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# ARTS IN SOCIETY

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The Theatre: Does It Exist?

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# ARTS IN SOCIETY

Published by Research Studies and Development in the Arts  
University Extension, The University of Wisconsin

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**The editors** will welcome articles on any subjects which fall within the areas of interest of this journal. Readers both in the United States and abroad are invited to submit manuscripts for consideration for publication. Articles may be written in the contributor's native language. An honorarium will be paid for papers accepted for publication.

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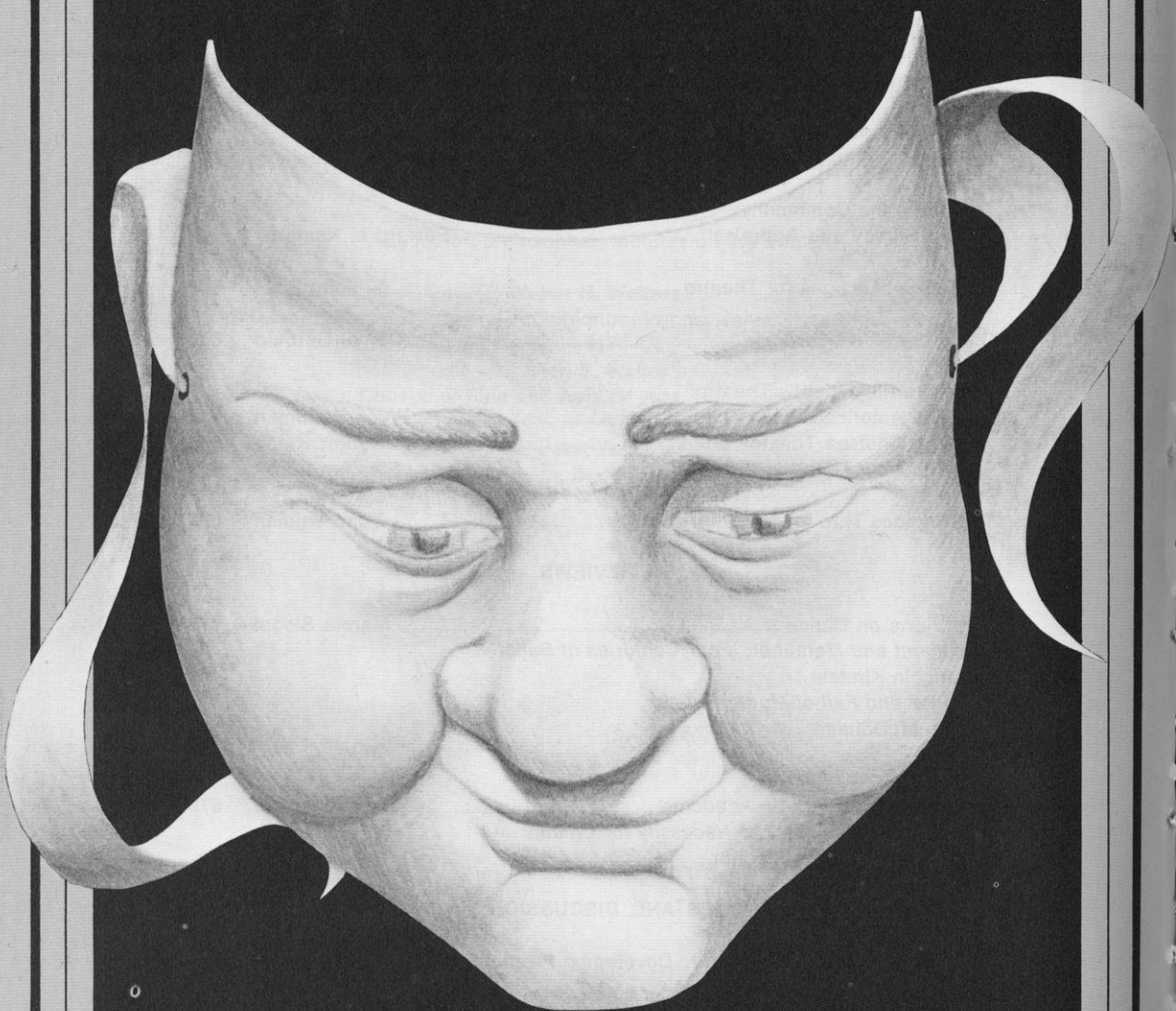
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# EDITORIAL

## A Deeper and Surer Rooting in Life

Edward L. Kamarck



Alan Schneider's measure of the life force of contemporary theatre, the lead article in this issue of *Arts in Society*, is aptly illustrative of a growing appreciation by our theatre leaders and thinkers of the significance of the social milieu. The reader will note that much of the cogency of Mr. Schneider's piece arises from his authoritative insight into the complex of institutional-artistic-social relationships which sustain our theatre in society. The most useful scholarship in theatre today, as in fact in all humanistic areas, is that which projects this kind of broad critical perspective with the aim of illuminating life-enhancing potentialities.

While the continued existence of the art of theatre in this disheveled era is still problematical, it is clear that the most hopeful developments in recent years have come from a leadership whose vision is predicated on a wide-angle social outlook. Increasingly we are seeing the evolution of methodologies and strategies for strengthening the relationship of theatre with the other life processes. Of those described in this issue, perhaps the most arresting is Norris Houghton's educational ploy for the training of entire theatre companies in concert.

