

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

SEPTEMBER 2016

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## September 22: Dinner-discussion of Deborah Zoe Laufer’s *The Last Schwartz* with Theater J’s Artistic Director, Adam Immerwahr

Two Washington premieres, **Deborah Zoe Laufer’s** play *The Last Schwartz* and new Theater J Artistic Director **Adam Immerwahr**, will headline Footlights’ discussion on Thursday, September 22.

“Nothing is funnier than family dysfunction,” Theater J says of the play, quoting Laufer. “The Schwartz family has been on their last legs since Papa died a year ago. Norma’s husband isn’t speaking to her, Herb and Bonnie are having baby troubles, and Simon wants to be an astronaut. Throw a sexy wanna-be Hollywood starlet into the mix, and you’ve got the recipe for a *yahrzeit*” – Yiddish for the anniversary of the death of a loved one – “gone perfectly wrong. Can Judaism hold this family together?”

That’s a good question, as Laufer also calls her play “Cherry Orchard in the Catskills.” Yes, that Cherry Orchard – the Chekhov play Footlights discussed.

WBUR, the National Public Radio station in Boston, described the play’s madcap characters after its premiere in nearby Gloucester: “American playwrights have infiltrated about as many funerals as a United States vice president. But in *The Last Schwartz*, dramatist Deborah Zoe Laufer adds an ecclesiastical twist to the hoary rite of adult siblings airing the laundry and squabbling over possessions in the wake of a parent’s demise.

“The play proves to be a rueful consideration of tribal connection which is also laugh-out-loud funny. Moreover, its combination of big themes and quirky comedy is whipped into spume.

“Domineering, self-righteous Norma is the eldest Schwartz, devoted to Mama and Papa’s memory and to their Jewish faith. Divorced and estranged from her only child, she nonetheless opines that respecting one’s history, from the old faith to the old furniture, is ‘what separates us from the animals.’

“The secular rest of the clan comprises oldest brother Herb, a frazzled financier wrapped in his Wall Street Journal as if to ward off the frequent bursts of his chatty tear-bomb of a wife, Bonnie; middle brother Simon, a near-blind,

borderline-autistic astronomer glued to a telescope and swathed in Mickey Mouse-worthy white gloves; and youngest brother Gene, a callow producer of television commercials who is both catered to and cowed by his siblings...Gene arrives late to the somber festivities, trailing along an aspiring, freewheeling starlet named Kia, whose body is poured into skimpy Spandex and whose attitude is anything-goes.”

Footlights will discuss *The Last Schwartz* with Theater J’s new artistic director, Adam Immerwahr. It’s not only his Footlights premiere, but the play is his Theater J directing premiere.

Immerwahr was most recently the Associate Artistic Director at McCarter Theatre Center in Princeton, N.J. He has previously directed productions at the Public Theater, Ensemble Studio Theatre, and the Wild Project. He has directed and developed work for Luna Stage, Hangar Theatre, Bristol Riverside, Premiere Stages, Playwrights Theatre of NJ, PlayPenn, the National Constitution Center, Philadelphia Artists' Collective, Princeton Summer Theater, and Passage Theater Company in Trenton. Internationally, he directed the African premiere of *The Convert* in Zimbabwe.

Footlights will welcome Adam Immerwahr to our dinner discussion, and hold a lively q-&a with him on **Thursday September 22**, at Alfio’s. Mark Gruenberg will moderate.

**Read the play.** Copies of *The Last Schwartz* are available from Samuel French’s theater scripts website and from Amazon.com. Note: We assume discussion attendees have read the play. Our discussion may include “spoilers.”

Alfio’s is 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 if you drive, but valet parking is available at Alfio’s. Dinner is at 6:30, the discussion at 7:30 and ends no later than 9.

The all-inclusive cost for dinner and discussion is \$20. 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.

**See the play.** *The Last Schwartz* plays at Theater J from September 7 to October 2. Tickets for Footlights are \$20 for any of the three Sunday matinee performances : Sept. 18, 25 and Oct. 2. Use the coupon code FOOTLIGHTS. Theater J will have post-show panels on those dates; topics and panel guests TBD.

### ***Footlights to discuss John Guare's Six Degrees of Separation, Monday October 17***

"I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people. Six degrees of separation. . . . But to find the right six people . . ."

Footlights will meet on **Monday October 17** to discuss playwright John Guare's award-winning ***Six Degrees of Separation***, which is generally considered by theater critics

### ***Calendar:***

- **Thursday, September 22**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Deborah Zoe Laufer's *The Last Schwartz***. Our guest is **Adam Immerwahr**, Theater J Artistic Director. Mark Gruenberg moderates. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net) or 301-986-1768.
- **Monday, October 17**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation***. Guests: **Susan Rhea**, Keegan Theatre Associate Artistic Director, and **Brandon McCoy**, director. Mary Ann Wren moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**  
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as one of the 'Best 50 Plays of the 20th Century.' Actress and Keegan Theatre co-founder **Susan Rhea** and director **Brandon McCoy** will join us to talk about the play, and the *six degrees* theory which has fascinated mathematicians and sociologists since it was first proposed in a 1929 short story called *Chains*. Guare's story is about a charming and very convincing con man and robber who pretends (among other things) that he is the son of actor Sidney Poitier. It is based on a real person and a chain of events which actually happened to friends of John Guare's, and then to their friends. (The con man later sued Guare, asking for a share of the profits from the play, but lost his case.)

*Six Degrees* will be performed at Keegan Theatre November 5 to December 3. Footlights may plan a group trip.

Copies of the play are available from Barnes & Noble or other usual sources, including the public library.

### ***About Footlights***

To subscribe to our e-list, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or e-mail [footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). To learn more about Footlights, see <http://www.footlightsdc.org>.