

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MARCH 2020

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

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March 2: Dinner-Discussion of *Inherit the Windbag* by Alexandra Petri

They hated each other's politics and life-styles and were ready to insult each other in their political debates. One was very much a conservative while the other was very much a liberal but, equally if not more importantly to them, the conservative argued for traditional values while the liberal wanted to blast them wide open.

Outside of the television studio where the debates took place, the country was divided along similar lines and there were killings and street battles among extremists.

While this sounds somewhat like the ugly times we are now in, these debates were between Gore Vidal and William F. Buckley during the Republican and Democratic conventions of 1968. It reached the point where the novelist, biographer and political activist Vidal called Buckley, the editor of the conservative *National Review* and also a political activist, a Nazi and Buckley threatened to punch Vidal in the face. Those outbursts came as riots, heavily armed police and tear gas filled Chicago streets at the end of the Democratic presidential convention.

Vidal and Buckley were articulate, patrician New Yorkers. Our playwright, **Alexandra Petri**, has been a loser on Jeopardy, won top prizes in 2014 and 2013 on the O. Henry Pun-Off even though she describes herself as a stand-up comedian, competed in an international whistling convention and, she said, was mistaken for an actual champion. She became a columnist at *The Washington Post* right out of Harvard in 2010.

The world premiere of her play is described on the Mosaic Theater website as: "In the summer of 1968, liberal Gore Vidal and conservative William F. Buckley met for a series of debates that rocked America and defined the genre of punditry. Now, for one evening only, Vidal and Buckley meet in the Dismal Beyond (also known as the Richard Nixon

Library in Yorba Linda, CA) to reprise their infamous debates. What ensues is a battle for history itself ... and satirical battle of wits, assisted by an ever revolving cast of characters from Aaron Burr to Ayn Rand."

Ms. Petri has said she knew some of the works of Vidal and Buckley but in 2015 saw the documentary *Best of Enemies* about their debates and that made her "absolutely obsessed with them." One great reason for her wanting finally to write a play about them was that what they were arguing about is not much different from what we have been arguing about the past 52 years. "Questions of racial justice, so-called law and order, American imperialism, wealth disparity -- these are all still with us," she said.

Another great reason for seeing the play is the cast: the incomparable John Lescault as William F. Buckley and Paul Morella as Gore Vidal. We have been lucky enough to have seen them in many plays over the years. We are thrilled that **John Lescault** will be able to join us.

The director is **Lee Mikeska Gardner** who has spoken to us five times previously.

Ari Roth, founder of Mosaic Theater and former Artistic Director of Theater J will be coming. That means our discussion of the play will have an unusually experienced group of theater people whom we have known and cared about for years. This will give us the chance to thank them for their work and to look forward to seeing them in March.

Ms. Petri is running around to the various primary states trying to write about them as fast as they keep coming. She may be able to make our discussion.

So please join Footlights on **Monday, March 2 at 6:30 pm** for our dinner-discussion of **Alexandra Petri's *Inherit the Windbag***. Jerry Stilkind will moderate.

We will meet at Alfio's, 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, but valet parking is available at Alfio's. Dinner is at 6:30, the discussion begins at 7:30 and ends by 9.

The all-inclusive cost for the dinner-discussion is \$30. 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 or 301-986-1768. Reservations and/or cancellations will be accepted until noon on the day of the dinner-discussion. If we are charged for no-shows we expect you to cover our cost.

Reading and seeing the play: We expect to have e-copies of the play available soon. Also we may have information on ticket discounts for Footlights. Come to the discussion or watch for details from

Calendar:

- **Through March 1**, any performance of *The 39 Steps* at Constellation (Source), 1835-14th Street, NW, (202) 204-7741. Use the code FOOTLIGHTS to get \$20 tickets.
- **Monday, March 2**, 6:30 pm, dinner-discussion of *Inherit the Windbag* by **Alexandra Petri**. Guests: **Ari Roth**, **Lee Mikeska Gardner**, and **John Lescault**. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.

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our listserv, FootlightsDC@groups.io. Mosaic's *Inherit the Windbag* runs from March 11-29, at the Atlas, 1333 H Street NE, DC.

April discussion: The Waverly Gallery by Kenneth Lonergan

Please join us in April for a discussion of *The Waverly Gallery* by Kenneth Lonergan, noted film director, playwright, and screenwriter.

Written in 1999, *The Waverly Gallery* is a memory play, inspired by the decline of Lonergan's grandmother as she suffered the indignities of Alzheimer's disease. The play will be performed at 1st Stage in Tyson's Corner.

We are delighted to welcome back 1st Stage's **Alex Levy**, director, and other guests. Please join us for dinner and discussion. Date TBD.

About Footlights

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