

from the FOOTLIGHTS

APRIL 2018

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to discuss Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone* on Monday, April 9

The New York Times calls *Vietgone* "a refugee tale with laughs and rap." In his play, **Qui Nguyen** reimagines his parents' reluctant courtship: Fresh from Saigon, they meet in an Arkansas refugee relocation camp in 1975. Whether their courtship actually involved quite so many ninjas, drugs, expletives, and hip-hop ballads is unknown.

Sometimes, the idea of a play exists long before its author is ready to write it. The play is usually biographical, some sort of family origin story, and the idea simmers and stews in the time it takes for the writer to find their voice. Like many a son or daughter, prodigal or not, an artist must venture into the world before they can come home again. Such is the case with *Vietgone*.

In an NPR interview playwright Qui Nguyen describes *Vietgone* as a "sex comedy" about his parents. But it is not exactly about sex, nor just a love story about his parents. It's more about what it means to be displaced from home and family, and the struggle to start a new life in a new place.

In reality, as he gathered family history for his play, Nguyen discovered that his parents' meeting wasn't love at first sight. It was purely a hook up. He found out that his mom left a younger brother and boyfriend behind when she fled Vietnam, and he learned more about the pain his parents felt over what they'd lost.

Nguyen's father, Quang Nguyen, was a helicopter pilot for the South Vietnam Air Force. He had a wife and two children in Vietnam. After the fall of Saigon in April 1975, Quang helped Vietnamese allies flee by helicopter, but had to leave his own family behind when he was evacuated.

When he arrived at the Ft. Chaffee refugee camp in Arkansas, he was riddled with guilt and tried desperately to find a way back to Saigon. He never returned to that family. Tong Nguyen was working for the U.S. Embassy when Saigon fell and could take only her mother with her when she fled to America. She met Quang at Ft. Chaffee. They married and had three children.

Studio Theatre will produce *Vietgone* April 25 - May 20.

Qui Nguyen is a playwright, TV/Film writer, and Co-Founder of the OBIE Award-winning Vampire Cowboys of NYC. His work, known for its innovative use of pop-culture, stage violence, puppetry, and multimedia, has been lauded as "Culturally Savvy Comedy" by The New York Times, "Tour de Force Theatre" by Time Out New York, and "Infectious Fun" by Variety.

His company, Vampire Cowboys, often credited for being the pioneers of "geek theatre", holds the unique distinction of being the first and currently only professional theatre organization to be officially sponsored by NY Comic Con.

Footlights is very pleased to welcome **Natsu Onoda Power**, director of Studio's *Vietgone* production, as our guest speaker. She is an associate professor in Georgetown's Program in Theater and Performance Studies, where she has taught since 2005. Directing credits include David Henry Hwang's *Yellow Face* and Young Jean Lee's *Songs of the Dragons Flying to Heaven*. Footlights member Pat Peyser will moderate our discussion.

Read *Vietgone*. Samuel French has published *Vietgone*. We have an e-copy of the play available to those attending our discussion. First make your reservation with Phyllis - details below - then e-mail Robin for a copy at robinlarkin@comcast.net.

New location. We will meet at **MeiWah**, located at 4457 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD - a short walk from the north entrance of the Friendship Heights metro stop on the red line.

MeiWah is on the second floor. There is an elevator to MeiWah from the street and garage levels. There is limited parking in a small surface lot behind the restaurant, entered from Friendship Blvd. Garage parking is available for \$5 with a voucher from the restaurant. Enter the garage just as you turn into the surface lot from Friendship Blvd or into the Chase Tower building across The Hills Plaza. Some street parking may be open.

Dinner is at 6:30, the discussion begins at 7:30 and ends by 9. The all-inclusive cost for dinner and the discussion is \$30. Cash or check, please – no credit cards, and no cash back. You may come at 7:20 for the discussion only for just \$5.

Dinner consists of two appetizers, five main dishes, orange slices and fortune cookies, served family style at each table. Drinks are not included, but can be ordered and paid for individually. MeiWah has a bar for beer, wine and drinks. Please be on time. Food will be served promptly starting at 6:30.

New reservation policy. Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin, at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. Reservations may be made until noon on Monday, April 9, but cancellations will be accepted only until **Friday, April 6 at noon**. Footlights **will** be charged for no-shows, and we expect you to cover our cost.

In May:

Look for details of our May dinner-discussion in our next newsletter.

Tickets to Constellation Theatre's Caucasian Chalk Circle, April 12-May 13

Footlights members may get discount tickets to any performance during the run, but only if they purchase tickets by midnight April 11. Our cost is \$20 plus a \$3-5 credit card fee. Use the code FOOTLIGHTS to apply the discount. See <https://www.constellationtheatre.org/>.

Calendar:

- **Monday, April 9, 6:30 p.m.**, dinner-discussion of **Qui Nguyen's *Vietgone*** with director **Natsu Onoda Power**. At MeiWah, 4457 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

About Footlights

To subscribe to the Footlights e-list, go to groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join, or e-mail 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 e-list and are also available at www.footlightsdc.org. To get a newsletter print copy contact Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300.

Finding a meeting location . . .

We continue to explore other venues for our dinner-discussions. We encourage you to suggest possible DC-area locations to Phyllis Bodin, at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. And kindly help us by checking out your suggested location. If you can, try the food and ask for a group or banquet menu. Other considerations:

- close to a Metro stop, and has available parking
- private space, without piped-in music or background noise
- total price for dinner, including tax, tip and room

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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