

from the FOOTLIGHTS

NOVEMBER 2017

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to discuss *The Book of Will* by Lauren Gunderson on Tuesday, November 14

BOY HAMLET:

*To be, or not to be...
I there's the point,
To Die, to sleep, is that all? Aye all:
No, to sleep, to dream, aye marry there it goes,
For in that dream of death, when we awake,
And borne before an everlasting Judge,
From whence no passenger ever returned -*

Playwrights and acting companies in Will Shakespeare's time printed very few copies of their scripts. One copy was given to the government's copyright office, which often did little to prevent other theater companies from accurately or inaccurately duplicating a popular play's script. A competitor theater might hire actors to attend one of Shakespeare's plays and the hired memorizers would then put together a script from what they had just seen. Or, the competitor might take on a former actor of Shakespeare's company who would then put together a play from what he remembered and then add lines to fill out a complete play.

Each theater company had a "stage manager" who would write out for each actor his entrance lines, dialogue and exit lines and anything else he was supposed to do in a particular scene. These pieces of paper were rolled up and given to each player so that if one or a few of these rolls of paper were stolen, it would be difficult if not impossible for a rival house to exactly duplicate the whole play from the parts.

Shakespeare retired to his home town of Stratford in 1613 and died in 1616. Seven years after his death two members of his acting company, John Heminges and Henry Condell, searched for, found and published his plays in what today we call The First Folio. This was an unheard of tribute to a playwright when theater was considered just popular entertainment.

The large folio contained 36 plays, 16 of which had never before appeared in print. They included *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*. The 20 other plays had been illegally printed in forms more or less like that which Shakespeare had written. At the top of this page is one version in a patched together version of *Hamlet* of perhaps the most well known speech in all of Shakespeare's work.

We know next to nothing about Shakespeare's personal life. We know even less about the lives of the two men from The King's Men, his acting company, who pushed

the project through over several years. This is the void that playwright **Lauren Gunderson** has imaginatively filled.

A few weeks ago, the headline of an article in *The New Yorker* (October 16, 2017) was "You've Probably Never Heard of America's Most Popular Playwright." More than 20 of her plays -- she is 35 -- have been produced and Lauren Gunderson was the most produced playwright in America this past year. She has combined drama and humor about lesser known characters in literature, particularly the women, into plays that people want to hear and see.

(In fact DC-area theaters are doing their part. *Emilie: La Marquise Du Châtelet Defends Her Life Tonight* is now at Avant Bard. Last season Round House produced *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*. And Olney gave us *I and You* a few seasons back.)

Gunderson's latest play, *The Book of Will*, will be produced by Round House Theatre November 29 – December 24, directed by Round House Artistic Director **Ryan Rilette**, now in his sixth season here. He has acted locally (*Uncle Vanya*, *Three Sisters*), directed many productions, and is a past president of the National New Play Network. We are thrilled to welcome Ryan back to Footlights to discuss *Will* with us. (He previously met with us to talk about Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love*.) Jerry Stilkind will moderate our discussion.

Our **November 14** dinner-discussion will be held at **Alfio's La Trattoria**, 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, but valet parking is available at Alfio's. Dinner is at 6:30, the discussion at 7:30 and we end by 9.

The all-inclusive cost for dinner and the discussion is \$25. 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.

Reading *The Book of Will*: The play has not been published, but Round House has generously allowed us to have a draft script. Once you have reserved with Phyllis, you may request a copy from Robin Larkin at robinlarkin@comcast.net. We do encourage you to read the script in advance of our discussion. Please note that you may not distribute copies to others.

Seeing *The Book of Will*: Tickets are available online at <http://www.roundhousetheatre.org/buy-tickets/calendar/> or through the box office (240-644-1100). Goldstar has discounted tickets for many performances, also.

*Thursday, December 7: Dinner-discussion of *Queens Girl in Africa* by Caleen Sinnette Jennings*

A breakout hit of DC's first Women's Voices Festival was **Caleen Sinnette Jennings's *Queens Girl in the World***. Now

Mosaic Theater has commissioned a sequel – ***Queens Girl in Africa*** – part of the 2018 Women's Voices Theater Festival. The play is described as a touching coming-of-age story of a New York based woman finding her place in Civil War-torn Nigeria.

Footlights is very pleased to welcome *Queens Girl* playwright Caleen Sinnette Jennings to our dinner-discussion, moderated by Debbie Minter Jackson. Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin.

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:

- **Tuesday, November 14**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Lauren Gunderson's *The Book of Will*** with **Ryan Rilette**, Round House Theatre Artistic Director. Jerry Stilkind moderates. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- **Sunday, November 19**, 3 p.m., performance of ***Top Girls*** at Keegan Theatre, 1742 Church Street NW, Washington, DC. Tickets for this performance, which includes a postshow discussion, are \$30 (no extra fee!) using the code '**FOOTLIGHTS**.' Call (202) 265-3767, email boxoffice@keegantheatre.com or order online.
- **Thursday, December 7**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of ***Queens Girl in Africa*** with playwright **Caleen Sinnette Jennings**. Debbie Jackson moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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