It is evident that we have need of a full battery of forms of exploration and response, of melding of new idea to action in the innumerable arenas shaping the American theatre experience. The most social of all the arts, theatre by its very nature requires the deepest and surest rooting in life. Whether as thinkers, organizers, educators, or creators, they serve theatre best who most illuminate and affirm its nexus with society.

In this struggle for the survival of theatre in our time, no role is more difficult to strengthen than that of the playwright. While it is axiomatic that his vision must be the fundamental one in the shaping of a new social orientation for theatre, no one can presume to prescribe the tenor and substance of that vision. History has repeatedly proved that it is fatal to do so. Informed, imaginative criticism, on the order presented in this issue by Messrs. Gerould and Rosenberg, does of course have an important function in guiding and stimulating new creative exploration. By highlighting, interpreting, prodding, and even educating, the critics help keep the exploration honest. Most useful of all is their continual reminder of the abiding values of a vigorous theatre art—poetic imagination, intelligence, contemporary vision, authenticity, partisanship on behalf of man. Yet it would be the grossest folly to suppose that critics alone can guide the neces-

sary reorientation. Neither, certainly, can directors; nor producers.

Pertinent here is Mr. Schneider's key point, that nowhere in America is there significant evidence of an ability to maintain a growing creative edge for theatre. It underscores the urgent need to fashion institutional arrangements for theatre which hospitably encompass the playwright's role. This objective, surely, must have a primacy of purpose. The playwright must be reintegrated into the theatre as an artist working conjunctly with others toward the development of a communal art.

Our growing creative aridity has amply demonstrated that good new plays simply do not arise in a vacuum; their birth, growth, and nurture require an infinitely rich and sophisticated cultural ambience—one that only a fine theatre institution can provide. The theatre institutions that sustained Sophocles, Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Chekhov, and Synge testify for the efficacy of a playwright's theatre. They also offer important clues for the fashioning of such institutions for our time.

Clues, too, abound in the plays themselves. It should be noted that without exception the plays from the great eras of theatre are firmly in life. Abundantly, richly so. Paraphrasing Matthew Arnold, they mirror steadily the passions and tumults of their time and they mirror them whole. They have one other important characteristic. *They are covert poems of the dream life of man.* To word the matter in another way, these plays possess not only a strong textual dimension (a well-wrought story of characters placed in an authentic social setting) but also an infinitely rich sub-text (the resonances and overtones of the playwright's creative subconscious, those subliminal messages that appear over, under, and between the lines). For text and sub-text read ego and id. These are plays of sensate man in society. The playwrights who wrote them were *communal* artists.

Although Sir Herbert Read was not writing specifically of the problems of the dramatist he put the case well for the communal mission in art in the following extract from *The Politics of the Unpolitical*:

*Society expects something more than self-expression from its artists, and in the case of great artists it gets something more. It gets something which might be called life-expression. But the "life" to be expressed, the life which is expressed in great art is precisely the*

*life of the community, the organic group consciousness. It is the artist's business to make the group aware of its unity, its community. He can do this because he, more than other men, has access to the common unconscious, to the collective instincts which underlie the brittle surface of convention and normality.*

The paradigm intimated by the relationship of text to sub-text in an *Oedipus* or a *Hamlet* should be suggestive of strategies for the education, development, and institutionalization of young playwrights. For instance, it strongly underscores the necessity of immersing playwrights in the intellectual and social realities of our time, of rooting them deeply in the everyday life of a particular place. It seems apparent that the creative drive of today's theatre is directed inwardly, toward sub-textual explorations. We are now being offered plays virtually without text, devoid of a significant tie to social reality, headless, id-bound. At their best, as in a Beckett or a Pinter, they speak searingly of alienation, personal terror, and the inevitability of death and decay. At their worst they are self-indulgent, mindless puerilities, far more obsessed with shock impact than insight. But even at their best where do they lead us? How many Beckett plays do we require? A society already terror-struck at its capacities for destruction has small need to have its impotence continually reaffirmed.

It must, of course, be acknowledged that the Becketts, Pinters and others of similar bent have offered a far more honest and valid vision than their predecessors who packaged reality neatly in well-made plays. In that sense the former have performed a most valuable service, since they have restored creativity to the theatres, albeit on a personal and self-expressive level. The plays of the latter in lacking a dimension of sub-text were akin to the other artifacts of our technological era: machine made and soulless. Because they inherently lacked human believability, they were ultimately destructive of the social function of theatre.

Even given the most ideal institutional ambience for creativity, how realistic it is really to expect to turn up many plays matching the transactional paradigm exemplified in the great classics? It is difficult to know unless we make the effort to create the ambience. Talent teems in our theatre. What is woefully lacking is the opportunity to grow, to be purposefully challenged. Certainly if we could

manage to cross an Arthur Miller with a Harold Pinter we would have the needed prototype. And, indeed, in his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Edward Albee came very close. It would appear also that several of the Black playwrights may be pointed in the right direction, LeRoi Jones and Edward Bullins most notably.

The paradigm, in matching those outer tensions associated with the drive for social order and stability against the inner tensions associated with the drive for human fulfillment, in substance speaks of the larger drama of human survival. Since society most values what most urgently responds to its needs, it follows that it is to that larger drama that the theatre of our time must address itself.

A thought to ponder: Abraham Lincoln is said to have learned most of his statesmanship from reading the history plays of William Shakespeare; who is educating today's political leaders? It is evident that it is not the playwrights, neither past nor present.

