

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MAY & JUNE 2017

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss Florian Zeller's *The Father* on Tuesday, May 23

Of Florian Zeller's award-winning *The Father*, The Times (London) said: "It's as sharp and surprising a play as you'll see all year." *Le Pere (The Father)* is the 2014 winner of three Moliere Awards including Best Play, and won the Prix du Brigadier in 2015. The play was translated by two-time Tony Award recipient Christopher Hampton and will be directed in its DC debut by David Muse, Artistic Director of Studio Theatre. Of Florian, David writes, "Florian is one of France's most prolific and well-regarded contemporary playwrights and *The Father* has been a sensation wherever it has played. I'm looking forward to matching theatrical wits with the play."

About the play: André is 80 and a man of his own mind. He's quick with a joke, especially one with an edge, and used to dominating conversations and relationships. But things are getting strange. His trusted watch goes missing, reappears, and is lost again; his daughter's stories don't quite add up; his furniture is disappearing; and there are strangers at his table. (Ted van Griethuysen, Footlights' dear friend, is cast as André.)

Florian Zeller's unnerving "tragic farce" asks who we are to ourselves when our signposts disappear. Mr. Zeller cites Harold Pinter as an influence, as well as the French theater of the absurd. *The Father* was inspired by a production of Eugene Ionesco's *The Chairs*, in which an old man stops in midthought and calls for his mother. "Suddenly, in a matter of seconds, someone who looked like an old man resembles a baby crying out for his mother," Mr. Zeller said.

The Guardian says of a UK production: "There are strong echoes of King Lear, both in the impending madness and the father-daughter relationships. It is an astonishingly unguarded play about the cruelties of love and the limits of patience, and the way child-parent relationships become inverted as old age creeps up and mugs us."

Stephanie Olshan will moderate our discussion. **Lauren Halvorsen**, dramaturg and sixth-season Associate Literary Director at Studio Theatre is our guest. Many Footlights participants have enjoyed Lauren's insights recently in talkbacks after performances at Studio Theatre.

The play is available for purchase on Amazon's website and through Farber & Farber, the publisher. *The Father* runs May 10 – June 18 at Studio. Talkbacks will be held on May 21 and June 3 following the 2 p.m. performances. See www.studiotheatre.org for more information.

Our May 23 dinner-discussion is 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, but valet parking is available at Alfio's. Dinner is at 6:30, the discussion at 7:30 and ends no later than 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 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 at 7:20 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 the day of the dinner-discussion. 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.

Dinner-discussion of August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* on Monday, June 5

We turn to **August Wilson** once again to discuss another of his 20th Century Cycle plays. Footlights has previously discussed six of these plays which chronicle the African-American experience in the 20th century.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom is the first of August Wilson's plays to win wide acclaim and is regarded as among his finest work. Wilson set the play in a recording studio in the 1920s Chicago, where a group of musicians await the legendary blues singer Ma Rainey to record several songs. The musicians banter among themselves about life, unfair treatment and their core beliefs. The characters represent aspects of America still bruised and haunted by the specter of slavery, blatant racism and social disregard. Ma Rainey's dramatic entrance and her command of the

situation reflect a power struggle for artistry and respect for black performers used as a meal ticket for white record producers and capitalists. Wilson's Rainey knows she's got what the producers want and she's determined to get her due – no matter what.

Our frequent guest, Wilson scholar Sandra D. Shannon offers in her *Dramatic Vision of August Wilson* that "*Ma Rainey* is not just about the blues recording industry in pre-Depression America. It blends various properties of the blues dynamic to re-create the emotional landscape of the time and era, that ends up being timeless."

We are fortunate to have the director of 1st Stage Theater's upcoming production of *Ma Rainey*, **Deidra LaWan Starnes** as our guest speaker. As one of the finest actors in town, Deidra has been seen on stages throughout the metro and regional area and secured a Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Lead Actress. Deidra

has performed in a number of Wilson's productions and will bring a unique depth of experience to the discussion. Debbie Jackson will moderate. We'll meet at Alfio's (see above). Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom will be performed at 1st Stage, June 1-25. Footlights will arrange a date, with talkback, to see it.

About Footlights

To subscribe to the Footlights elist, go to groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join, or email any message to footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To learn more about Footlights, see www.footlightsdc.org. Copies of the monthly newsletter are sent to the Footlights elist and are also available at www.footlightsdc.org.

Calendar:

- **Saturday, May 13**, 3 p.m., matinee performance of **Master Class** at MetroStage, 1201 N. Royal Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Use code **Footlights** when you call the theatre (703) 548-9044. Cost \$35 (regular \$60) and no handling fee. There will be a talkback.
- **Tuesday, May 23**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Florian Zeller's The Father** with Studio Theatre Associate Literary Director **Lauren Halvorsen**. Stephanie Olshan moderates. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- **Monday, June 5**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **August Wilson's Ma Rainey's Black Bottom** with director **Deidra LaWan Starnes**. Debbie Jackson moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin.
- **Monday, July 17**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Horton Foote's Night Seasons** with director **Jack Sbarbori** and others with Quotidian Theatre's production. Mary Ann Wren moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin.
- **Sunday, July 23**, 2 p.m., performance of **Horton Foote's Night Seasons** at Quotidian Theatre Company, The Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh Street, Bethesda, MD. Talkback.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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