

from the FOOTLIGHTS

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“Life shouldn’t be all work and no plays.”

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February 20: Julia Cho’s *The Language Archive*

Only two people in the entire world still speak the ancient language of Ayapaneco. Luckily, they live in the same small town in Mexico. Sadly, they are not talking to each other. The reason, says a linguist, “they don’t have much in common.” —from *The Guardian*, April 13, 2011.

Join us at **Alfio’s** on **Monday, February 20**, when Footlights will discuss **Julia Cho’s *The Language Archive*** with Forum Theatre co-founder and Artistic Director **Michael Dove**, **Jessica Burgess** who will direct Ms. Cho’s play, and cast member **Mitchell Hébert**, 2-time Helen Hayes Nominee.

In Cho’s play, linguist George speaks a dozen languages and is passionate about his work of making a record of the dying tongues while it is still possible, but he is simply unable to communicate with his own wife Mary. An older couple, the only two humans alive who still speak ‘Elowan’ – an imaginary sort of Eastern European tongue which the Archive is trying to record – are barely on speaking terms in any language.

Julia Cho is the daughter of Korean immigrants who says she had no exposure to theater as a child and is a “least-likely” playwright, but someone who was simply stunned by her first real exposure to live theater (John Guare’s *Six Degrees of Separation*).

Since then, Ms. Cho has written multiple plays, many of which have been nominated for – and have won – prizes, and she also writes for television, including scripts for *Fringe* and *Big Love*. *The Language Archive* won the 2010 Susan Blackburn Prize. Cho says she would like to be more of a ‘writer’s writer’ as she matures, and try her hand at non-fiction, essays, poetry, and novels. Meanwhile, we can enjoy her play about language as it uses humor to convey what one critic called “the terrifying inadequacy of language to bridge the distance between human beings.”

Forum Theatre is a leader locally in presenting thought-provoking plays, such as Vaclav Havel’s *The Memorandum*, Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*, Charles Mee’s incredible *bobrauschenbergamerica*, and Caryl Churchill’s *Mad Forest*. Want to see a play about the black plague? Forum did it with *One Flea Spare*. Michael Dove says Forum looks for “well-written plays that we think are worth talking about and that address social and political issues.”

Footlights talked with Michael Dove last season as he directed Wajdi Mouawad’s play *Scorched* for Forum. He also directs for other theaters. He recently did David Mamet’s *Water Engine* for Montgomery College, and will direct Warren Leight’s *Side Man* in the spring for a theater in Virginia.

Jessica Burgess is an Artistic Associate at Round House Theatre, in charge of project development, readings, workshops, casting, and outreach. She co-directed *A Prayer for Owen Meany* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Blake Robison. She has also worked with Adventure Theatre, Catalyst, the DC Beckett Centenary Festival, Rorschach, Solas Nua, and Theatre Alliance, among others. After a two-year stint at Woolly Mammoth reading scripts which had been submitted, she says she had a good idea of “which plays are produced and why.” She founded The Inkwell, a local organization whose purpose is to encourage emerging playwrights, work with plays which are ‘80% finished,’ and provide space for readings and rehearsals as a play is being shaped and rewritten.

Mitch Hébert acts, directs (remember that wonderful *Rabbit Hole* at Olney?), and teaches at the University of Maryland. He is fresh from two ‘star turns’ – *After the Fall* at Theater J and *Clybourne Park* at Woolly Mammoth – but his theater credits span years of memorable roles, from *Art* and *Charming Billy* right to the end of the alphabet with *Uncle Vanya* and beyond. He performs regularly at Round House, Theatre J, Signature, Studio, Rep, and Olney among others, and recently went to China to help direct a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Make reservations for our February 20 dinner-discussion with Phyllis Bodin at 301-986-1768, or Phylbo@verizon.net. Dinner is at 6:30; the discussion begins at 7:30 and usually ends by 9 - 9:30. We meet at Alfio’s Trattoria, located on the ground floor of the Willoughby Apartments, 4515 Willard Avenue, Chevy Chase, MD. The restaurant is two blocks from the Friendship Heights metro station on the red line. Street parking is limited but valet parking is free. The cost for dinner is only \$13 for salad, bread, choice among six entrees, ice cream, and coffee or tea, and the price includes tax and tip. Cash or check, no credit cards, please. We appreciate a \$5 contribution to Footlights. Wine, beer, and cocktails are available from the bar. If you have to cancel your dinner reservation please let Phyllis know promptly, but no later than noon on

February 20. If we are charged for no-shows, we may have to bill you. You may come for the discussion only.

Read *The Language Archive*. We have copies of the play available to mail to you for \$15. Send a check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, # L07, Rockville, MD 20852. The play has not been published.

See the play with Footlights. *The Language Archive* will be performed at Forum Theatre, Round House Silver Spring, 8641 Colesville Road, from February 16-March 10. Footlights will see it on Saturday, March 3, at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$20. A postshow discussion is included. Send your check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Lane, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852.

About Footlights

To learn more about Footlights, visit our website: <http://www.footlightsdc.org>. To subscribe to our e-list, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/footlightsdc/join>, or e-mail footlightsdc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

The Language Archive exists. In fact, there are several of these institutions in existence, all dedicated to collecting, recording and preserving as many of the world's languages as possible. The largest of the archives is in Berlin, Germany.

There are estimated to be 6500 living, spoken languages and dialects now, but scholars are afraid that if fewer than 100,000 people speak one of them – and this is true of at least 80% of the existing languages – it will vanish forever by the end of this century.

Some of these institutions, including the one in Berlin, have on-line access to the collection, so you can hear the words spoken. The archives also try to collect and preserve regional dialects of major languages.

Locally, you can visit the National Museum of Languages, 7100 Baltimore Ave., College Park, MD (301-864-7071). It is open to the public, has exhibits and offers tours of the collection.

Calendar

- Monday, February 20, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of Julia Cho's *The Language Archive* with Michael Dove, Jessica Burgess and Michell Hébert. Mary Ann Wren will moderate the discussion. At Alfio's, 4515 Willard Ave., Chevy Chase, MD, 20815. Reserve with Phyllis Bodin, 301-986-1768, or phylbo@verizon.net.
- Saturday, March 3, 2 p.m., performance of *The Language Archive*, at Forum Theatre, Round House Theatre, Silver Spring, 8641 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, MD. Tickets are \$20. Send check, payable to Footlights, to Robin Larkin, 5800 Nicholson Ln, #L07, Rockville, MD 20852. To contact - robinlarkin@comcast.net or 240-669-6300.

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