

from the FOOTLIGHTS

APRIL 2011

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

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April 26: Lynn Nottage's 2009 Pulitzer Prize-winning Play *Ruined*

The plight of women in civil war torn Democratic Republic of Congo is brought vividly to life in Lynn Nottage's prize-winning play *Ruined*. Mama Nadi's rain forest brothel is the location, and the story is the madam's struggle to keep herself, and the women working for her, safe from the violence all around them. She is in some ways a modern version of Brecht's "Mother Courage." Through a glimpse at the lives of Mama Nadi, Sophie, Salima and Josephine, we witness the violence that reigns and its brutal effects on the women involved. In *Ruined*, Lynn Nottage has crafted a drama that compels us to take our blinders off and confront the stark reality of armed conflict and cruelty. *Ruined* relates, but does not preach. In Mama Nadi's rain forest brothel we find much more than the vestiges of war's brutality. We discover hope, resilience, humor and the ever present fortitude of the human heart.

Inspired by school productions of *Annie* and *The Wiz*, Lynn Nottage wrote her first play at a very young age: *The Darker Side of Verona*, which dealt with an African-American Shakespearean company. Many of us saw her *Crumbs from the Table of Joy* at Round House several years ago, and we were pleased to welcome her as our speaker when Footlights discussed her play *Intimate Apparel* in February 2003. She once worked for Amnesty International and heard many stories of the devastation that any war can bring to families.

The civil war in the Congo is estimated to have claimed as many as 3,000,000 lives so far – many of them women and children. The former Belgian Congo was granted independence in 1960 but since then the country despite its vast mineral wealth has never achieved any stability, or peace among the various tribes. Some suggested background reading for *Ruined*: Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost* for the colonial years, and Barbara Kingsolver's novel *The Poisonwood Bible* for post-colonial events, the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, and the continuing struggle.

Join us on **Tuesday, April 26**, at Alfio's to discuss this masterful play. Our speaker will be **Dr. Sandra G. Shannon**, a Full Professor of African American Literature, specializing in Dramatic Literature and Criticism at Howard University. She is an authority on the plays of August Wilson, and has written several books and many scholarly articles on his work. Dr.

Shannon last spoke to Footlights in April 2006 when we discussed Wilson's *Radio Golf*. She is teaching a class at Howard this semester on the plays of Lynn Nottage.

Alfio's Trattoria is located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Avenue, in Chevy Chase, Maryland (phone 301-657-9133). The restaurant is two blocks from the red line 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 six entrees, ice cream, and coffee or tea. The price includes tax and tip. We appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar. Phyllis Bodin will take reservations for our dinner-discussion. You can reach her at 301-986-1768, or phylbo@verizon.net. You may come for the discussion only if you wish.

Dinner is at 6:30 p.m. and the discussion begins at 7:30, ending no later than 9:30. If you have to cancel your dinner reservation please let Phyllis know by noon on April 26 so we will have an accurate count for the restaurant. Barbara Reithmaier and Debbie Jackson will moderate the discussion.

Reading *Ruined*

Ruined is in wide distribution and available at most book stores. It is also available through online shopping at Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com in print or in Kindle and NOOKbook downloads.

Ruined on Screen

Lynn Nottage is working on a screenplay for an HBO special of *Ruined* starring Oprah Winfrey, who saw the play and immediately decided it had to be a movie. Meanwhile, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*, Nottage's latest play, is in previews in New York City.

Ruined at Arena Stage

Arena Stage will produce the first in-the-round staging of *Ruined*, April 22 – June 5, directed by Charles Randolph-Wright. The production features an expanded company with cast members playing live music and additional ensemble roles featuring University of Maryland students. Arena will offer a free series of guest speakers connected with *Ruined*. The series is open to public and will take place on select Friday nights during the run, immediately following the performance. In addition, other performances have post performance discussions scheduled. See www.arenastage.org for complete details or call the box office, 202-488-3300.

May 24: Tennessee Williams' *Tennessee Continuum*

Join Footlights at Alfio's to discuss two short plays by Tennessee Williams: *Portrait of a Madonna*, an early, poignant and eerily beautiful sketch of the character who would become Blanche du Bois, and *The Gnädiges Fräulein*, considered one of the most successful of his mid-career experiments in style, a heartbreaking yet hilarious ode to the indomitability of the human spirit and what many believe to be a thinly disguised allegory of his own creative life.

This year marks the centennial of Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams's birth. The Washington Shakespeare Company will join in celebrating this iconic American playwright when they present these rarely-performed one act plays, as *Tennessee Continuum*. Although Williams wrote novels and many short stories he is world-famous for such plays as *Streetcar Named Desire*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Fugitive Kind*, *The Glass Menagerie*, and *Night of the Iguana*, and may be the most produced playwright on earth today.

Christopher Henley, Artistic Director of the Washington Shakespeare Company, and a frequent guest at Footlights, will visit us once again to discuss these one-act plays. Jerry Stilkind will moderate the discussion.

The WSC now has a beautiful new theater in the Artisphere in Rosslyn, the former home of the Newseum, 1101 Wilson Blvd, Arlington, VA. It is two blocks from the Rosslyn metro stop, and offers free parking in the building garage. *Tennessee Continuum* will play in repertory with Tom Stoppard's *Night and Day* from May 12 – July 3. Footlights will see the Williams plays on a future date to be announced.

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.

Calendar

- Tuesday, April 26, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Ruined* by **Lynn Nottage**. Our guest is Dr. **Sandra Shannon**, professor at Howard University. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis, 301-986-1768 or phylbo@verizon.net.
- Tuesday, May 24, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Tennessee Continuum* by **Tennessee Williams**. Our guest is **Christopher Henley**, Artistic Director at Washington Shakespeare Company. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis, 301-986-1768 or phylbo@verizon.net.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
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