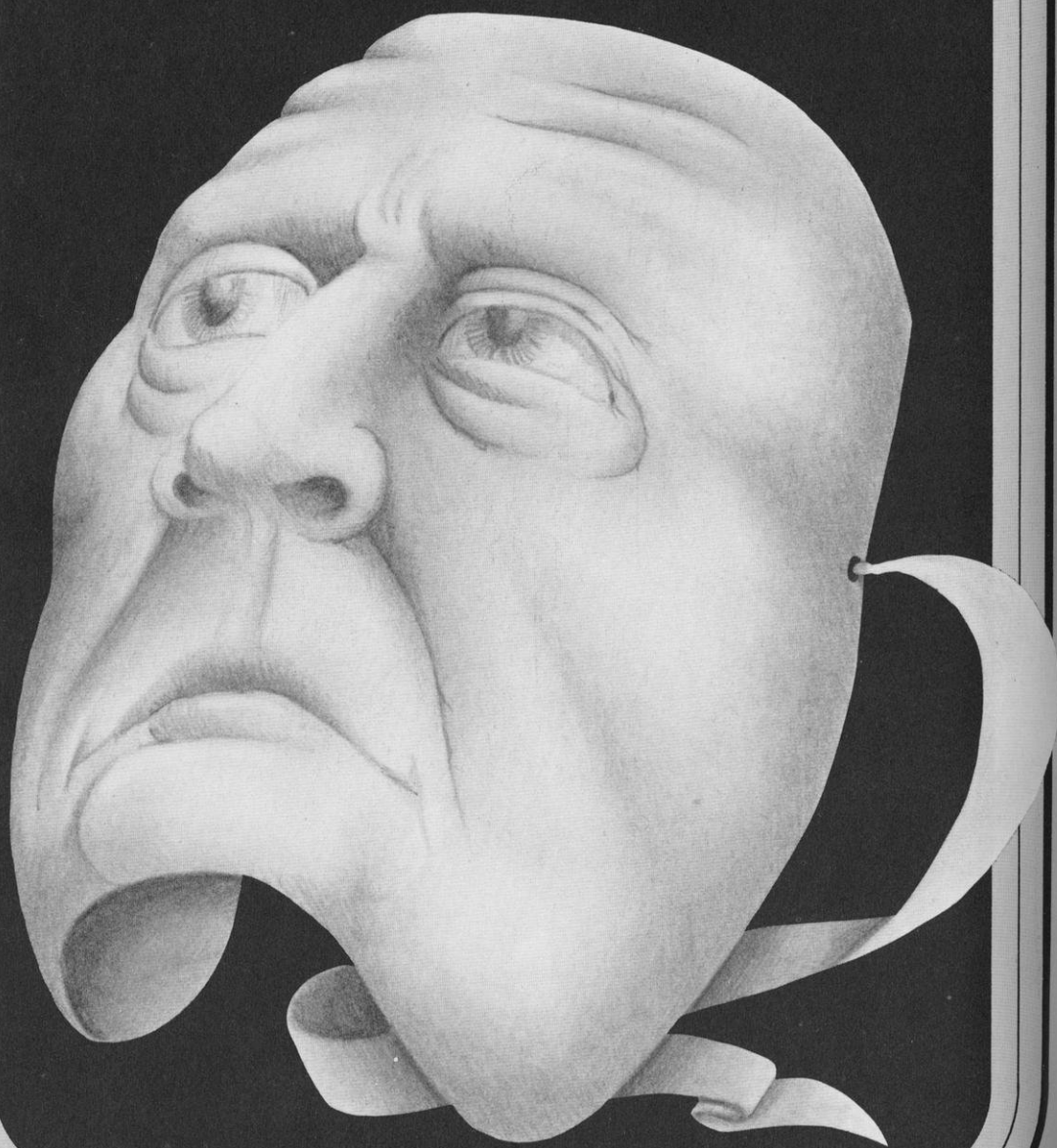
**Edward L. Kamarck**

**The Pig Pen** by Ed Bullins.  
Left to Right: Laura Esterman, Robert  
Peterson, L. Herbert Kerr Jr.  
Courtesy: American Place Theatre



# The Theatre: Does It Exist?

Alan Schneider



*The theatre is one of the most useful and expressive instruments for a country's edification, the barometer which registers its greatness or its decline. A theatre which in every branch, from tragedy to vaudeville, is sensitive and well-oriented, can in a few years change the sensibility of a people, and a broken-down theatre, whose wings have given way to cloven hoofs, can coarsen and benumb a whole nation.*

Federico Garcia Lorca

For whom, of course, that is the question. For the great American public, lining up for off-track betting and the Saturday night neighborhood movie, not caring one way or another what happens to the theatre? For Broadway's audiences, the three percent (shall we be generous and make it four?) of the citizenry who actually still go to see and be seen at the hits? For those of us who are part of its battered underpinnings, struggling with the rust to find a way to go on?

The sad fact is that, on all these levels of perception, the theatre seems increasingly unnecessary. Irrelevant. Like the appendix, still there but not doing much for us. We've got color TV in our living rooms; those comfortable, clean, modern, increasingly antiseptic film theatres all over the place flashing deep-focus, wide-angle shots and sexy closeups before our eager eyes; more papers and magazines each week than we can get through in a month; concerts and lectures and meetings galore; and multiplex stereo music (and talk) in close profusion at our fingertips. Not to mention highly theatrical goings-on outside the front door to consider over the morning coffee. An avalanche of stimuli, sensation, images, sounds, impressions, intellectual and aesthetic points-of-view roaring down upon us daily. Culture? When we hear the word, we want to reach for the car keys. I can hear the collective sigh of relief through the commuter train when the *Times* theatre critic turns thumbs down on the latest opening: "That's one we won't have to see!"

