

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

MARCH 2007

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## Ah, Wilderness!

Footlights meets on **Thursday, March 8** to discuss **Eugene O'Neill's** gentle comedy, *Ah, Wilderness!* (1932). O'Neill, four-time Pulitzer Prize winner and the first American playwright to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature (1936) "for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy," is generally thought of as a writer of weighty autobiographical tragedies. While still autobiographical, *Ah, Wilderness!* is written in a lighthearted, nostalgic mood, inspired in part by O'Neill's mischievous desire to demonstrate that he could portray the comic as well as the tragic side of life. The play is set in the same place and period, a small New England town in the early 1900s, as his later tragic masterpiece, *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Dealing with the growing pains of a sensitive, adolescent boy, *Ah, Wilderness!* was characterized by O'Neill as "the other side of the coin," meaning that it represented his fantasy of what his own youth might have been, rather than what he believed it to have been.

Our guest on March 8 is **Dina Epshteyn**, production dramaturg for *Ah, Wilderness!* at Baltimore's CenterStage, where *Ah, Wilderness!* will play from March 16–April 15. Footlights' John Glynn will moderate our discussion.

We'll meet 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. We will have extra chairs if you want to come for the discussion only. Valet or street parking is available. **Make reservations with Robin (this month only)** – 301-897-9314 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net). If you must cancel, let Robin know by noon on March 8, so we have an accurate count of dinner reservations.

For extensive archives on O'Neill visit [www.eoneill.com](http://www.eoneill.com). Among the gems is a video of a 1959 Hallmark Hall of Fame broadcast of *Ah, Wilderness!* with Helen Hayes as Essie and Lloyd Nolan as Miller.

## Crime and Punishment

Our April selection is an award-winning play adapted from Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*. Regarded as Dostoyevsky's literary masterpiece, the Penguin Group Book Clubs reading guide describes it as "...a brilliant character study of a man who is at once an everyman and as remarkable as any character

ever written. It poses a simple question, "Can evil means justify honorable ends?" With such a complex, strong central character, no wonder **Marilyn Campbell**, a playwright and actress, and **Curt Columbus**, a director and translator, felt challenged to adapt the novel for the stage. What's amazing is that the two collaborators condensed a 500 page novel into 90 minutes of action. Round House Theatre describes the play as featuring "... a cast of three performers in an acting *tour de force*." Raskolnikov, the murderer, who relives his crime, Sonia, a young prostitute, and a detective explore what causes his horrific crime. Can one human being ever justify killing another? At one point in his interrogation, the detective asks Raskolnikov about an article he has written as a law student, in which he postulates: "Ordinary men have to live in submission and abide by the laws of society. However, extraordinary men have a right to commit any crime and to transgress the law in any way, just because they are extraordinary." Are some persons more equal than others, and therefore, at liberty to commit violent acts for the good of all?

We meet on **Tuesday, April 17**, at 6:30 p.m. at Alfio's. Our guest is Producing Artistic Director of the Round House Theatre in Bethesda, **Blake Robison**, whose favorite novel is *Crime and Punishment*. Robison finds the adapted play "a psychologically compelling portrait of a killer and his redemption." Rosalind Lacy MacLennan will moderate.

## Read the Plays!

We encourage you to enhance your enjoyment of our discussions by reading the scripts. Both *Ah, Wilderness!* and *Crime and Punishment* (adapted by Campbell and Columbus) are available at Backstage Books (202-544-5744 or [backstagebooks@aol.com](mailto:backstagebooks@aol.com)), 545 8th St. SE, Washington, DC (Eastern Market blue line metro stop). You can get a 10% discount if you identify yourself as a Footlights member and you pick up the book yourself. This offer does not apply to mail orders from Backstage Books.

## See the Plays!

We will see *Ah, Wilderness!* on **Sunday, April 1 at 2 p.m.** at CenterStage, 700 North Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD. Tickets are \$36. A talkback will follow this performance. Send your check to Robin, to arrive by **March 19**. We will arrange carpools to Baltimore.

Footlights will see *Crime and Punishment* at Round House Theatre, 4545 East-West Highway, Bethesda, MD on **Sunday, April 22 at 3 p.m.** Tickets are \$40 and include a post-show discussion. Send your check to Robin by **April 2**.

## **After Darwin – A Footlights Greatest Hit**

Is God Dead? “We cannot survive without The Book.” So laments a character in *After Darwin* (1998), by British playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker. *After Darwin* dramatizes the development of Darwin’s theory of evolution on his voyage to the Galapagos, & his ultimately fatal conflict with the ship’s devoutly religious captain—all set as a play within a play, with an ambitious amoral actor as Darwin & a principled patrician as the captain.

Footlights discussed *After Darwin* in April, 2001, but no local production was available. Journeymen Theater is producing *After Darwin* from March 7-31. We will see it on **Saturday, March 17, 2 p.m.** at the Church Street Theatre,

1742 Church Street, NW, DC. Tickets are \$15. Includes a Footlights postshow discussion. Please send your check to Robin, to arrive no later than March 15.

## **Support Footlights**

To join our e-mail discussion list, send any message to [footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). Or browse to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>. Our website address is <http://www.footlightsdc.org>.

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**

- Sunday, March 4, 2 p.m., performance of *Insurrection: Holding History* at Theater Alliance, H Street Playhouse, 1365 H Street, NE, Washington, DC.
- Thursday, March 8, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Ah, Wilderness!* at Alfio’s, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (301-657-9133). Dinner: \$12, includes tax and tip. Suggested donation to Footlights: \$5.
- Saturday, March 17, 2 p.m., performance of *After Darwin* at Journeymen Theater, Church Street Theatre, 1742 Church Street, NW, DC. Tickets are \$15. Deadline: March 15.
- Sunday, April 1, 2 p.m., performance of *Ah, Wilderness!* at CenterStage, 700 North Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD. Tickets are \$36. Deadline: March 19.
- Tuesday, April 17, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Crime and Punishment* at Alfio’s, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (301-657-9133). Dinner: \$12, includes tax and tip. Suggested donation to Footlights: \$5.
- Sunday, April 22, 3 p.m., performance of *Crime and Punishment* at Round House Theatre Bethesda, 4545 East-West Highway, Bethesda, MD. Tickets are \$40. Deadline: April 2.

**Dinner-discussion reservations:** For *Ah, Wilderness!* reserve with Robin Larkin, 301-897-9314 or [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net). For *Crime and Punishment* reserve with 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.

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