

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

DECEMBER 2007

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

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## ***The Skin of Our Teeth*, Thornton Wilder's third Pulitzer Prize, December 18**

This play is a "loopy...survey course in the history of the western world, crammed with the playwright's all-time favorites: an Ice Age, a visit from Moses, a convention of mammals, and the Jersey shore," a critic in Seattle said of a production there this past spring.

"What we have is a combination of farce, horror-movie and biblical epic of the Creation that never fails to entertain and grip its audience," Philip Fisher wrote in a review of a production at the Young Vic in London three years ago.

We will discuss this wildly improbable play at our faux Medieval Italian restaurant and then see it at one of the cutting-edge stages (according to the Washington Post) of Washington -- Rorschach Theater. Our guests will be the director, **Rahaleh Nassri**, who will just have finished directing another play at Studio Theater, and one of the leads in the production, **Scott McCormick**.

In the three acts spanning only five thousand years of "history," we see some ordinary (odd, granted) people in extraordinary times doing some extraordinary things -- good and evil. Wilder said in an interview in 1956 that "I see myself making an effort to find the dignity in the trivial of our daily life, against those preposterous stretches that seem to rob it of any such dignity..." This theme can also be seen, of course, in his better known play, *Our Town*. However, there is nothing sentimental in *The Skin of Our Teeth*. While we are fortunate in meeting the man who invented the wheel, the alphabet and beer (I forget in which order), we also see unconditional love protecting the young man that murdered his older brother. Manic, when it is not funny or serious, might be a better tag. However we sum up the play, it "is actually quite finely tuned and carefully crafted," a New York reviewer said in 1998.

That may have been one reason why Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* had as star-studded a cast as has ever been seen when it opened on Broadway in November 1942 under the direction of Elia Kazan. Tallulah Bankhead, Frederic March, Florence Eldridge, E.G. Marshall and Montgomery Clift were in it.

"I hate this play...and I don't understand a word of it," the actress playing Sabina tells the audience. Jerry Stilkind, moderator for the Footlights December meeting says: "Don't believe her, you cannot trust this husband-hunting hussy."

We meet Tuesday, December 18 at **Alfio's**, in the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, two blocks from the Friendship Heights Metro. Dinner is \$12 (includes tip) with several choices of entrées, as well as salad, bread, ice cream & coffee. Come early if you can but please arrive by 6:15 p.m. to allow sufficient time to get all the entrée orders in to the waiter. The discussion begins at 7:30 p.m.

Contact Mark Gruenberg to reserve for dinner, 202-898-4825 or [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com). If you later find you must cancel your dinner reservation, please let Mark know by noon on Tuesday, December 18 so we can give an accurate count of dinner reservations to the restaurant.

Copies of the play are available at the library, at Backstage Books (202-544-5744), or other bookstores.

## ***The Skin of Our Teeth* at Rorschach Theatre**

Footlights will be attending the Rorschach Theatre production of *The Skin of Our Teeth* in February or early March at a date to be determined.. There will be a cast discussion after the play. Tickets are \$15. We anticipate setting the date at the December 18 Footlights dinner discussion meeting. For further information on tickets, contact Robin Larkin by phone (240-669-6300) or email ([robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net)).

## **Footlights Newsletter Going Electronic**

Footlights will be distributing the Newsletter primarily through the Listserv on the internet. Footlights members who prefer to continue to receive hard copies of the Newsletter through the postal mail are asked to drop a note to that effect to Beatrice Rouse, P.O. Box 5443, Rockville, MD 20848. If we don't hear from you by December 28, this Newsletter will be the last you will receive through the postal mail. We will continue to send the Footlights Newsletter by email.

## Footlights Discussion January 21

We begin 2008 with our January play, winner of the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play — *Doubt: A Parable* by **John Patrick Shanley**. The New York Times calls it, "An inspired study in moral uncertainty with the compellingly certain structure of an old-fashioned detective drama." In *Doubt*, a nun in a Bronx Catholic school in 1964 suspects a popular priest of inappropriate behavior with a student. Armed with nothing more than a resolute belief in her suspicion and a few circumstantial details, she instigates a relentless campaign to remove the priest, enlisting the help of a subordinate nun and the child's tormented mother. The simple, yet ever-shifting plot leaves all four characters and the audience wondering whether they were justified in their thoughts, motives and actions.

Shanley writes, "Doubt requires more courage than conviction does, and more energy; because conviction is a resting place and doubt is infinite – it is a passionate exercise. You may come out of my play uncertain. You may want to be sure. Look down on that feeling. We've got to learn to live with a full measure of uncertainty."

Our speaker will be **John Going**, director of the upcoming production of *Doubt* at Olney Theatre Center which opens February 13. This will be a return visit for John. He has met with Footlights previously for our discussions of *Love! Valour! Compassion!* and of *Lend Me a Tenor*. We will meet at Alfio's.

Copies of *Doubt* will be available at our December meeting or you may order your copy from Backstage Books (202-544-5744).

## Calendar

- Tuesday, December 18 - - Please arrive by 6:15 p.m. for dinner discussion of **Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth***. at Alfio's, in the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD.
- Date to be determined at December 18 Footlights dinner discussion meeting - - Performance of *The Skin of Our Teeth* at Rorschach Theatre. Tickets are \$15; includes postshow discussion.
- Monday, January 21 - - Please arrive by 6:15 p.m. for dinner discussion of **John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt: A Parable*** at Alfio's, in the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD.
- Saturday, February 16 at 2 p.m. - - Performance of *Doubt* at Olney Theatre Center with Talk Back discussion. Tickets are \$36. Contact Robin for further information: 240-669-6300 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net).

**Dinner-discussion reservations:** Reserve with Mark Gruenberg, 202-898-4825 or [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com).

**Theater tickets:** Robin Larkin, 240-669-6300 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net). Make check payable to **Footlights**. Send to Robin Larkin at her **new address:** 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.