

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

JANUARY 2009

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## ***The Cherry Orchard: January 27 Discussion***

**Anton Chekhov's** last play has had many translators and adapters, including David Mamet, since it was first performed in Moscow in 1904. A brand new adaptation by Tom Stoppard has just opened in Brooklyn, NY.

The title of the play as we normally see it is ***The Cherry Orchard, a Comedy***. However, the posters and publicity for the play at its opening called it ***The Cherry Orchard, a Drama***. Chekhov, one of the acknowledged masters of modern theater, insisted his play was a comedy. But Constantin Stanislavski, one of the acknowledged great directors of the modern theater, who staged the first production at his legendary Moscow Art Theater, insisted it was a drama and so it was played.

**Christopher Henley**, artistic director of the Washington Shakespeare Company, who along with Gaurav Gopalan will direct the production we will discuss and see, write that it is the main character's "and her family's attachment to an imagined gilded age that are out of step with the march of time." They write that they will "transform" the play into "a dreamlike memory-scape filled with humor and heartbreak where hope and desire teeter on the edge of collapse."

The many translations, adaptations and performances around the world tell us that the play is well loved. One reason may be that a director and actors can tip the ambiguity toward a lament for a dying, impractical aristocratic past or toward the up-and-coming, gauche entrepreneurs. There seems to be a great deal of room for different interpretations.

Chris, who has been one of our favorite speakers, will talk about the play and take questions at our dinner-discussion at 6:30 p.m. at **Alfio's** on **Tuesday, January 27**. Jerry Stilkind will moderate our discussion. Alfio's is located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815 (Phone: 301-657-9133) – two blocks from the Friendship Heights Metro. Street parking is limited but valet parking is free at Alfio's.

To reserve, contact Mark Gruenberg at 202-898-4825 or [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com). The cost is only \$12 for a choice among 5 entrees, plus salad, bread, beverage and ice cream, and includes tax and tip. We suggest a \$5 contribution to Footlights. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. and ends at 9-9:30 p.m. You may come for the discussion only, if you wish. There will be extra chairs.

(Note: If you must cancel your dinner reservation, please let Mark know by **noon** on Tuesday, January 27, so we have an accurate count of reservations.)

## **See *The Cherry Orchard* February 8**

We will see the Washington Shakespeare Company's production

of *The Cherry Orchard* at the discounted rate of \$15 a ticket on February 8 at 2 p.m. at the Clark Street Playhouse, 601 South Clark Street, Crystal City (Arlington), VA 22202. There will be a discussion with the cast after the show. For tickets, send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

This may be the last production the WSC does at the Clark Street Playhouse in Arlington. We need to ask Chris whether he is still planning a Sledgehammer Ball.

**Food for Thought** – 1) How many playwrights have earned their own adjective, such as Chekhovian, Shakespearean or Pinteresque? We have Mametspeak, too. Why? What does it mean? 2) In a year of profound change, the background of social change in *The Cherry Orchard* is particularly apt. How does it speak to us today?

## ***Eurydice* in February**

Footlights always welcomes The Ushers Theatre Going Social Group to join us for our dinner-discussions and theater outings. We plan at least one joint event per season. This year it is **Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice***. We especially invite Ushers members to join us for our dinner-discussion on February 23, our pre-performance luncheon on February 28, followed by the 3 p.m. performance at Round House Theatre, Bethesda.

The Orpheus-Eurydice legend has inspired poets, writers, artists, and composers for 25 centuries, and the fascination continues. Their love affair, the marriage, Eurydice's tragic death, the descent into the Underworld, the rescue, and what happened after – or didn't – first saw light in 500 BC.

On February 23 Footlights will meet to discuss playwright Sarah Ruhl's interpretation, written from Eurydice's viewpoint, a play which had its world premiere in 2003. Artists from Rubens to Chagall, moviemakers (remember *Black Orpheus* set in the slums of Rio to a samba beat?), novelists, and of course composers, since Orpheus was a gifted musician, have given us a wealth of material. Glimmerglass Opera in Cooperstown, NY devoted their entire 2007 season to operas based on the Orpheus story: five operas, by French, Italian, German, and American composers, the earliest work from 1607 and the most recent from 1993.

