

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MARCH 2015

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

March 25: A Footlights Conversation with Ed Gero on *The Originalist*

In what is a first for Footlights, not to mention the U.S. Supreme Court, Footlights will host a dinner-discussion about a play starring a current, nationally known political – he wouldn't like the word, but it's accurate – figure, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Famed D.C. actor **Ed Gero**, who plays Scalia in **John Strand's** world premiere, *The Originalist*, will be our guest speaker on Wednesday, March 25 at Alfio's.

Scalia, of course, is now the longest-serving justice on the High Court and the intellectual and emotional leader of its conservative bloc. His views on the U.S. Constitution and the law are colorful, interesting, challenging, sometimes irritating and even operatic, which is no great surprise because he's an opera fan. He holds to the philosophy that the court must use the Constitution's "original intent" to decide whether a case or a law stands or falls. But his incisive, pungent and often funny questioning from the bench is a hallmark of Supreme Court oral argument. His written opinions are the same way, especially his dissents.

Strand sets up the play as an intellectual jousting match between Scalia and one of his law clerks, a young progressive woman who graduated from Harvard Law School. That's no great surprise, either. According to a report in Slate, he has hired liberal clerks and loves the intellectual debate with them. And his best friend on the court is fellow opera buff Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, leader of the court's liberal bloc. Seeing the two in action on the bench is a treat (unfortunately, she's not in the play).

Ed Gero, of course, is one of the most noted and best actors in the D.C. area, if not the nation. Playing a range of stage roles from King Lear onwards, Shakespearean and not, he has immersed himself in the Scalia role – attending oral arguments, reading Scalia's writings and The Federalist Papers, and, after all that preparation, meeting the justice for lunch, several times. Slate reports they're now on a first-name basis.

A fourteen-time nominee and four-time recipient of the Helen Hayes Award for his work in Shakespeare, contemporary and musical theatre, Gero has played at least one other political figure: President Richard Nixon, in Round House Theatre's *Nixon's Nixon*. He last appeared at Arena Stage as Mark Rothko in *Red*.

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.

Seeing *The Originalist*

Arena Stage is producing the world premiere of *The Originalist* from March 6 to April 26.

Reading *The Originalist*

We do not have copies of the script available at this time. It is a new play and unpublished. There are many recent articles about the play and Ed Gero's preparation for playing Justice Scalia. Visit Arena's website, The Economist, NPR, Slate and Salon. Copies of Scalia's opinions are on the Supreme Court's website, and possibly some of his outside speeches, too.

April 28: John W. Lowell's *The Letters*

How do smart, new plays get to DC? A Chicago friend of MetroStage's artistic director, Carolyn Griffin, called her because she loved *The Letters*.

The critics loved it, too: "In his riveting, airtight, two-person drama, *The Letters*, playwright John W. Lowell captures the insidious mix of manipulation, terror and hypocrisy that is at the root of all totalitarian regimes" (Chicago Sun-Times).

Luckily this tension plays out in a small space: “At the start of the action, we meet Anna, some kind of editorial apparatchik within some unspecified Soviet bureaucracy, whose job seems to be censoring the correspondence of others. Anna has been called into the office of her boss, The Director. It’s not clear why” (Chicago Tribune). We can imagine that actors Susan Lynskey and Michael Russotto will keep us on the edge of our seats.

Footlights will discuss *The Letters* with director **John Vreeke** and **Carolyn Griffin** on Tuesday, April 28 at Alfio’s. Possibly the actors will join us, too.

We will see *The Letters* at MetroStage on Saturday, May 16, matinee performance. Please mark your calendars!

After you sign up with Phyllis Bodin for the April 28 discussion at Alfio’s, contact Robin Larkin,

robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300, if you would like to receive an electronic copy of *The Letters* script.

August Wilson Revisited

We are very sorry our February discussion of August Wilson’s *King Hedley II* had to be canceled due to weather conditions. We are considering a Wilson retrospective program with Dr. Shannon and local actors who have played roles in Wilson plays, to be scheduled later this year.

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

- **Wednesday, March 25**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *The Originalist* by John Strand. Guest: Actor **Ed Gero**. 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, April 28**, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *The Letters* by John W. Lowell. Guests: Director **John Vreeke** and MetroStage Producing Artistic Director **Carolyn Griffin**. At Alfio’s. Reserve with Phyllis.
- **Saturday, May 16**, matinee production of *The Letters* at MetroStage. Details to follow.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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