

from the FOOTLIGHTS

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy* on January 21

Mercy, like snow, gently falls over the world of the living and the dead in the feelingly acted musical adaptation of *James Joyce's The Dead*, which was our last discussion of 2012. The play set on the Feast of the Epiphany in 1904 Dublin most appropriately pointed to the memories, insecurities, human failings and the great arc of forgiveness basic to the holidays to come in December.

Bam, no time to blink, certainly not to think. We're in London now. We're in an artist's pitch black apartment in the 1960s (or right now). As soon as our eyes adjust we are flooded with light, girlfriends (current and ex), lady teetotalers, unimpressed future father-in-laws (perhaps), frantic comings and goings (some real, some pretend) all round confusion and hold your-sides laughter. What more could you ask of our celebration of a new year?

Quotidian, the theater that did the Joyce adaptation, has been around for years, is a deservedly well-known company and its casts frequent guests of ours. Then there is No Rules Theatre Company – a three year old troupe, new to Footlights but putting on a British farce – *Black Comedy* by Peter Shaffer, who also wrote *Amadeus*, *Equus*, and *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*. (Footlights has discussed both *Equus* and *Royal Hunt* previously.) It has to be a young company to put on this play because the actors are running in and out, narrowly missing each other (we hope), sometimes in the dark, sometimes in the light, probably athletes as much as actors. (In 2011 No Rules received the Helen Hayes Award for Best Emerging Theatre Company in recognition of the company's talent and unique contribution to the city's artistic landscape. Now moving into its fourth season, the company is thrilled to be in residence at Signature Theatre Company in Arlington, VA.)

"If timing is everything in comedy, then that is true in spades for Peter Shaffer's comic staple *Black Comedy*..." Written in the 1960s, this outrageous British sex farce requires broad physical comedy blended with exquisite timing to work. Pity the cast that has not had substantial experience or training in that area," a reviewer said of a Chicago production a few years ago.

"[One of] the funniest and most brilliant short plays in the language," the London Sunday Times said.

Perhaps most accurately, the N.Y. Daily News called it "A dazzling comic ballet." And not to put too fine a point on it USA Today opined: "It is still possible to laugh yourself into a hernia watching *Black Comedy*."

The play opens in the dark as Brindsley Miller, a young sculptor, and his debutante fiancée, Carol Melkett, have moved antiques and fine furniture from a neighbor who is away for the weekend to Brindsley's fairly bare apartment to impress an important art collector and Carol's father, Colonel Melkett, who are coming that night, that he is a successful artist.

Carol asks Brindsley about his former girlfriend, a painter named Clea. He replies he was with her just a few months a few years ago. She puts a Sousa march on the record player, which causes a short circuit, which normally would cause a blackout, but which causes the lights to go up in our play.

As they search for matches, the phone rings, Brindsley picks it up. It is Clea, back in London and wanting to see him that night. He says no and tells his current friend that a chum had called. Miss Furnival, a spinster and lifelong teetotaler who lives upstairs, knocks on the door and is let in because she fears the dark. Colonel Melkett, Carol's father, arrives and by the light of a cigarette light instantly dislikes Brindsley's sculptures and the artist. Miss Furnival gasps when she recognizes that the furniture comes from their mutual neighbor but agrees to remain quiet after some frantic, on-the-side pleas by Carol.

Brindsley starts to leave to get a flashlight from a nearby pub when the neighbor who owns the furniture unexpectedly arrives, having cut short his out-of-town trip. Brindsley pulls him into his own apartment and the neighbor cannot recognize his own furniture in the dark. Not long after Carol serves drinks, Miss Furnival finds gin to her taste, and Clea, the former girlfriend arrives to Brindsley's astonishment.

Then matters get complicated.

Our guests on Monday, January 21 will be **Matt Cowart**, the director of the play and a member of the No Rules company, **Joshua Morgan**, artistic director, and **Brian Sutow**, producing artistic director, of the

company. Jerry Stilkind will moderate our discussion.

Join Footlights on **Monday, January 21**, at **Casa Fiesta**, 4910 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20016. The restaurant is just south of Fessenden St. Street parking is available. Dinner is at 6:30 and the discussion begins at 7:30 and usually ends around 9. Cost for the South American buffet dinner is just \$15, and that includes tax and tip. Cash or check, no credit cards please. We appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Beer, wine, and cocktails are available from the bar. You may come for the discussion only if you wish.

Make reservations with Phyllis Bodin at 301-986-1768 or Phylbo@verizon.net. If you have to cancel, please let Phyllis know by noon on January 21, so that we will have an accurate count for the restaurant. We may have to pay for no-shows.

Calendar

- **Monday, January 21**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Peter Shaffer's *Black Comedy***. Our guests are from No Rules Theatre Company – **Matt Cowart**, director of the play, **Joshua Morgan**, artistic director, and **Brian Sutow**, producing artistic director. At Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Avenue, NW, Washington, DC. Reserve with Phyllis, 301-986-1768 or Phylbo@verizon.net.

See and read *Black Comedy*.

Footlights will arrange to see *Black Comedy* at No Rules. The company has partnered with Signature Theatre, 4200 Campbell Avenue, Arlington VA 22206. *Black Comedy* will be performed in Signature's Ark space from February 6 to March 2.

Order your copy of *Black Comedy* by Peter Shaffer for \$10 from Samuel French, Inc. at <http://www.samuel french.com/p/2990/black-comedy> or phone them at 1-866-598-8449.

About Footlights

To learn more about Footlights, visit our website: <http://www.footlightsdc.org>. To subscribe to our e-list, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or e-mail footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

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