

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MARCH-APRIL 2006

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

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A Rebel Nun and a Poetic Genius – April 3

Juana de Asbaje was a rebel nun and a poetic genius. Born an illegitimate female, who was reading at age 3 and defying church scholars at age 16, Juana lived during the Spanish Inquisition from 1651-1695 in Mexico. Because women were so looked down upon as intellectual inferiors, denied any kind of literary learning, and blocked from the priesthood, Juana's only chance for freedom of expression was a good marriage.

Self-taught in her grandfather's library, she earned a place at the Spanish Viceroy's court by dressing as a man at age 12 to attend the University of Mexico. But although treated with respect as a prodigy and lady-in-waiting, she renounced the court because, as she later confessed, she cared more about learning than eating. She also turned her back on an arranged marriage by entering a nunnery. Here, she was allowed to collect a library of 4,000 books, the largest in the New World, in an apartment of her own. Also she was granted the freedom to write most of her renowned poetry. She became a poet, proficient on several musical instruments, a scholar, a wit, devoted friend to her sister nuns, an outspoken advocate for a woman's right to education.

But how religiously devout was she? And for how long could she defy church authority?

Washington D.C. based playwright, **Karen Zacarías**, inspired by the life of her own grandmother, took on the exploration of some of these questions about Sor Juana, as well as the themes of "love, compromise and betrayal" in her play *The Sins of Sor Juana (Los Pecados De Sor Juana)*, winner of the Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding New Play in 2000. Karen is also the founder and artistic director of Young Playwrights' Theater, a company that works with Washington D.C. students since 1995, "to enhance literacy, spark creativity and resolve conflicts through play writing."

Ms. Zacarías, along with the production director, **Abel López**, and **Rebecca Medrano**, one of the founders and producers at the GALA Hispanic Theatre, promise to bring an intellectually challenging discussion to Footlights' next dinner-discussion, on **Monday, April 3**, 6:30 p.m. at **Alfio's**, in the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD. \$12 includes dinner and tip. Rosalind Lacy MacLennan, Footlights member, will moderate our discussion. Contact Mark Gruenberg to reserve for the dinner-discussion.

You will enjoy the discussion much more if you read the play in advance. The English translation of the play is now available at Backstage Books (202-544-5744), 545 8th St. SE, Washington,

DC (Eastern Market metro stop). Call first before going to pick up a copy.

We'll see *The Sins of Sor Juana*, performed in Spanish, with English surtitles, at GALA Theatre, 3333 14th St, NW on **May 7, 4 p.m.** Tickets are \$20. Send your check to Robin Larkin.

August Wilson's Radio Golf – April 19

On **Wednesday, April 19**, Footlights will discuss **August Wilson's** last play, *Radio Golf*, and the Wilson legacy. We meet at **Casa Fiesta**, 4910 Wisconsin Ave, NW, for dinner at 6:30 p.m. The discussion begins at 7:30 and ends no later than 9:30 p.m. Buffet is \$14, including tax and tip. Contact Mark Gruenberg to reserve.

Our speakers will be **Eric Ruffin**, head of Howard University's directing program; **Sandra Shannon**, author of many books and articles on Wilson; and **Otis Ramsey-Zoë**, literary manager at CENTERSTAGE, where *Radio Golf* will be performed from March 24 to April 30.

August Wilson is in the same constellation of stellar playwrights as Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Arthur Miller. Yet only Wilson produced an epic work such as his unparalleled cycle of 10 plays chronicling African American history, struggles, and aspirations. *Radio Golf*, the last play of the cycle, centers around a couple of African American golf-loving real estate entrepreneurs in Pittsburgh's Hill District and their notions of progress, racism, and success. "Teach kids how to play golf and they have all the rules they need to win at life" says the one planning to run for mayor. As the characters work through who they are and what they stand for, the audience must also grapple with important and complex issues such as racism, eminent domain, family loyalty, economic development and progress.

The legacy of August Wilson (1945-2005) is still unfolding. He was the recipient of numerous awards including two Pulitzer prizes and a 1999 National Humanities Medal from the president of the United States. Wilson was described as "perhaps our greatest poet, our strictest conscience and our most enthralling activist" by Ben Cameron in *American Theatre*. Wilson was instrumental in founding two organizations that promoted African American writing: the Center Avenue Poets Theatre Workshop in 1965, and Black Horizons in Pittsburgh in 1968. Wilson's plays attracted such creative talents as James Earl Jones, Angela Bassett, Charles S. Dutton, Phylicia Rashad, Laurence Fishburne, and Leslie Uggams. *The New York Times'* Frank Rich wrote that *Fences* "leaves no doubt that Mr. Wilson

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is a major writer, combining a poet's ear for vernacular with a robust sense of humor (political and sexual), a sure instinct for crackling dramatic incident and passionate commitment to a great subject" — a review that could aptly apply to Wilson's entire body of work.

Copies of August Wilson's *Radio Golf* that includes both an essay by Wilson and an interview with Wilson conducted by Suzan-Lori Parks will be available at the April 3 Footlights meeting or may be obtained by mail until the limited supply is exhausted by sending a check for \$7 to cover mailing to Beatrice Rouse, PO Box 5443, Rockville, MD 20848.

Footlights will see *Radio Golf* at CENTERSTAGE on **Sunday, April 23 at 2 p.m.** Tickets are \$41. Send your check to Robin.

Calendar

- Monday, April 3, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *The Sins of Sor Juana* at Alfio's, in the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave, Chevy Chase, MD. \$12 dinner includes tax and tip.
- Wednesday, April 19, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Radio Golf* at Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Ave, NW. \$14 buffet including tax and tip.
- Sunday, April 23, 2 p.m., performance of *Radio Golf* at CENTERSTAGE, 700 N Calvert St, Baltimore. Tickets: \$41
- Sunday, May 7, 4 p.m., performance of *The Sins of Sor Juana* at GALA Theatre, 3333 14th Street, NW. Tickets:\$20
- Thursday, May 18, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *The Elephant Man* by Bernard Pomerance. Casa Fiesta
- Saturday, May 27, 2 p.m., performance of *The Elephant Man* at Olney Theatre. Tickets: \$33
- Monday, June 12, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Picasso's Closet* by Ariel Dorfman. Alfio's
- Sunday, June 25, 3 p.m., performance of *Picasso's Closet* at Theater J, including post-show discussion with Ariel Dorfman. Tickets: \$35 adult; \$32 senior

Dinner-discussion reservations: Mark Gruenberg, 202-898-4825 or press_associates@yahoo.com

Theater tickets: Robin Larkin, 301-897-9314 or robinlarkin@comcast.net. Make check payable to **Footlights**. Send to Robin Larkin, 5403 Nibud Ct, Rockville, MD 20852

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News of David Sobelsohn

On March 2, our Footlights founder was assaulted, robbed and left unconscious in the street. Thankfully, David survived the attack and is slowly recovering at home. He welcomes company, telephone calls and notes from Footlights friends. David says hearing from people and talking with them is most therapeutic for him. You may call him at 202-484-8303. His address is 201 I St, SW #838, Washington, DC 20024.

Get well, David! Our healing thoughts are with you.

To contribute to a special Footlights gift for David, send your check to Robin Larkin by April 3, our next dinner-discussion meeting date.