

# from the FOOTLIGHTS

OCTOBER 2017

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

## Footlights to discuss Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls* on Thursday, October 12

The award-winning *Top Girls* (1982), British playwright Caryl Churchill's most popular play, is a curious mixture of fantasy and sad reality. The story begins as the very ambitious Marlene decides to celebrate her promotion to managing director of Top Girls - an employment agency - at a posh restaurant, and (because this is fiction) she is able to invite several famous women from the distant past to help her mark the occasion. Her guests include the transvestite Pope Joan from the 800s, housewife Dull Gret who was the subject of a Brueghel painting as she leads a charge against the devils in hell, the famous travelers English Isabella Bird, Japanese courtesan-then-nun Lady Nija, and the pathetically obedient Patient Griselda from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. To us, it seems a odd choice: although all the woman certainly had interesting lives, Pope Joan was murdered when discovered to be female, and none of them could truly be considered to have *had it all*. They gather, they eat and drink, tell their stories, then drink a lot more. This opening act is considered one of the most difficult scenes to stage in all of theater, but also one of the funniest.

The rest of the play is reality, the office, and Marlene's real story, set during the Thatcher years in Great Britain. The *New York Times* calls the play "A blistering yet sympathetic look at women who achieve success by adopting the worst traits of self-made men." The message perhaps is that, for women, *having it all* is the real fantasy.

Caryl Churchill began her career writing radio and TV plays for the BBC. Her first stage play to receive wide notice was *Cloud 9* (1979), about a British overseas colony in Victorian times, a play which both Catalyst and Studio theaters have done in recent years. Forum staged her strange *Mad Forest* (1990) several seasons ago, and will soon do her *Love and Information* (2012) beginning September 28 through October 21. She is a socialist, a feminist, someone deeply involved in political causes, and a totally unpredictable playwright who constantly experiments. She has written more than 50 plays, and she is considered among the top of Britain's most significant contemporary playwrights.

Our guest speakers include two Footlights favorites: the brilliant young director Amber Paige McGinnis (*Dry Land*), who is this year's Richard Bauer Emerging Talent Award honoree, and the wonderful Susan Marie Rhea (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and most recently at Footlights for *Six Degrees of Separation*), who acts as well as directs and will have several roles in *Top Girls* when Keegan Theatre performs the play this fall, November 4-December 2. Mary Ann Wren will moderate.

Our **October 12** dinner-discussion will be held at **Alfio's La Trattoria**, 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 at 7:30 and we end no later than 9.

**Please note:** The all-inclusive cost for dinner and the discussion is now \$25. 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](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net) or 301-986-1768. Reservations and/or cancellations will be accepted until noon on the day of the dinner-discussion. If you must cancel, please let Phyllis know as soon as possible since the restaurant needs a complete count. This is a seated, table-service dinner, not a buffet. We may be charged for no-shows and expect you to cover our cost.

**Reading *Top Girls*:** Copies may be scarce at local libraries, but you can order online from Amazon, Samuel French, Barnes & Noble, etc., or check with local book stores.

**Seeing *Top Girls*:** We plan to see *Top Girls* at Keegan Theatre on Sunday, November 19, 3 p. m. A postshow discussion is included. Tickets for Footlights for this performance only are \$30 (no add-on fees). Use the code 'FOOTLIGHTS' when ordering your ticket. The Keegan box office number is (202) 265-3767, or email [boxoffice@keegantheatre.com](mailto:boxoffice@keegantheatre.com). Online, go to [keegantheatre.com](http://keegantheatre.com) to buy tickets.

Keegan Theatre is at 1742 Church Street NW, Washington, DC 20036 In the Dupont Circle neighborhood, between 17th & 18th and P & Q Streets. It's in walking distance from the Dupont Circle metro station. Street parking is limited but you can reserve a parking space on-line at nearby garages.

***Tuesday, November 14: Dinner-discussion of The Book of Will by Lauren Gunderson***

Footlights is pleased to welcome back **Ryan Rilette**, Artistic Director of Round House Theatre, to discuss **The Book of Will** by **Lauren Gunderson** with us. He is directing the upcoming (November 29 - December 24) production at Round House.

Without William Shakespeare we wouldn't have masterpieces like *Romeo and Juliet*. But without two of his friends, we would have lost his plays forever. In *The*

*Book of Will*, playwright Lauren Gunderson imagines the backstory of two members of Shakespeare's acting company - John Heminges and Henry Condell - who, 7 years after his death, come up with the wild idea to publish all of Shakespeare's scripts in a handsome bound folio rather than the cheap unauthorized quartos then available.

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To learn more about Footlights, see [www.footlightsdc.org](http://www.footlightsdc.org). Copies of the monthly newsletter are sent to the Footlights elist and are also available at [www.footlightsdc.org](http://www.footlightsdc.org).

***Calendar:***

- **Thursday, October 12**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*** with Keegan Theatre's **Susan Marie Rhea** and director **Amber Paige McGinnis**. Our moderator is Mary Ann Wren. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at [phylbo@verizon.net](mailto:phylbo@verizon.net) or 301-986-1768.
- **Tuesday, November 14**, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of **Lauren Gunderson's *The Book of Will*** with **Ryan Rilette**, Round House Theatre Artistic Director. Jerry Stilkind moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin.
- **Sunday, November 19**, 3 p.m., performance of ***Top Girls*** at Keegan Theatre, 1742 Church Street NW, Washington, DC. Tickets for this performance, which includes a postshow discussion, are \$30 (no extra fee!) using the code '**FOOTLIGHTS**.' Call (202) 265-3767, email [boxoffice@keegantheatre.com](mailto:boxoffice@keegantheatre.com) or order online.

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