

from the FOOTLIGHTS

MARCH 2012

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

<http://www.footlightsdc.org>

Footlights to Discuss *Working* on March 16

In a white-collar town, such as Washington is, there are few blue-collar workers to tell their stories – and even fewer who can write them down, interpret them for a wider audience and tell the world. But that's what world-renowned author **Studs Terkel** did during his long writing career, and especially with one of his masterpieces, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (1974). Terkel (1912-2008) was a free spirit, an outspoken populist, a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, a terrible ham, and one of the best-loved characters on the American scene. Born in New York in 1912, he lived in Chicago for over eight decades.

Terkel's book, *Working*, was adapted by Stephen Schwartz & Nina Faso into a musical in 1978 and has been through several revisions since. In a 1999 NYT review Peter Marks writes: "*Working* is a musical about people who are never in musicals. The hard hats, cleaning women, parking lot attendants and bricklayers portrayed in this sweet-tempered revue are propelled from the chorus line of life into unlikely leading roles. The trucker on a long haul, the operator on a short break, the waitress on a circuit of the dining room: all get the chance in this show to exercise their inalienable American right to life, liberty and the pursuit of a boffo production number.

"It's an unashamed celebration of the common man, as wholesome as a Labor Day picnic. Based on Studs Terkel's identically titled book, a compilation of verbatim interviews with dozens of workers about their daily toils, this 1978 musical attempts nothing fancier than to spread the message through song that virtually everyone takes pride on the job and, by golly, deserves a little respect for it."

Terkel was a pioneer in gathering oral history from regular people, and the American musical, ever since the time of *Showboat* and *Oklahoma!* has pioneered in actually telling stories of real people and their surroundings. To put the two together, and set *Working* in the context of the history of U.S. musical theater, Footlights will discuss the book and the musical with **Karl Kippola**, assistant professor in the Department of Performing Arts at American University.

Professor Kippola combines the qualities of an historian of drama, a practitioner and a director. With a BA in drama, an MFA in acting and a PhD in theater

performance studies, he has concentrated on the history of the American musical. An AU professor for nine years, he was an actor for 25 years at Everyman, Rep Stage, the Shakespeare Theatre, Olney, Round House and other theaters. He has also directed musicals ranging from *Kiss Me Kate* to *Company* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, as well as non-musical plays such as *Hamlet* and *Tartuffe*. Professor Kippola has a forthcoming book, *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-1865*.

Professor Kippola will discuss *Working* with Footlights at **Alfio's** on **Friday, March 16. Make reservations** with Phyllis Bodin at 301-986-1768, or Phylbo@verizon.net. Dinner is at 6:30; the discussion begins at 7:30 and 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 March 16. If we are charged for no-shows, we may have to bill you. You may come for the discussion only.

Read *Working*. Studs Terkel's book is easily available in local public libraries. The musical script may be another matter.

Also available: *Studs Terkel's Working: A Graphic Adaptation*. As Roger Ebert said: "*Working* has been a book, a radio drama, a Broadway musical, and now a gripping graphic novel. I can't speak for Studs, but I suspect he would have been tickled to see it adapted by a former government file clerk and wage slave, who knows all about working."

Finally, Broadway Archives created a DVD from the 1982 PBS American Playhouse broadcast. Stephen Schwartz directed, and it includes James Taylor singing his trucking song. Studs Terkel introduces the show. Netflix has copies.

See *Working*. Keegan Theatre will produce *Working* with Shirley Serotsky directing, April 14 - May 13. See

www.keegantheatre.com for more information. Footlights will arrange a group trip to see it.

April 24: Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*

In April, Footlights will meet to discuss Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa*. A memory play set in the fictional village of Ballybeg in Ireland, the story is told as Michael remembers the events of that summer in 1936 when he was seven years old and living with his aunts in their cottage. There are five sisters, all unmarried (including Michael's mother), a brother who was a missionary working in Uganda and who has returned ill with malaria, and Michael's father who plans to go to Spain to fight against Franco even though the Catholic Church strongly supports that regime. The local cottage industry has shut down, none of the sisters now has an income, and the family lives in poverty and insecurity.

('Lughnasa' is an ancient Celtic festival, to celebrate the first fruits of an early harvest, although there is little joy in the cottage.)

Calendar

- Friday, March 16, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of *Working* with AU Professor Karl Kippola. Charlotte Baer 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.
- Tuesday, April 24, 6:30 p.m. dinner-discussion of Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* with director of the Quotidian Theatre production, Craig Allen Mummey. Mark Gruenberg will moderate the discussion. At Alfio's. Reserve with Mary Ann Wren, 301-770-4572 or wjwren@rcn.com.

Quotidian Theatre (www.quotidiantheatre.org) in Bethesda will produce *Dancing at Lughnasa*, opening April 20, and continuing through May 20. **Craig Allen Mummey**, director, will be our guest speaker for our April 24 meeting, at Alfio's.

Craig Mummey has directed many local productions. Just in the past year, he directed *Hair* for the Kensington Arts Theatre; *Lettice and Lovage* for the Colonial Players (Annapolis, MD); and *Blackbird* for Silver Spring Stage.

Make reservations for April 24 with Mary Ann Wren, 301-770-4572 or wjwren@erols.com.

About Footlights

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