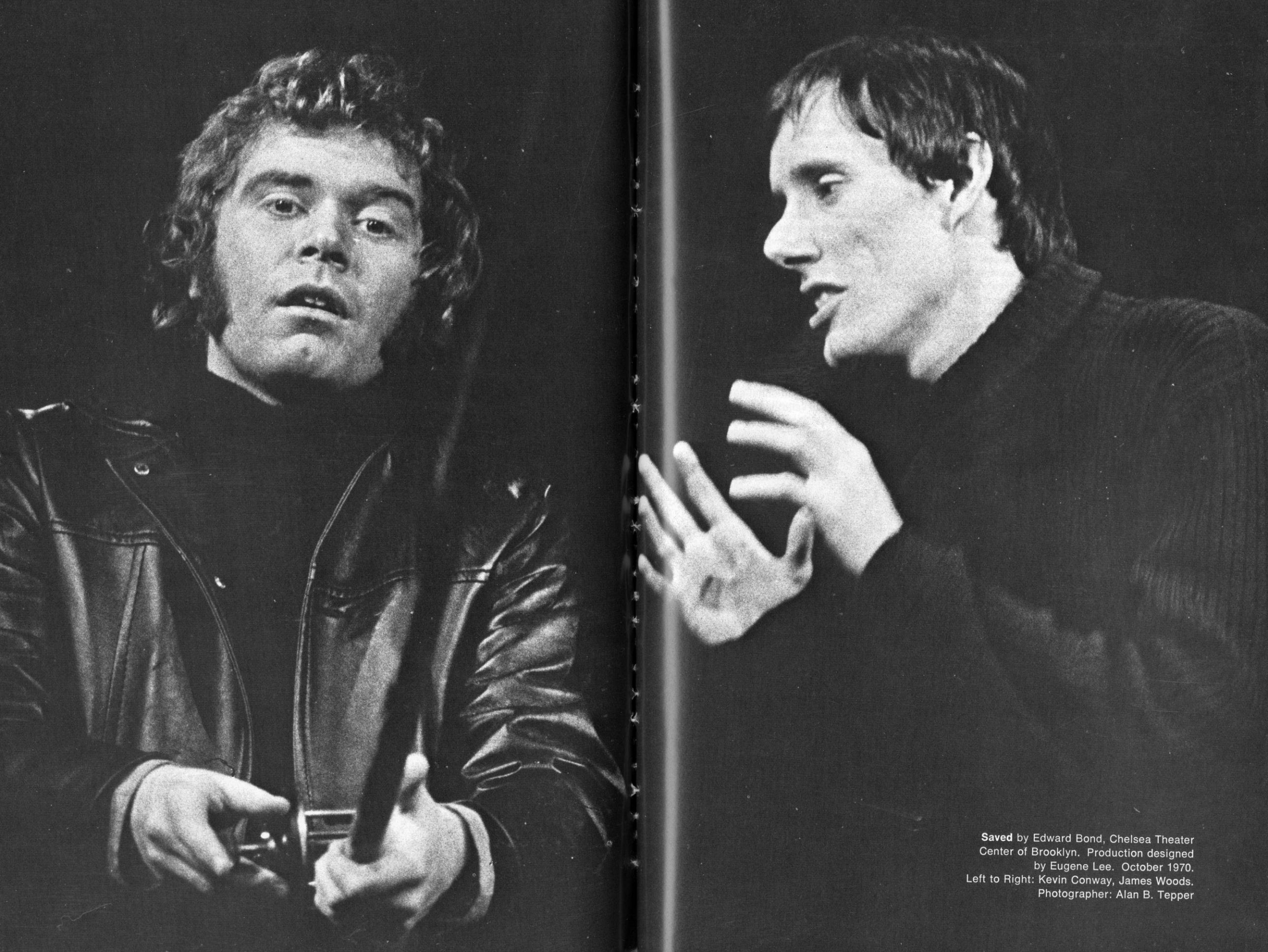
"The terrible truth is," Peter Brook reminds

us, "that if you closed all the theatres, the only loss would be a well-bred community feeling that a certain civilized amenity—like buses or tap-water—was lacking. There would be one subject less to talk about, maybe. But would there be a real sustained crying-out, a feeling of lack? A hunger?" We are now closer to Mr. Brook's hypothetical ultimate than ever before—in fact, off-Broadway theatres were closed by an actor's strike last fall, and the Broadway ones might be closed by another and longer one at any moment—and few shouts are heard in the land. The possible loss of Yankee Stadium seems vital to the pulse of the community, even though only a minority has actually been there; that of the Public Theatre arouses a handful and is, as one of the City Councilmen admitted, low down on the list of priorities.

And yet the theatre as a phenomenon of life, a process, an organism, an experiential adventure of the senses and the soul, not only has a unique history and identity but reaches us uniquely. Not only does it offer us the constant equation of live performers and a live audience—that is, a direct and personal relationship between two live elements, in a period of human connections made ever more impersonalized, mechanized, plasticized, removed-from life—but the theatre also actually unites that audience, brings it together, as no other group of individual human beings, except possibly a church congregation or a political gathering, is united and made over into one entity, emotionally and spiritually.

The movie audience remains an audience of separate but equal individuals: anonymous, private, responding as in a dream of their own to the images on the screen. One can watch a film in an empty projection room and appreciate it thoroughly; one cannot begin to experience a play in an empty or half-empty theatre the way one does when the theatre is full and responding, "assisting" in the performance as the French say. For a theatre audience is something quite other than the sum of its parts. The theatre is not only a meeting place, it is a meeting, an assembly of spectators gathered together and actually transformed. Wanting to be addressed together, wanting to know and share each other's responses and inner feelings as well.