Tennessee Williams and Jean Anouilh are among the many other playwrights who have written an Orpheus play. Sarah Ruhl has said that the death of her own father was the reason for adding a major character – that of Eurydice's father – to this modern, updated version of the ancient story. But the basic elements of love, and grief, and the inevitability of loss, the possibility of second chances, remain. (Also the reminder that if someone in authority says "Don't look back," perhaps we should pay attention.)

Although Sarah Ruhl is only 34 years old, this will be the fourth of her plays to be produced in our area in the past several years, starting with *Passion Play, a cycle*, and continuing with *The Clean House* and *Dead Man's Cell Phone*.

Our guest speaker will be **Rachel Grossman**, Director of Education and Outreach for Round House Theatre. She will help us decide whether the ancient Orpheus-Eurydice tale is myth, legend, allegory, parable, or simply a really good story. Footlights member Mary Ann Wren will moderate the discussion.

We will meet on **Monday February 23**, 6:30 p.m. at **Casa Fiesta**, 4910 Wisconsin Avenue, NW (202 244-8888), between the Friendship Heights and Tenleytown Red line Metro stops. There is usually plenty of nearby street parking. Dinner will be buffet-style; cost is \$15, including tax and tip. Reserve with Mark at [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com) or 202-898-4825.

### Reading *Eurydice*

Backstage Books, 545-8th Street SE, (202) 544-5744 has copies of the play.

### Calendar

- Tuesday, January 27, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* with guest Christopher Henley, Washington Shakespeare Company. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD (301-657-9133). \$12
- Sunday, February 8, 2 p.m., performance of *The Cherry Orchard* at Washington Shakespeare Company, Clark Street Playhouse, 601 S. Clark Street Arlington VA 22202 (703-418-4808). Tickets: \$15
- Monday, February 23, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* with Rachel Grossman, Round House Theatre. At Casa Fiesta, 4910 Wisconsin Avenue, NW (202-244-8888). \$15
- Saturday, February 28, 1 p.m., luncheon at Shangri-La, 7345 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20810 (301-656-4444). \$18
- Saturday, February 28, 3 p.m., performance of Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice* at Round House Theatre, Bethesda. Tickets: \$35.

Reservations: Dinner-discussions – Mark, [press\\_associates@yahoo.com](mailto:press_associates@yahoo.com) or 202-898-4825.  
Performances – Robin, [robinlarkin@comcast.net](mailto:robinlarkin@comcast.net) or 240-669-6300.  
Luncheon – Joel, [joel@ushers.us](mailto:joel@ushers.us) or 703- 447-8805.

Robin Larkin *for* FOOTLIGHTS  
5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L07  
Rockville, MD 20852

### *Eurydice* at Round House Theatre

Footlights will join the The Ushers to see *Eurydice* at Round House Theatre, 4545 East-West Highway in Bethesda for the Saturday matinée on February 28 at 3 p.m. Tickets are now \$35 – a special group rate for Ushers & Footlights. Round House has graciously matched the Goldstar price (including their \$6.50 service) for us. Unlike Goldstar whose seats are in the sides of the theatre, we have excellent center orchestra seats. Please make your checks payable to Footlights and send them to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

### Pre-theater Luncheon at Shangri-La

We'll be meeting for an Indian-Nepali buffet luncheon at Shangri-La, 7345 Wisconsin Avenue, Bethesda, MD 20810 (301-656-4444), at 1 p.m.). The buffet has 4 vegetarian and 3 meat entrees. Although the buffet changes, it usually has tandoori chicken, butter chicken, a lamb dish, lentils, salad, rice, eggplant and curried cauliflower. Fresh naan (bread) is brought to the table. \$18, includes the all-you-can-eat buffet, group fees, gratuity and taxes. Please RSVP by February 15 to Joel Markowitz at [joel@ushers.us](mailto:joel@ushers.us) or 703- 447-8805.