

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

JULY 2011

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## July 12: Footlights Discussion of *Clybourne Park* with Howard Shalwitz

Please join us on **Tuesday, July 12**, at **Alfio's** for our dinner-discussion of *Clybourne Park* by **Bruce Norris** with guest **Howard Shalwitz**, Artistic Director of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. Shalwitz is directing the upcoming Woolly Mammoth revival of their production of the multiple award-winning *Clybourne Park* – 2011 Pulitzer Prize for Drama; 2011 Helen Hayes Award Winner for Outstanding Resident Play and Outstanding Director.

*Clybourne Park* was the all-white Chicago neighborhood on which a hopeful African-American Southside family set its sights in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 epochal drama. (Footlights discussed *Raisin* in October 1998.) The house in Mr. Norris's play is the dream house that Hansberry built, the place her upwardly mobile Younger family was planning to inhabit. In the first act the Youngers haven't arrived yet. In the second they're long gone, and *Clybourne Park* has become a very different, predominantly black neighborhood. And it is now a white family that wants to move into an area that shows every promise of being thoroughly regentrified. The cast plays different roles in each of the play's two acts.

From *The New Yorker* review: "Norris uses ordinary incidents to build an extraordinary tableau of the coded bigotry behind which the white characters in the fifties hide their hypocrisy from themselves. . . . Norris has a gift for social observation, historical analysis, and structure, but his greatest talent is his ability to capture in word and gesture what James Baldwin called 'those stammering, terrified dialogues' with 'the black man in America.'"

Playwright Bruce Norris takes us out of our comfort zone in *Clybourne Park*, free of the limits that Lorraine Hansberry faced in the theatre of her time. It's somewhat ironic that a white male playwright can co-opt a black woman's play and win the Pulitzer Prize, especially when the black playwright herself could not.

Footlights is honored to welcome Howard Shalwitz as our guest speaker. He is the co-founder of Woolly Mammoth and for 30 years has led the company on a unique path, focused on new plays that ask hard questions, introduced fresh voices, and challenged theatrical convention. Howard was selected as a "Washingtonian of the Year" in 1998 and received the

prestigious "Founders Award" from the Cultural Alliance in 2006. Both a director and an actor, he is one of the few artists to receive multiple Helen Hayes Award nominations in both categories. He has directed for Playwrights Horizons, New York Theatre Workshop, Arena Stage, Milwaukee Rep, and many others. At Woolly Mammoth he has directed over thirty plays including *Clybourne Park*, *Fever/Dream*, and *She Stoops to Comedy*, and appeared in *Full Circle*, *The Gigli Concert*, and *Lenny & Lou*, to mention just a few. A native of Buffalo, NY, Howard studied philosophy at Wesleyan University and received a Masters in Teaching from Brown before launching his theatre career in New York in 1975.

Alfio's Trattoria is located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Avenue, in Chevy Chase, MD. The restaurant is two blocks from the red line Friendship Heights Metro station. Street parking is limited but valet parking is free. 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. Cash or check; no credit cards. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar. Mary Ann Wren will take reservations for our dinner-discussion. You can reach her at 301-770-4572, or [wjwren@rcn.com](mailto:wjwren@rcn.com). 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 Mary Ann know by noon on July 12 so we will have an accurate count for the restaurant.

**Read *Clybourne Park*.** Copies may be hard to come by. *Clybourne Park* was originally published in the UK by Nick Hern Books. Copies may be obtained directly (<http://www.nickhernbooks.co.uk/?isbn=9781848421783>) from them. Backstage Books is expecting copies. The US publication will be available mid-August from bookstores, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, etc. Woolly Mammoth may be selling copies, as well.

**See *Clybourne Park*.** The remount of Woolly's production will run from July 21 - August 14. Many special discussion events are planned. See [http://www.woollymammoth.net/performances/show\\_clybourne\\_park\\_2011.php#ev](http://www.woollymammoth.net/performances/show_clybourne_park_2011.php#ev). For tickets call Woolly's box office - 202-393-3939.

## August 8: Footlights to Discuss Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*

**Samuel Beckett** has long been considered a leading light - if not the leading light - of Theatre of the Absurd, but *Happy Days*, which he wrote in late 1960 and which premiered in 1961, is the exception to that rule.

The short two act play is "suffused with tenderness, lucidity and humor," according to a review of the production on Amazon.com, where it is available as part of the Beckett on Film DVD Set. (Also available on Netflix.) A biography of Beckett says he wrote it that way at the urging of his girlfriend, Suzanne Dechevaux-Dumesnil, whom he married in 1961. She requested a 'happy' play after *Krapp's Last Tape*. On the other hand, the *New York Times* called *Happy Days* "a song of rue that will haunt the inner ear." So take your pick. After a one-month pre-Broadway run (also in New York), *Happy Days* opened on Broadway on Columbus Day 1961, but ran only for two weeks, in repertory with another Beckett play, *Krapp's Last Tape*.

Footlights will sort all this out with **José Carasquillo**, a longtime friend and ally of Footlights and actor and director in the DC area, who is directing *Happy Days* at

the Washington Shakespeare Company, where it opens in late August. José will also bring **Delia Taylor**, who plays the part of Winnie, which he says "is 98% of the play." (The role of the absurdly optimistic Winnie in *Happy Days* is said to be one of the most challenging for any actress in the history of theater, because it requires her to be at once cheerful, entertaining, pathetic and endearing all while being trapped in a pile of dirt – up to her waist in the first act, and up to her neck in the second.) José's not only directing, but he's playing Willie, who's the other 2%. Our dinner-discussion will be at **Alfio's** in Friendship Heights on **Monday, August 8**, with dinner at 6:30 p.m. and discussion at 7:30 p.m. Make your reservations with Mary Ann Wren at 301-770-4572, or [wjwren@rcn.com](mailto:wjwren@rcn.com).

### 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](mailto:footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

### Calendar

- Tuesday, July 12, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Clybourne Park* by **Bruce Norris**. Our guest is **Howard Shalwitz**, Artistic Director, Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company. John Glynn moderates. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren, [wjwren@rcn.com](mailto:wjwren@rcn.com) or 301-770-4572.
- Monday, August 8, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of **Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*** with guests **José Carrasquillo**, who will direct the production at the Washington Shakespeare Company, and **Delia Taylor**, who will play Winnie. Mark Gruenberg moderates. We'll meet at Alfio's. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**

5800 Nicholson Lane, # L07

Rockville, MD 20852