Alan Schneider, a highly regarded professional director, has been associated with the Broadway production of a number of the outstanding plays of the last decade—most notably *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* He served as Artistic Director of the Arena Theatre in Washington and as Associate Director of the Minnesota Theatre Company. He also had a brief stint as a critic for *The New Leader*.



**Saved** by Edward Bond, Chelsea Theater  
Center of Brooklyn. Production designed  
by Eugene Lee. October 1970.  
Left to Right: Kevin Conway, James Woods.  
Photographer: Alan B. Tepper

We all yelled "Strike!" *together* after we listened to the organizer's rousing speech in *Waiting For Lefty*; we all wept *together* (at least the male members of the audience) for our fathers' failures at *Death of a Salesman*. We tensed our nerve-endings *together* while those splinters of glass were being jabbed into the eyeballs of the two couples in *Virginia Woolf*; or those dazed and maddened inmates of Charenton started to advance towards our sheltered seating in *Marat/Sade*.

More than that, the theatre, in a variety of ways, always unites its audiences with its performers—what is happening on stage with what is made to happen in the auditorium. Now. At this very moment. Of course, they're *pretending* something up there, but they are pretending it *right now, here, and for and with* us. And what they are pretending is as much affected by us and what we think, feel, and do, as we are being affected by what they say and do. They are real and we are real, and the inter-action between us is the most real thing because it is spontaneous and immediate and felt. With actors forgetting their lines or business or breaking something—or finding a moment of truth and beauty or intensity that hadn't been there before, right in front of us, because of us; and us being touched or moved or aroused because of them. And both sides of the equation knowing it.

In those days, a million years ago, when we laughed or cried across the footlights or at least past that open doorway of the proscenium arch, that inter-action used to be felt and comprehended in a familiar way. With Chekhov or Sheridan or Shakespeare or Tennessee Williams. Then, who knows, Thornton Wilder and Meyerhold and Reinhardt and Tyrone Guthrie and Margo Jones and Artaud and that fellow Grotowski and a few dozen others—playwrights, directors, actors, seers—began, in their own individual ways, to bring the performance out in front of that dividing frame; and audiences and performers began to share in the same tangible space instead of remaining physically apart. Once we were all out there together, in one way or another, no longer trying even to pretend that we weren't there except *precisely* for each other's benefit, why shouldn't we come even closer, why shouldn't we talk to each other, or even touch each other, get really involved with each other? In the way, let us say, the Living Theatre eventually began to try to involve us (even though they were not always honest about it), and then something called *Dionysus '69* and, before that, all those Happenings, and then Grotowski, and the Open Theatre, and all

that stuff at La Mama, and *Alice in Wonderland*, where we had to crawl right through the rabbit hole with the actors, and then *Orlando Furioso*, where in the middle of those rolling platforms we had to move fast or get killed; and now its boisterous buoyant magnetic successor, *1789*. And soon, the "touch Braille" of the Los Angeles Company Theatre's *James Joyce Memorial Liquid Theatre*, where we are feeling each other for most of the time. And then whatever else is coming next, consciously or subconsciously, deliberately or through osmosis. The theatre's only real crime is neither violence nor obscenity but dullness.

No, somehow, it isn't that the theatre as a form or artistic experience is dead or not needed, even by some of those millions who keep going to the movies each night. Any more than our new 747's make roller coasters less fun, or cocktail lounges rule out the haunted houses at carnivals, or computers deny us our human need to make two and two equal five. On the contrary. It's not the idea of theatre that is finished; it is that some of its forms are no longer as valid; the form of the simple human-interest story, for example, or trying to go on doing what can be better done, at half-hour intervals, as television chit-chat. But the theatre's forms are ever widening, marvelously fluid, and constantly surprising us. Metaphor, ritual, confrontation, actuality. Exciting us, stirring us, fulfilling us, giving us hope of something ever more immediate. What, if anything, is dying is the institution of theatre as it has existed for so long—in company with all the other institutions of our society which are currently being questioned on all sides. The pattern of the theatre's organization, of interests vested in money and buildings and promotion schemes and ways of thinking, is what tends to be frozen or congealed behind the protective—and outmoded—facades of its past. And nowhere more clearly or desperately or unjustifiedly than on Broadway.

Broadway, as everyone knows except the producer of any current smash hit show, has already been frozen a long time. For a long line of reasons, which would take a good half hour on a clear day to reach the ticket

**Waiting for Godot** by Samuel Becket,  
Sheridan Square Playhouse.  
Production design by William Ritman.  
February 1971.

Left to Right: Henderson Forsythe, Anthony  
Holland, Paul Price, Edward Winter.  
Photographer: Alix Jeffey

window. Mostly the reasons are economic ones, but then it's hard today to tell where psychology leaves off and economics begins, or vice versa. Let's start with economics. Costs. Costs are just plain murder. It now costs anywhere from \$150,000 to \$250,000 for a straight show on Broadway (it used to cost \$25,000 or so when I first started) and a million or two for a musical. As the costs of making smaller movies go down, the costs of making larger stage shows go up. And so do the ticket prices—the inevitable consequences of small seating capacity and only six nights in each week, one show a night. The theatre is, after all, a relatively tiny and relatively inefficient (by business standards) handicraft activity operating ineffectively and marginally within a mass-production economy.

