

from the FOOTLIGHTS

JANUARY 2015

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss *The Widow Lincoln* by James Still, January 13

The Widow Lincoln imagines what happened in the White House, in Mary Todd Lincoln's rooms, in the weeks after her husband's assassination, when she is half crazed with grief and believes she is actually talking to her dressmaker and confidant Elizabeth Keckley, and to the spiritualist whom she has so often consulted, and to England's Queen Victoria from whom she has received a touching note of sympathy.

Mrs. Lincoln has watched three of her four children die, has endured endless criticism as First Lady for being both a silly female entirely too frivolous and careless with money, but also as being too involved with politics and weighty matters best left to males. She has been accused of being a Confederate spy, although her own Kentucky family considered her a turncoat, and several of her brothers were killed in the War. She could possibly have been bi-polar, but we know she suffered a severe head injury when she was thrown from a carriage – an attempt on her husband's life which failed. At some point she may indeed have lost touch with reality, probably when her beloved husband was shot as she sat next to him holding his hand at Ford's Theatre, April 14, 1865.

Mary Lincoln remained mostly bedridden in the White House for the next 5 weeks. She did not attend any of the martyred president's funerals, either in Washington, along the route of the funeral train, or the final one on May 4 in Springfield. Finally, on May 22, wearing black, Mary walked down the White House stairs for the last time. She would never be the same again.

Playwright James Still's earlier commissioned play, *The Heavens Are Hung in Black* reopened the newly renovated Ford's Theatre to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. In anticipation of the sesquicentennial of the assassination of President Lincoln, Ford's Theatre again commissioned James Still to write for their stage. This time the playwright chose to write a play about Mary Todd Lincoln in the days and weeks following Lincoln's assassination.

James Still is a three-time nominee for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Still is collaborating as he did on *The Heavens* with director Steven Rayne.

The world premiere of *The Widow Lincoln* begins previews at Ford's Theatre on January 23, with performances through February 22. See

<http://www.fords.org/home/media-center/releases-and-updates/fords-2015-widow-lincoln-premiere> for more information.

Our dinner-discussion guest is **Patrick Pearson**, Director of Artistic Programming at Ford's Theatre. Mr. Pearson, for the last three years, has played an integral role in the successful planning and production of challenging seasons at Ford's. A native Texan, he earned a BFA in Musical Theatre from Sam Houston State University and an MBA in Directing from California State University, Fullerton. Stephanie Olshan will moderate our discussion.

Please join us on **Tuesday, January 13**. 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 the script. An electronic copy of *The Widow Lincoln* has been promised. We will post a note on our Footlightsdc yahoo list when it is available. Contact Robin Larkin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300 for an e-copy. Please remember to honor the playwright's copyrights on the material. Do not distribute to others.

See *The Widow Lincoln*. Please note: we are not handling group ticket sales for this play. Tickets are available through Ticketmaster. There are still some performances listed on Goldstar.

Uncle—Vanya Life Sucks (or the Present Ridiculous)

Aaron Posner's *Life Sucks* is loosely based on Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. It opens at Theater J January 14 and runs through February 15. It is only one of the *Vanya*-influenced plays coming up early in 2015. Footlights discussed this Chekhov explosion last month with Nelson Pressley. We won't see *Life Sucks* as a group, but Theater J has offered us a discount price of \$35 for all of the Sunday matinees of the run. Use the code FOOTLIGHTS when you buy your tickets. There may still be tickets on Goldstar, although Sunday matinees were not included. Generally, Theater J holds a postshow discussion following Sunday matinees.

Reflection

Why do we go to the theater? As our good friend Jim Petosa said on one of his many visits with Footlights – (I'm paraphrasing; I could not begin to replicate Jim's turn of words.) – we get to live other lives and contrast those experiences with our own. We get to explore ideas, other ways of thinking that challenge our own views. Perhaps we see the world in a slightly new light.

Calendar

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, 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.

Our own local theater world has been shaken by recent events leading to Ari Roth's departure from Theater J after nurturing it through 18 years into a first-rate presence. We've had nearly as many Footlights visits from Ari over the years as from Jim. Always, we've come away from those discussions with that "new light," and with a deeply satisfying, far-reaching exploration of challenging ideas.

Our hope looking forward is that we continue to experience meaningful theater from our many friends at Theater J. We also eagerly await the next occasion when we welcome Ari back to Footlights – this time to tell us about his new venture, Mosaic Theater Company, and to explore one of the plays for his first season.

2015 should be a very good year. May it be good for all of you.

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.

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