

from the FOOTLIGHTS

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2010

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

November 21: Footlights to Discuss *Golden Boy* by Clifford Odets

Our play for discussion on **Sunday, November 21, 6 p.m.**, will be Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy*.

Golden Boy was playwright Clifford Odets' most successful theatrical production. The first two acts of *Golden Boy* were written early in 1937 while Odets was working in Hollywood. He and actress Luise Rainer had just entered into a marriage that proved rocky right from the start. In mid year Odets moved to New York and after some struggle finished the play. It was produced late in 1937 in the United States and later went to London.

Odets has stated in interviews that he wrote the play as a deliberate attempt to create a hit. Critics have noted that the struggle Joe Bonaparte, Odets' protagonist, faces in *Golden Boy* mirrors the struggle Odets himself faced. The forceful earthy language and call to action shouted out in Odets' earlier plays such as *Waiting for Lefty* and *Awake and Sing!* that propelled Odets to stardom are replaced by a more personal struggle. There are certainly still reminders of the grimness of life in the 1930s, but *Golden Boy* was a dramatic departure from Odets' previous work and posed choices between ideals and success. The language is still powerful in its own way.

As Odets was torn between Hollywood and the New York theatre scene, Joe is torn between the high-pressure, fame, and big-money in boxing and his dream of becoming a violinist. Joe faces a dilemma when offered a lucrative sponsorship while still not wanting to risk injuring his hands. Full commitment to boxing will be a fatal blow to his career as a violinist. *Golden Boy* spawned a movie and a musical. The movie featured William Holden in his first starring role.

Footlights is pleased to welcome back as our guest speaker, Helen Hayes Award winning actress and award winning director **Lee Mikeska Gardner**, a member of Footlights' Advisory Board, who is directing *Golden Boy* for Keegan Theatre. We last heard from Ms. Gardner in our meetings on *Angels in America* (Signature Theatre production), *Stop Kiss* (Woolly Mammoth), and *Machinal* (TACT).

We'll meet at Alfio's Trattoria, located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments at 4515 Willard Avenue in Chevy Chase, MD 20815 (phone 301-657-9133) - two blocks from the Friendship Heights metro station. Street parking is limited but valet parking

is free at Alfio's.

The cost for dinner is only \$13, for salad, bread, choice among several entrees, ice cream, and coffee or tea, and the price includes tax and tip. We would appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar.

Phyllis Bodin will take reservations for our dinner-discussion. She may be reached at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. You may come for the discussion only if you wish. The discussion begins at 7 p.m. If you have to cancel, please let Phyllis know by noon on November 21 so we have an accurate count for the restaurant.

It is very likely that you will enjoy the discussion more if you read *Golden Boy* before our meeting. Check your local library or order from your favorite bookstore.

Footlights members John Glynn and Renée Gier will moderate our discussion.

Keegan Theatre will produce *Golden Boy* November 20 through December 19. Footlights will see *Golden Boy* on Sunday, November 28 at 3 p.m. Group tickets are \$25 and include a postshow discussion and reserved seats for Footlights. Keegan Theatre performances are at Church Street Theatre, 1742 Church Street, NW.

For tickets, send your check for \$25, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Ln, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852. Let Robin know your check is on the way - robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300.

December 5: Footlights to Discuss Eugene O'Neill's First Pulitzer Prize-winning Play, *Beyond the Horizon*

It's been called "the first great play of the 20th century" and "a spare, beautiful, achingly emotional story of a love triangle," but Eugene O'Neill's first Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Beyond The Horizon*, has been rarely produced in recent years. Now, The American Century Theater is staging it and its director here, the renowned Kathleen Akerley, will discuss it with Footlights on December 5. Jack Marshall, artistic director of TACT, may join us.

O'Neill won the Pulitzer for the play in 1920, only the second drama Pulitzer ever awarded – and the first of two he would win in a three-year stretch (He won four overall). A recent synopsis notes *Beyond The Horizon* "signaled a change in American drama. Critics and

audiences responded favorably to O'Neill's dark, tragic vision, which contrasted sharply with the unrealistic, melodramatic plays of the day. The play drew heavily on O'Neill's own experiences, including his tuberculosis and his sea voyages. O'Neill crafted a tale of missed opportunities and failed dreams, involving two brothers. Robert, a poetic but sickly dreamer, wants to go to sea to strengthen his health and see the world. His brother, Andrew, is a born farmer who wants nothing more than to work on his family's farm. Because they love the same woman, both brothers choose to go against their natures. Robert stays on the farm, and Andrew goes to sea."

A recent review by Huntley Dent of a 2010 production of the play at London's National Theater noted that one of the first people to realize the play's significance was the great novelist D.H. Lawrence. "Lawrence was the first European to be struck by the Manichean drama of America's classic literature. Darkness and the light contend for souls. By the time O'Neill regarded the rocky landscape where Hawthorne's Puritans struggled between election and damnation, the gloomy cloudbank of guilt hadn't lifted, but the cosmic significance of everyday deeds had dwindled," Dent wrote.

"Whatever the technical shortcomings or seeming over-simplicity of this play when measured against

O'Neill's later masterpieces, it nonetheless conveys an emotional wallop on par with the best," Les Gutman wrote in a recent review in *Curtain Up*.

Footlights will discuss all of this and more with Ms. Akerley at Alfio's restaurant on Willard Ave in Friendship Heights on December 5. Mark Gruenberg will moderate our discussion.

Dinner begins at 6 p.m. and discussion starts at 7. Please make your reservations with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768. If you have to cancel, please let Phyllis know by noon on December 5.

The American Century Theater will produce *Beyond the Horizon* January 14 - February 12, 2011.

About Footlights

For more information about Footlights, check our website: www.footlightsdc.org. To subscribe to our e-list and monthly newsletter, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or send an e-mail to footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

If you prefer a paper copy of the newsletter rather than receiving it on-line, let Robin know your address - robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300.

Calendar

- Sunday, November 21, 6 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Golden Boy* by **Clifford Odets**. Our guest speaker is director **Lee Mikeska Gardner**. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- Sunday, November 28, 3 p.m., performance of *Golden Boy* at Keegan Theatre, 1742 Church St., NW, DC. Tickets are \$25. Reserve with Robin, robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300.
- Sunday, December 5, 6 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Beyond the Horizon* by **Eugene O'Neill**. Our guest is director **Kathleen Akerley**. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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