Everyone knows this situation is true, but doesn't know how to change it. Or at the very least of getting together, across the board, and figuring out a way of functioning differently: financing plays differently, cutting the costs differently; and spreading the wealth—amazingly enough, there's still plenty of that on occasion—differently. Broadway happens

to be today in exactly the place where Hollywood was ten years ago just before the era of independent film production made it obsolete. And that same pattern of obsolescence is bound to take place in New York, or is already taking place, perhaps with off-Broadway playing the role of that independent producer fellow.

About ticket prices: all my producer friends always laugh when I talk this way and when I suggest, for example, a ticket price closer to what we have to pay for a movie. How can I be stupid enough not to know or realize or understand that the hits, especially the musical hits, always sell out—no matter what the price is. People are paying \$15 plus, and they'll pay \$25 plus or \$100 plus or whatever is necessary plus, to see that latest hit. And when it's a flop, you can't give away the seats, even if the show happens to be written by the most distinguished American playwright going, or is the noblest utterance since the Gettysburg Address.

All right, I answer politely, but where do we go from here? What's going to happen when



those expense-accounts and those upper-upper middle class sophisticates, who now fill up the bars and limousines on 44th and 45th Streets, run out of dough—and years? Then who comes, at those prices and to see those shows? Will their kids come? Or their cousins from the suburbs, who have long ago given up the habit because theatre-going is just too expensive, as well as too uncomfortable, too difficult to get seats and baby-sitters and to know where you're going to be six months from now; and most of all, too unrewardingly dull even when the critics have come out with raves? Are the teachers coming and the secretaries and the clerks and the storekeepers from uptown, all those people who for some reason keep on going to the movies?

But Broadway is interested only in one thing: immediate success. Which is a synonym not for quality but for money. That is, for "box-office." Which means simply drawing the most people for the longest possible time—with whatever the sweetest lollipop of the moment happens to be and the hell with what happens next week or next year. Which means, for example, that Brecht and Shakespeare never get done because they would cost the same as a big musical (lots of cast and lots of stagehands). But a musical has a one thousand times better chance of making a mint—unless you can get Liz and Dickie Burton—and even then they may want too much of the take. Broadway is ruled by the theatre party ladies. Which means by audiences who don't want to see anything disturbing or worth thinking about, anything related, for example, to the real world. They don't want to see a "sort of a hit," they want to see a hit. And they'll come by the droves from all sorts of unlikely and outlandish and faraway places like Great Neck to make whatever it is a hit—if whatever it is has the right subject matter, the right stars, and the right notices. For Broadway is also ruled by the critics, or rather by THE CRITIC, whoever that man on the *Times* happens to be. He determines our fates, on both sides of those non-existent footlights, in some respects more so than does Richard Nixon. The greatest poker game on Broadway is deciding ahead of time what Clive Barnes will say. And if you can win that one a few times, you can cash in on a lot of blue chips.

At one time, somewhere in the dim romantic past of five or six years ago, there were ardent hopes and specific indications that Broadway might soon have alongside of itself some kind

of subsidized, non-commercial partner, akin to what the British have with their National, their Royal Shakespeare, and their Royal Court, to balance and stimulate the commercial half and make up for all its glaring omissions of content and form. After all, there are people yet alive who remember back to the glories of the early Theatre Guild and of the Group Theatre. But, ironically enough, the progeny of that selfsame group, the Actors Studio Theatre, after much hoopla, disappointed us by turning down Albee's *Virginia Woolf* as "a dull, whiny play without a laugh in it" for safer pastures, and soon ran out of fodder. The Association of Producing Artists, so recently triumphant and glittering, fell apart almost as soon as it became solvent; and even the re-born Phoenix, with two hits, *School for Wives* and *The Catonsville Nine*, remains only a shadowy substitute. While the Lincoln Center, strapped helplessly to its marble mausoleum like a snail, and moving at a snail's pace to master its own mammoth hollowness, finds it still difficult to set our hearts beating and our eyes aglow. It seems that only when England's own, commercial or non-commercial, reaches our shores do we get excited about something that you can't whistle while you're riding the subway home.

Hopes for any kind of serious theatre now rest in the new "middle contract," the first inching forward of the Broadway glacier in years. The idea is to take the less desirable theatres and cut them down to 500-seat houses, with a fixed limited maximum gross and a special scale of payment for all those concerned. Thus theoretically encouraging those producers to do shows, supposedly at much lower costs, of a kind no longer possible in Broadway's blockbuster economics. Potentially valuable as the principle is, it has yet to be tested adequately in practice; and it is not yet clear that producers will do anything via middle contract except what they might have done, slightly more expensively, on a regular Broadway basis. We shall see. In the meantime, as one walks past Times Square, among other disappointments, one's thoughts and eyes turn towards the Bijou, once a sparkling 500-seat gem of a theatre, now reduced by Broadway's Alice-in-Wonderland logic to showing Japanese films. There are also the Henry Miller and the Hudson to think about, both once marvelously handsome and inviting, reduced by the laws of economics to the status of garish grind houses for skin flicks. And the Little Theatre on 44th Street, perhaps the most perfectly proportioned and equipped playhouse in New York City, has 600 lovely seats, a great backstage, and the David Frost

Show. Soon, it'll be the Helen Hayes and another and then another going, always the most attractive ones, to make way for parking lots and hotels and the glass cubes of office buildings, for which our vulture society does indeed hunger so avidly. To be replaced, we are told smilingly down at the Mayor's office, by new and more efficient theatres, of course, built with city assistance and moral support. We know in reality that the kind of replacements they are talking out are a series of huge, impersonal monsters, located deep in the least accessible recesses of those office-buildings and hotels; cold, uninviting, spawned and spavined by committees, well-meant, but hopelessly wrong and impossible to work in.

