

from the FOOTLIGHTS

SEPTEMBER 2019

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Tuesday, September 10: dinner-discussion of August Wilson's *Jitney* at Alfio's

Jitney takes place in a somewhat shabby office housing a tolerated illegal taxicab (jitney) business and a tolerated illegal small-time runner in the numbers racket. They are tolerated, apparently, because the "customers" are African-American in an African-American area of Pittsburgh. We can presume that the city can be fairly tolerant of these businesses in a working-class neighborhood because they do not compete with any in the larger white world of the city. The time is 1977.

But, almost from the beginning of Act 1 you see seven men of varying ages who come and go to pick up a rider, get coffee, take numbers over the pay phone on a wall, joking with one another and then with an edge to what they are saying. They are all in this together but some more than others, which may make you begin to feel uncomfortable.

Then the edginess gets sharp and dangerous for some. There are some big misunderstandings and then some hard, cutting words between father and son.

Money is tight, every penny counts. Most of the men are not married, but do have women past or present on mind. The city decides the building housing the business of unlicensed cabs should be torn down within the next few weeks to make way for an urban renewal project that might gentrify them out of the area.

August Wilson is once again describing the pressure on a black community coming from the white world. He is also describing the economic pressure felt by working-class people of all races and ethnicities. He is also describing the pressures that come from within people misunderstanding or not caring much about each other.

He said of the main character in his play *Fences*: "By looking at Troy's life, white people find out that the content of this black garbage-man's life is affected by the same things - love, honor, beauty, betrayal,

duty. Recognizing that these things are as much part of his life as theirs can affect how they think about and deal with black people in their lives."

This is why Wilson, who died in 2005, won almost every theater award existing in the United States – the Pulitzer Prize twice, Tony and New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards.

Jitney won the 2017 Tony Award for Best Revival of a Play. The director was Ruben Santiago-Hudson, who is now directing the touring production of *Jitney*. First stop is Arena Stage, September 13 - October 20.

Join us on September 10 when Footlights meets to discuss August Wilson's *Jitney*. We welcome back **Dr. Sandra G. Shannon**. Dr. Shannon received her Ph.D. Degree from the University of Maryland. She is currently Full Professor of African American Literature, specializing in Dramatic Literature and Criticism. She is one of the nation's leading scholars on the life and works of August Wilson. As extensions of her areas of scholarly expertise, she has served two-year terms as Editor of Theatre Topics journal and as President of the Black Theatre Network. She is also Founder of the interdisciplinary-focused August Wilson Society at Howard University.

Our dinner-discussion meets 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 dinner and the 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.

Read the play: *Jitney* is available in local libraries and bookstores. E-copies may be bought from the usual vendors, such as Amazon.

See the play: Tickets may be obtained from Arena Stage. We are unaware of any discounts at this time. There are many discussion events planned at Arena as part of their Wilson Festival this season. See Arena's website for more information.

October 16: Edward Albee's Occupant

On Wednesday, October 16, Footlights will discuss **Edward Albee's *Occupant*** – a tribute to sculptor Louise Nevelson and Albee's long-time friend.

Louise Nevelson immigrated to the US from Russia as a child. Unapologetically flamboyant, her life was one marked by intrepid artistic triumphs as well as deep inner turmoil. In Albee's play, both her public accomplishments and private emotional conflicts are examined by an unnamed interviewer who

questions the posthumous Nevelson with an unabashed scrutiny. The result is a touching, humorous, and honest tribute to a woman who was a pioneer for free-thinking females everywhere, but also stood strongly on her own as one of the 20th century's greatest artistic minds. The play ends with Nevelson "occupying" her place as a preeminent American sculptor.

Join us on October 16 at Alfio's. We welcome back **Adam Immerwahl**, Artistic Director, Theater J. He will be joined by a member of the production team. Pat Peyser will moderate. Reserve with Phyllis.

Edward Albee's *Occupant* script is available from Samuel French Publishers – \$9.95. Copies are available from local libraries. The play is included in The Collected Plays of Edward Albee 1979-2003 Volume 3.

About Footlights

To subscribe to the Footlights e-list, go to groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join, or e-mail footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Visit www.footlightsdc.org.

Calendar:

- **Tuesday, September 10**, 6:30 pm, dinner-discussion of *Jitney* by **August Wilson**. Guest: **Prof. Sandra Shannon**. Jerry Stilkind will moderate. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin at phylbo@verizon.net or 301-986-1768.
- **Wednesday, October 16**, 6:30 pm, dinner-discussion of **Edward Albee's *Occupant***. Guest: **Adam Immerwahl**, Artistic Director, Theater J. Pat Peyser moderates. At Alfio's. Reserve with Phyllis.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
5800 Nicholson Lane, Apt. L-07
Rockville, MD 20852