

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

OCTOBER 2018

“Life shouldn’t be all work and no plays.”

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## *Footlights to discuss August Wilson’s Gem of the Ocean on Thursday, November 1*

After several of his plays were successfully produced, **August Wilson** noted that he was “onto something” and consciously started developing what’s known as the “Pittsburgh Cycle,” a play representing each decade of the 1900s. **Gem of the Ocean** is set in 1904 but was written nearly last, years after the works that brought Wilson to prominence with a Tony Award, two Pulitzers and national acclaim. The historical inferences, references, and messages found in *Gem of the Ocean* are scattered throughout his plays—as such, the play is foundational, though not as frequently produced as his others. A crucial point is that people need to come to grips with their past and history to move forward.

The mysteriously aged and ancient Aunt Ester is referenced in several of Wilson’s works and she is actually seen only in *Gem* where she is already revered for her ancient wisdom and mystical powers. A stranger interestingly named “Citizen” seeks her out pleading to “cleanse his soul” for an infraction he committed. Through Aunt Ester we learn that the passage to forgiveness and healing requires looking back to move forward. To Wilson, the foundational rootlessness of Black people comes from being torn away from their rich African heritage, stripped of their legacy, and thus stuck and shackled mentally and emotionally long after the physical chains have been removed. Redemption is only possible when “Citizen” – obviously a metaphor for us all – can acknowledge the shimmering bones of the enslaved along the Middle Passage to move forward.

Come explore the rich tapestry of Wilson’s haunting images and elegant language with a return visit by **Ryan Rilette**, Round House Theatre artistic director, and welcome **Timothy Douglas**, director, for his first Footlights experience. Debbie Jackson will moderate. Debbie first interviewed Timothy back in the “early days” and recalls him saying, “...beware of

calling on the ancestors lightly, because they will show up!” Judging from his remarkable career directing Wilson and other plays throughout the country, and his recent engaging vocal passages in Round House’s *Small Mouth Sounds*, the ancestors have had full reign in Douglas’ life. Come see how he and the Round House designers take on this formative Wilson production.

**Location.** We will meet 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 begins at 7:30 and ends by 9.

The all-inclusive cost for dinner and the discussion is \$30. 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](mailto: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.

**Read *Gem of the Ocean*.** If you are coming to the dinner-discussion we can send you an e-copy of the play. Make reservations with Phyllis and then contact Robin Larkin ([robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net)) for your copy. As always, we request that you not distribute the play to others.

**See it.** *Gem of the Ocean* will play at Round House November 28 - December 23.

## *Tickets to Venus in Fur*

4615 Theatre Company's *Venus in Fur* (our play discussed last month) will be performed at the Silver Spring Arts Center, Highwood Theatre, 914 Silver Spring Ave, Silver Spring, MD, from October 25-November 17. Footlights tickets are just \$12 using the code 4615FOOTLIGHTS. See [www.4615theatre.com/copy-of-repertory-info](http://www.4615theatre.com/copy-of-repertory-info) to buy tickets and get directions. Note there are many performances with postshow discussions.

## *About Footlights*

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## *Calendar:*

- **Thursday, November 1**, 6:30 pm, dinner-discussion of **August Wilson's *Gem of the Ocean***. Our guests are **Ryan Rilette**, Round House Theatre artistic director, and **Timothy Douglas**, *Gem* director. Debbie Jackson moderates. At **Alfio's**, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD, on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net) or 301-986-1768.
- **October 25-November 17**, performances of ***Venus in Fur*** at the 4615 Theatre Company, Highwood Theatre, 914 Silver Spring Ave, Silver Spring, MD. \$12 tickets for Footlights members using the code 4615FOOTLIGHTS. See [www.4615theatre.com](http://www.4615theatre.com).

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