline Clay** and **Katy Carkuff**. At Alfio's. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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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 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 the plays. *Private Lives* is readily available in libraries or ordered online. Samuel French is the publisher. *Gidion's Knot* is published by Dramatists Play Service. Amazon has copies also.

See the plays. *Private Lives* is currently at the Shakespeare Theatre Company's Lansburgh Theatre venue, through July 13. *Gidion's Knot* is a co-production of Forum Theatre and NextStop Theatre. It will play at Forum (Silver Spring) in July and at NextStop (Herndon) from August 28 - September 14.

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@yahoogleroups.com.