

from the FOOTLIGHTS

DECEMBER 2014

"Life shouldn't be all work and no plays." <http://www.footlightsdc.org>

December 15: Chekhov Re-imagined

If someone asked you to name the trendiest playwright in this area right now, chances are **Anton Chekhov** would not pop immediately into your mind, but consider this: Metro Stage just finished a run of *Three Sisters*, Woolly Mammoth recently staged Aaron Posner's *Stupid Fucking Bird* (twice!) and Theater J will soon open Posner's *Life Sucks (or the Present Ridiculous)* playing January 14-February 15. Arena Stage will present Christopher Durang's *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* (April 3-May 3) and Round House is doing Annie Baker's updated *Uncle Vanya* (April 8-May 3).

What is it about Chekhov's plays and the characters that inhabit them that invites updated versions and spinoffs? Footlights thought it might be interesting and fun to talk about this sudden Chekhov explosion. To help us sort all this out, Footlights welcomes Washington Post theater critic **Nelson Pressley** to our dinner-discussion at Alfio's on **Monday, December 15**. Mary Ann Wren will moderate.

"Medicine is my lawful wife and literature is my mistress. When I get tired of one I spend the night with the other." – Anton Chekhov

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) was a physician, dramaturg and author who is considered to be among the greatest writers of short stories in history. He spent most of his professional life treating the poor and relied on his writing for income. He wrote articles for newspapers, short stories, and of course for the theater. Four of his plays - *The Seagull*, *The Cherry Orchard*, *Three Sisters*, and *Uncle Vanya* - are still staples for every theater company.

Since a majority of the current offerings are based on *Uncle Vanya*, as were such past productions as *Vanya on 16th Street* and many films (the most famous was probably Louis Malle's *Vanya on 42nd Street*), we will focus on that play and suggest attendees re-read it and come with questions.

Nelson Pressley has been a theater critic for the Washington Post since 1999. His multiple college degrees are in English as well as theater history. He was once asked what he would do if he ever felt burned out as a critic. His answer: perhaps try his hand at playwriting. Meanwhile, his book *American Playwriting and the Anti-Political Prejudice* has just been published, and he continues to review play after play for the Post,

including WSC/Avant Bard's *Visible Language* at Gallaudet, which 28 Footlights members recently saw on our last group theater trip.

Mark your calendars now for **Monday, December 15**. 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. (Note: if you know you must leave before 9, please be sure to sit near the door, so you can exit quietly!)

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 reservations with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. 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 the restaurant needs an accurate count. We may be charged for no-shows and would expect you to cover the cost of your meal.

Read *Uncle Vanya*. Chekhov's plays are easily found in most bookstores and libraries in the area, and also online (see http://www.online-literature.com/anton_chekhov/). If you are curious about the Durang *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike* which Arena will stage, and the Annie Baker adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* which Round House will use, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and Samuel French have copies.

January 13: *The Widow Lincoln*

Join us on **Tuesday, January 13** at Alfio's for dinner and discussion of *The Widow Lincoln* by playwright **James Still** (*The Heavens Are Hung in Black*). Ford's Theatre will present the world premiere of *The Widow Lincoln* January 23-February 22.

Mary Todd Lincoln sparked more controversy than any First Lady before or since. Set during the weeks following Abraham Lincoln's assassination, *The Widow Lincoln* portrays a very human Mary in the aftermath of

her husband's death as she mourns the post-war life they will never share. Playwright James Still has created an emotional drama that explores the tenacious attitudes and heartbreaking grief of the maligned "Mrs. President."

Our guest will be **Patrick Pearson**, Director of Artistic Programming at Ford's Theatre. Stephanie Olshan will moderate the discussion. Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

Read *The Widow Lincoln*. The script will be available electronically in mid-December for those reserving for the dinner-discussion. Contact Robin Larkin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300.

Please observe copyright restrictions, and do not distribute copies to others. Read the play and join the discussion!

See *The Widow Lincoln*. Footlights will attend the January 31, 2 p.m. matinee at Ford's Theatre. Our ticket price is \$46, due by December 29. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L-07, Rockville, MD 20852.

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

- **Monday, December 15**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion with **Nelson Pressley** on **Chekhov Re-imagined** – the DC area's upcoming invasion of plays based on *Uncle Vanya*. 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.
- **Tuesday, January 13**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of **James Still's *The Widow Lincoln*** with **Patrick Pearson**, Director of Artistic Programming at Ford's Theatre. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.
- **Saturday, January 31**, 2 p.m. performance of ***The Widow Lincoln*** at Ford's Theatre, 511 Tenth St, NW, Washington, DC 20004. Tickets are \$46. Send your check by December 29, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L-07, Rockville, MD 20852.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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