The recent season on Broadway, as one wag had it, was average: better than the one before, not so good as the one to come. The usual musicals, unusually heavy with nostalgia (from *No, No, Nanette* to *Follies*); some sub-usual comedies, including one from Neil Simon; and a few super-usual British imports (my favorites being *Home*, *The Philanthropist*, and Peter Brook's playful version of *Midsummer Night's Dream*, but take your choice). Not one new serious American play (even including those insured with comedic one-liners to make themselves more palatable) was a success or came up to expectations. Nor, as it happens, did I direct anything on Broadway last season, for the first time since *Virginia Woolf* in 1962. What was painfully apparent was that the season again summed up far from an unalloyed delight. And that if it had not been for all those British actors, there wouldn't have been enough nominations in each category to make the "Tony" Awards even possible. The time seems fast coming when there won't be enough plays on each year for it to qualify as a season.

Richard Barr, for one, the producer of Edward Albee's sadly unsuccessful (it ran only four weeks) latest play, *All Over*—as well as the longer-running *Virginia Woolf*, *Tiny Alice*, *Delicate Balance*, and others, swears that he'll never again produce another serious play on Broadway without large-scale subsidy, not exactly an overwhelming prospect. The Theatre Development Fund, set up a few years ago to help the commercial theatre through its growing trials, did indeed give Barr a small amount of money from its limited resources to keep the Albee play running; but the audiences simply would not come. (They did come to the previews at lower prices.) And Barr has been forced, for the first time in a decade, to think of giving up his producing offices as well as the premises occupied by

the Playwrights Unit in Greenwich Village, an active and influential workshop for new playwrights. When producers like Richard Barr are considering limiting their production activities on Broadway, then Broadway is indeed really dead.

Off-Broadway, hopefully, though more or less in the same psychological and economic boat, is doing a bit more to keep the theatre alive. (Perhaps that is why I chose to work there twice last year, once even venturing as far as the wilds of Brooklyn.) The most active and lively theatre place in New York, for example, is probably Joseph Papp's Public Theatre, regally and tastefully housed in the old Astor Library downtown, with five pleasant playhouses constantly serving up a variety of theatrical imagination and excitement, in a youthful and non-Establishment atmosphere that draws a wide range of non-chichi customers. There are, perhaps, a handful of other theatres which do good work more than sporadically or by accident. But off-Broadway, by and large, is still—in company with the remainder of the American theatre—a peripheral and unpredictable operation, without a consistent guiding philosophy or point of view; precocious and pragmatic but often untalented and self-indulgent. Budgets, of course, tend to be much smaller than Broadway's, anywhere from one-fifth to one-tenth or less, tastes much more personal and specialized. But the need to deliver, to come through with a "success" is still almost as omnipresent—and as destructive. On the Mesozoic theory that off-Broadway is a showcase, everyone gets paid very little, and sometimes nothing at all. What it is now a showcase *for* is no longer clear; perhaps it is only Hollywood that we are all working for. Pressures do, however, tend to be lower, tensions more easable, and working conditions more relaxed, in spite of smallish, mostly makeshift theatres replete with cramped dressing-rooms. The few desirable off-Broadway playhouses are practically never available, with theatre owners, as usual, rating the top billing on the totem pole.

Rental deals south of 14th Street would suggest some startling paradoxes for Marxist economists. All deals, for example, are made on a guarantee of something like six weeks, and for fixed rentals rather than percentages (these are often added to the basic rental). After all, the theatres involved are relatively small (limited by union regulations to 199 or 299 seats), expensive to operate, even with temperamental hot-water pipes, impressionistic paint jobs in the lobby, or inadequate plumbing either for audience or actor requirements.

Too many dark weeks would lead to bankruptcy and more parking places. Thus, it may actually reward theatre owners to book in a succession of two-night flops, each one paying out six weeks non-returnable rental, rather than take a chance on a single show, which might wind up as a moderate success with only a few weeks run. And wind up leaving the theatre dark until the next customer gets his cast ready. There are endless variations of this gambit. The vital point is that one can't do a show until one has a theatre and one can't get a theatre unless one has a certain kind of show. With a corollary: off-Broadway producers who worry about not getting a theatre when they need one often acquire a lease on a building to give them more freedom to produce; inevitably, they wind up without enough plays to put on, and become bookers of other producers' shows. Real estate is always king, even though the kingdom tends to be smaller and a bit seedy.

Off-Broadway's recent actors' strike came with very few actors supporting it, and eventually disappeared, with matters mainly unsettled. And no one quite sure who had won but knowing that everyone, sooner or later, will be losing because costs will go up and there will be fewer jobs. Barr himself gave up on off-Broadway some years ago because he felt it was no longer economically feasible for a producer to survive there; and he didn't want to function only as a theatre booker. He once held the lease on the Cherry Lane, a charming small theatre of many memories, where in cheerier times we managed to afford such plays as *The American Dream*, *The Zoo Story*, *Endgame*, *Happy Days*, *Play*, *The Lover*, and a few others. I once figured out that I had, without realizing it, directed an unusual number of two-character plays. The reasoning had nothing to do with aesthetic considerations; it had to do with the number of seats at the Cherry Lane (179 to be exact). Even in those golden days, off-Broadway could rarely afford large casts. And the question of what constituted a large cast was interpreted in many ways; in some cases, it meant anything over two.

