

from the FOOTLIGHTS

JANUARY 2006

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Neil LaBute's *Fat Pig* on January 10

"We're all just one step away from being what frightens us. What we despise. So we despise it when we see it in anybody else"—Carter in *Fat Pig*

"Some of my best work has been done with the crunch of snack cake in the background."—Neil LaBute

Footlights' January play is *Fat Pig* (2004) by maddingly provocative and controversial playwright, screenwriter, film director, and prose author **Neil LaBute**. *Fat Pig* asks: In a culture obsessed with beauty, can love ever be blind? Tom is attracted to bright and witty Helen, who happens to be a woman of size, but his coworkers are determined to save him from himself.

In much of LaBute's work, the seemingly bland surfaces of his dramas, such as *bash*, *The Shape of Things*, *The Mercy Seat*, *This is How It Goes*, and *In the Company of Men* among others, often conceal worlds of astonishing cruelty, in which men and women enjoy manipulating and doing harm to one another. Some critics and viewers have been taken aback by the viciousness of LaBute's characters, yet John Lahr, critic in *The New Yorker* says: "There is no playwright on the planet these days who is writing better than Neil LaBute."

We will have an exciting panel of guest speakers to guide us through an understanding of *Fat Pig*, and LaBute's work— **Kate Debelack**, who plays Helen in Studio Theatre's production of *Fat Pig*, **Danielle Mages Amato**, Studio Theatre Dramaturg & Literary Associate, and Otis Ramsey-Zoë, Literary Manager at CENTERSTAGE in Baltimore. Robin Larkin will moderate our discussion.

Footlights is pleased to invite Ushers members to join us for our dinner-discussion of *Fat Pig*. We'll meet on **Tuesday, January 10 at 6 p.m.** at Thai Chef, 1712 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 3rd floor, a very short walk north of the Dupont Circle Metro stop. Dinner is \$15, and includes a spring roll appetizer, a choice among five entrees, iced tea, tax and gratuity. Cash payment is preferred. Cash bar is available. A minimum additional \$5 donation to Footlights (tax deductible) is encouraged.

Make reservations for our dinner-discussion. Please reserve with Mark Gruenberg, 202-898-4825 or press_associates@yahoo.com. If you must cancel be sure to notify Mark so that someone else can attend. You may come for the discussion only at 7:30 p.m. We will have extra chairs in the back.

Read the play. Copies of *Fat Pig* are almost gone at

Olsson's (Dupont Circle's phone is 202-785-1133), 1307 19th St. NW, Washington, DC (Dupont Circle metro stop). If you are going to pick up a copy of the play, call first and if you reserve a copy in your name, be sure to pick it up promptly.

See the play. We are joining Ushers to see Studio Theatre's production of *Fat Pig* on **Saturday, January 28, 2 p.m.** Ushers and Footlights members will have dinner following the post-show discussion at Thai Tanic, 1236 14th St., NW—close to Studio Theatre. For dinner reservations contact Joel Markowitz, joel@ushers.us or 703-447-8805.

Fat Pig opens at Studio Theatre on January 4, and runs through February 12. Studio Theatre is having a LaBute Festival which includes *autobahn* (January 11-February 5), and readings from *Seconds of Pleasure: Stories* (January 21-22 & 28-29). See www.studiotheatre.org for details.

Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* on February 15

The heightened language dances with the rhythmic drums in an intricate ritual to continue life on Earth and in the beyond. We can feel what is happening but far more slowly can we begin to understand what is happening. And not clearly until pidgin English and the power of force reign us in so that we may see how a man betrays his mission and how his son honors the timeless universe.

Wole Soyinka, born and educated in Nigeria, then England, has written scores of plays, articles, fiction and non-fiction books, and been active politically in Nigeria, for which he was imprisoned in solitary confinement for some two years. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, the first African to be so honored. The Swedish Academy cited him as "one of the finest poetical playwrights that have written in English." During the 1990s he had little choice but to leave his country during yet another reign of a military dictator. He has continued to live mostly in the United States, even after the recent return of civilian rule in Nigeria.

Written in 1975, *Death and the King's Horseman* is based in part on a real incident in 1946 in Oyo, a Yoruba city in Nigeria, then ruled by Great Britain. Soyinka says in a note to the play that it is not about the clash of cultures. After all, he suggests, when one side has the power of life and death over another, using the word "clash" disguises the relationship between the two. But it is about how one people have created a seamless web between worlds we can see and worlds we cannot but know to exist.

One of our guests will be **John Vreeke**, director of the play

to be done at the Washington Shakespeare Company (WSC) February 9–March 12. Most recently, he directed Tony Kushner's *Homebody/Kabul* for Woolly Mammoth and Theater J. He was nominated for a Helen Hayes Award for his adaptation and direction of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* at WSC and for directing *Born Guilty* at Theater J.

Our other guest will be **Christopher Henley**, one of the founders and artistic director since 1996 of WSC. Not only has he directed at his theater but also has acted in many productions. We saw him in the all-male production of *The Maids*, which is how Genet wanted the play to be done, and more recently in Tom Stoppard's *Jumpers*. He has won two Helen Hayes nominations for his acting. He may talk about how an artistic director puts a season together and why he

chose Soyinka's play. Jerry Stilkind is our moderator.

We will meet for our **Wednesday, February 15** dinner-discussion of *Death and the King's Horseman* at **Casa Fiesta**, 4910 Wisconsin Ave, NW. Casa Fiesta offers a fixed price buffet for \$14 including tax and tip. Dinner is at **6:30 p.m.** The discussion begins at 7:30. Make reservations with Mark on or after January 10.

We'll see *Death and the King's Horseman* at WSC (Clark Street Playhouse), 601 S. Clark St., Crystal City (Arlington) on **Sunday, February 19, at 2 p.m.** Tickets are \$15. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5403 Nibud Ct, Rockville, MD 20852.

Robin Larkin for **FOOTLIGHTS**
5403 Nibud Court
Rockville, MD 20852

Calendar

Sunday, January 8, 2:30 p.m., see *Spoon River Anthology* at the American Century Theater. Dinner afterwards.

Tuesday, January 10, 6 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Fat Pig* at Thai Chef.

Saturday, January 28, 2 p.m., see *Fat Pig* at Studio Theatre. Dinner at Thai Tanic.

Wednesday, February 15, 6:30 p.m., dinner-discussion of *Death and the King's Horseman* at Casa Fiesta.

Sunday, February 19, 2 p.m., see *Death and the King's Horseman* at Washington Shakespeare Company. Tickets: \$15

Dinner-discussion reservations: Mark Gruenberg, 202-898-4825 or press_associates@yahoo.com
Theater tickets: Robin Larkin, 301-897-9314 or robinlarkin@comcast.net

To get Footlights updates on-line, send any message—even blank—to join@footlightsdc.org. Subscribers can post to our on-line list by sending brief messages to list@footlightsdc.org. Visit our website at www.footlightsdc.org for updates. Address inquiries to Mark Gruenberg at 202-898-4825 or press_associates@yahoo.com. Please support Footlights, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization. Send your tax-deductible contributions to Footlights, c/o Robin Larkin, 5403 Nibud Ct, Rockville, MD 20852.