

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

JANUARY 2007

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## Noises Off on January 8

"Bang, bang, bang. Bang you're on. Bang you've said it. Bang you're off."  
Lloyd, *Noises Off*

**Michael Frayn**, *Noises Off* (1982) playwright, says he got the idea for his masterpiece farce within a farce as he was standing in the wings of a London theater watching a performance of a farce he had written for Lynn Redgrave. According to Frayn "it was funnier from behind than in front and I thought that one day I must write a farce from behind." And so he did, using the theatrical phrase for "sound heard in the wings" for his title. The result is a play about which critic Frank Rich remarked, "*Noises Off* is, was, and probably always will be the funniest play written in my lifetime."

On one level, the play is a highly ingenious mechanism. In the first act we watch the chaotic final rehearsal of a basic British farce, full of door-banging, trouser-dropping and sexual complication. In the brilliant second act, viewed from behind the scenes, life and art collide as the performers and director become the victims of their own betrayals and misunderstandings. By the third act the original farce has descended into total mayhem. Clearly the play is a very funny comment on the fragility of farce itself where split-second timing and a calculated, rehearsed spontaneity can be blown apart by a missed entrance or a recalcitrant prop. But, like all Frayn's work, the play becomes a metaphor for the larger lunacies of life, and the thin dividing-line between order and chaos.

It's not an easy play to pull off. Timing is critical. It is the rise and fall of this play. Actors must memorize lines that ultimately don't make any sense, as well as frenetic blocking that expends more energy than a marathon. And it takes strong discipline for the actors not to break up themselves. (During rehearsals, director Jonathan Munby instructed cast members on the sidelines not to laugh as scenes were played. For one actor's take on the rehearsal process see <http://blog.arenastage.org/>)

Footlights will meet for our first dinner-discussion of 2007 on **Monday, January 8**, at **Alfio's**, in the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (301-657-9133), two blocks from the Friendship Heights Metro. \$12 includes dinner and tip. Dinner is at 6:30; the discussion begins at 7:30. You may come for the discussion alone; we will have extra chairs. Make reservations with Mark Gruenberg, [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com) or 202-898-4825. Please note: If you find you must cancel your reservation, please call (do not e-mail) Mark before noon on

January 8, so we can give Alfio's an accurate count.

We are very pleased to have an outstanding panel of guests from Arena Stage's current production of *Noises Off*: **Stephen Schnetzer** who plays Garry Lejeune; **Susan Lynskey** (if her teaching schedule permits) who plays Poppy; **Mark Bly**, senior dramaturg; and one of the stage managers. Robin Larkin will moderate the discussion.

*Noises Off* can be obtained at Backstage Books, 545 8<sup>th</sup> St. SE, Washington, DC (Eastern Market metro stop). Call Backstage Books first (202-544-5744) to pick up a copy of the play; if reserving a copy, please be sure to pick it up. You may find it in your local library, as well.

## Go See Noises Off with Footlights

We will see *Noises Off* on **Tuesday, January 23**, at **7:30 p.m.** at Arena Stage (Kreeger), 1101 Sixth Street, SW. Tickets are \$40.25 (orchestra seats), and include a post show discussion. Send your check, payable to "Footlights" to Robin Larkin, 5403 Nibud Ct, Rockville, MD 20852. We must receive payment by January 8 (also the date of our meeting). Contact Robin at [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net) or 301-897-9314.

## *Insurrection: Holding History* – February Play

On **Tuesday, February 13**, we will discuss *Insurrection: Holding History* by **Robert O'Hara**. Hailed at its premiere in 1996 as bold, intimate, outrageous and overflowing with theatrical invention, *Insurrection: Holding History* follows Ron Porter, a young gay African-American graduate student as he travels back to the south of 1831 and participates in Nat Turner's slave rebellion. When his 189-year-old ancestor leads his mystical journey through time and history to the moment of crisis, he confronts his own misconceptions and stereotypes as well as his understanding of what it is to be gay and black in our modern world. Filled with "comedy, poetry and pure chutzpah," according to Tony Award-winning playwright Tony Kushner, "this is a gorgeous, fresh and vital play from a very exciting playwright."

Our guest is **Jeremy Skidmore**, artistic director of Theater Alliance where *Insurrection* will be produced. Debbie Minter Jackson will moderate our discussion.

We'll meet at Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Ave. NW, DC (202-244-8888). Come at 6:30 p.m. for dinner; the discussion begins at 7:30 p.m. Dinner buffet is \$14,

including tax and tip. Make your reservations with Mark Gruenberg at [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com) or 202-898-4825, anytime on or after January 8.

We will see *Insurrection: Holding History* on Sunday, March 4, 2 p.m. at Theater Alliance at the H St. Playhouse, 1365 H Street, NE, Washington, DC. Tickets are \$18. Payment is due February 26.

## Footlights Important News

We've moved our list!

To join the new list at Yahoo Groups, send any message to [footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). Or to join the

Yahoo Footlights group through the web, browse to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>. Subscribers can post to our on-line list by sending brief messages to [footlightsdc@yahoogroups.com](mailto:footlightsdc@yahoogroups.com). Visit our website at [www.footlightsdc.org](http://www.footlightsdc.org) for updates.

Please support Footlights, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization. Send your tax-deductible contributions to Footlights, c/o Robin Larkin, 5403 Nibud Ct, Rockville, MD 20852.

## Calendar

- Monday, January 8, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Noises Off* at Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (301-657-9133). Dinner: \$12, includes tax and tip. Suggested donation to Footlights: \$5.
- Tuesday, January 23, 7:30 p.m., performance of *Noises Off* at Arena Stage (Kreeger), 1101 Sixth Street, SW. Tickets are \$40.25. Deadline for payment: January 8.
- Tuesday, February 13, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Insurrection: Holding History* at Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Ave. NW, Washington, DC (202-244-8888). Dinner: \$14, includes tax and tip. Suggested donation to Footlights: \$5.
- Sunday, March 4, 2 p.m., performance of *Insurrection: Holding History* at Theater Alliance, H Street Playhouse, 1365 H Street, NE, Washington, DC. Tickets are \$18.

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

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

Robin Larkin *for* FOOTLIGHTS  
5403 Nibud Court  
Rockville, MD 20852