

from the FOOTLIGHTS

JUNE 2016

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

June 8: Dinner-discussion of Branden Jacobs-Jenkins' *An Octoroon*

It takes guts and gumption to satirize anything about race in America. Touch on slavery and you've set up a powder keg just waiting for a spark to explode. While humor and satire can be tools to explore deep-seated and painful topics, it's a delicate balance. Renowned musical creators Kander and Ebb were nearly run out of town for their *Scottsboro Boys* that I caught in Philadelphia before it opened on the west coast. Robert O'Hara's *Insurrection: Holding History*, turned from slapstick to a final scene that wiped me out—I couldn't move, couldn't cry, could only sit and shudder. We'll soon see what the Washington D.C. metro audience has to say about the long awaited satire *An Octoroon* at Woolly Mammoth, celebrating nearly 40 years as one of the most cutting edge theaters in town.

The premise for *An Octoroon* actually comes from a popular 1859 melodrama *The Octoroon* by Dion Boucicault (same year as John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry). Daring young playwright **Branden Jacobs-Jenkins** keeps many of the same characters, and even much of the dialog of the original in re-creating the plot of forbidden love between a white Southerner and a racially mixed slave. The refashioned play includes an extensive prologue where a black and a white playwright from the past and present discuss the challenges of presenting a play about race and slavery. The staging is unusually stylistic with characters falling into and out of slapstick and stereotype exploring uncomfortable realities about the dreadful institution that mark us to this day.

The play won an Obie and acclaim in New York, in addressing "the complexity of American identities and their unresolvable connection to our legacy of slavery and genocide..." (HowlRound.com). While the country grapples with recent wounds of racial unrest, and political rhetoric fans the flames of distrust and even hatred, it's a strange time to start using facepaint and mimicking makeshift slave auctions to make a point. Or it might be the best time to take a long hard look and deal with it.

Kirsten Bowen, dramaturg for the show will join us for the discussion. She is Woolly's Literary Director, where she has worked since 2013. In that time she has dramaturged the plays *The Nether*, *Guards at the Taj*, *Women Laughing Alone with Salad*, *Lights Rise on Grace*, *Cherokee*, *Marie*

Antoinette, *The Totalitarians*, *We Are Proud to Present*, and Mr. Jacobs-Jenkins' first play with Woolly Mammoth, *Appropriate*. Prior to her time at Woolly she was the Associate Literary Director for Signature Theatre in New York City.

An Octoroon is published and is available to purchase and review.
— *Debbie M. Jackson*, moderator

Please join us at Alfio's on **Wednesday, June 8**, for our dinner-discussion of this fascinating play. Alfio's is located at 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 available 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 try 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, please – no credit cards. Wine, beer, cocktails are available from the bar. You may come for the discussion only for just \$5.

Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin, at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. Reservations and/or cancellations will be accepted until noon on June 8. If you must cancel, please let Phyllis know as soon as possible since the restaurant needs a complete count. This is a seated, table-service dinner, not a buffet. We may be charged for no-shows and expect you to cover our cost.

See *An Octoroon* at Woolly Mammoth with Footlights on **Saturday, June 11 at 3 p.m.**, with a talk-back discussion following. Tickets for Footlights for this performance only are \$30. Use the code **6659** to get your tickets - call 202-393-3939 or online at ticketing.woollymammoth.net.

About Footlights

To subscribe to our e-list, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or e-mail footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To learn more about Footlights, visit our website at <http://www.footlightsdc.org>.

*July 11: Dinner–discussion of Anton Chekhov’s
The Lady with the Little Dog, adapted
by Stephanie Mumford*

"Reading Chekhov was just like the angels singing to me."
-- Eudora Welty, 1977

Footlights has discussed a few of Chekhov’s famous plays – *The Cherry Orchard*, *The Three Sisters*, and most recently, *Uncle Vanya* in all of its re-imaginings last season. But Chekhov is also known for his short story masterpieces. “His short stories explore life’s mysteries and mundanity in equal measure.” – The Guardian. Vladimir Nabokov declared that one of those short stories – *The Lady with the Little Dog* – is among the greatest short stories ever written.

Calendar:

- **Sunday, June 5**, 2 p.m., performance of **Steve Yockey’s *Blackberry Winter*** at Forum Theatre, 8641 Colesville Rd, Silver Spring, MD. Tickets are \$15 if you use the code FOOTLIGHTS online - <http://forum-theatre.com/buy-tickets> - or at the box office - 301-588-8279. Includes postshow discussion.
- **Wednesday, June 8**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Branden Jacobs-Jenkins’ *An Octoroon***. At Alfio’s, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- **Saturday, June 11**, 3 p.m., performance of ***An Octoroon*** with talk-back at Woolly Mammoth Theatre, 641 D St NW, Washington, DC. Tickets are \$30. Use code 6659. On-line - ticketing.woollymammoth.net - or phone 202-393-3939.
- **Monday, July 11**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Stephanie Mumford’s adaptation of Anton Chekhov’s *The Lady with the Little Dog***. At Alfio’s. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- **Sunday, July 17**, 2 p.m., performance of ***The Lady with the Little Dog*** at Quotidian Theatre (at The Writer’s Center), 4508 Walsh St, Bethesda, MD. Tickets are \$15. Use the code FOOTLIGHTS for your discount - 301- 816-1023.

Stephanie Mumford, co-founder of Quotidian Theatre, has now adapted *Lady* as a stage play, and is directing it for Quotidian Theatre’s July production. Footlights is pleased to welcome Stephanie, co-founder Jack Sbarbori, cast members and others to discuss the play with us on **Monday, July 11**, at Alfio’s.

Make reservations with Phyllis. If you are coming to the discussion, we have permission to send you an e-copy of the draft script. Please do not distribute it to others. E-mail Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net.

We will see *The Lady with the Little Dog* at Quotidian (performing at The Writer’s Center in Bethesda) on **Sunday, July 17, 2 p.m.** Tickets are \$15. Use the code FOOTLIGHTS for your discount.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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