Today's off-Broadway can afford fewer and fewer plays with more than a few characters. Even the Theatre de Lys doesn't do plays such as *The Three-Penny Opera* any more. Except under special circumstances, such as, for example, at the enterprising and almost unique Chelsea Theater Center (because it is both subsidized and non-commercial) located within the Brooklyn Academy of Arts, where last season I directed Edward Bond's *Saved*, with ten

—count 'em, ten—actors, not to mention a sizeable and permanent production staff and crew. *Saved* sold out for three weeks at the Chelsea, and the theatre still had difficulty getting enough funds for its next production. We even managed to transfer—to the Cherry Lane—and were doing reasonable business when, a few weeks later, that off-Broadway strike came and killed us. Of course, that particular strike wasn't supposed to affect us because, for numerous complex reasons, the Chelsea had a special arrangement with Actor's Equity, even after we transferred. But, you see, everyone thought we were affected and had closed, and everyone insisted on treating us as though we were indeed closed (including telephoning all of us daily to tell us how sorry they were). Even though we kept repeating that we weren't, at the rate of several thousands of dollars weekly (which we didn't have to spend), in newspaper advertising each week. Until we ran out of the medium that was trying to put across our message—and had to close.

Then came what might be called a most educational off-Broadway experience, the revival of *Waiting for Godot*. After a host of adventures over the past 15 years trying to re-do the play—it wasn't considered commercial enough a proposition, had no subsidiary rights available, everybody in the world has already seen it, etc.—we finally got the Sheridan Square Playhouse, one of the best, for our very own. (All because the uncertainties of the strike were frightening off producers from making too many plans.) And by agreeing to do it for free (that is, if my union is looking, technically by reinvesting my fee in the production), as did everyone else—except the actors. Also by having the lessee of the theatre in as co-producer, so that we didn't have to pay out all that rent—until after we opened. The budget, therefore, was minimal, the labors and love of all concerned huge. And, as the dice happened to fall on opening night, the responses of both critics and audiences were so enthusiastically favorable that we were sure we'd be around awhile, at least a year or two. Finally! After a much-too-long period of waiting, I was going to be paid almost as much each week as a Westchester County truck driver.

Quick cut to reaction shot: Infinite sadness. A few weeks after we had opened to all those glowing notices and resplendent hopes, the houses selling out like mad, the actor playing our Lucky said he had to leave soon because his back was hurting him—and, besides, he had a great part in a film to be shooting in Florida. Would he at least come back to us

after he had finished the movie? No, he was just too tired; anyhow, he had to confess that the role and the whole play depressed him too much. Goodbye. Fortunately, we were able to find another actor for the role, equally talented and almost as suitable. (Lucky One, by the way, has not been back to see us; maybe he's still in Florida.)

A week or so later, our Estragon gave us his notice. He wasn't too happy, he admitted, about the performance his partner on stage, our choice for Vladimir, was giving; nor did he agree with my interpretation of the play. It didn't fit in with the way he had previously played the role somewhere else. Although, naturally, he had accepted the role readily enough when I first offered it to him—and he had gotten generally favorable notices. No question of loyalty to the other performers, to the management, nothing even about the rare opportunity this particular play offered him as a performer. (The loss of weekly salary didn't mean anything because he happened to be grossing around \$100,000 annually doing TV commercials.) Goodbye again, not entirely in the sporting tradition this time. We tried to find someone equally good to replace him, but that was more difficult.

And so on. All down the line. Actors leaving, actors tired, actors unhappy. Actors wondering why they should have to give eight performances a week. Problems with Pozzo and a dramatic departure. Problems with Lucky II. More replacements. Eventually, I could not bring myself to come down to the theatre or enter the dressing-room because I knew that there would be more complaints than hellos.

Was this typical for off-Broadway? I trust not. Because if it is, all the talk about off-Broadway being more fun than Broadway is just nonsense. But from the stories that float around, I'm not sure that it wasn't. Good actors rarely if ever stick around very long off-Broadway unless they have some special reason. The productions just cannot pay them enough—and there are too many good opportunities always cropping up elsewhere. Nor does Equity, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, allow run-of-the-play contracts off-Broadway even should the actors want to sign them. Besides, what is typical? In the theatre, every flea has a story of its own to tell.

Now, off-off-Broadway—where I do not, at the moment at least, have any personal fleas to flick off—is both better and worse. The economics, or rather the fact that there hardly are any economics to speak of, seem sometimes

to be better, the aesthetics often worse. Except in scattered instances: particularly the “communal companies” or ensembles that have been springing up as both protest and answer to harsh realities elsewhere. Including Richard Schechner's Performance Group, Joe Chaikin's older Open Theatre, the eternal Ellen Stewart's eternal La Mama, Andre Gregory's newer Manhattan Project, some things at Theatre Genesis, one or two other places and times. Outside of such, largely subsidized (by government and foundation funds) ventures, “o-o-b” is simply a profusion of confusion, a medley of work that is often little better than mediocre, even though camouflaged by mystique or highly articulate manifestos of philosophy or purpose.

In general, what once started out as legitimate off-beat experiment and search for new styles as well as a new way of working together has, increasingly, degenerated into sensation, opportunistic exploitation of nudity, sexuality, and four-letter words, detailed dramatizations of Krafft-Ebing. Last year's or last week's sensation must always be superseded, topped by something else, no matter what. With taste and content and rationality relegated to ashcans that make Beckett's seem positively old-fashioned. As humorist Russell Baker once reminded us, there's very little new stuff left to be performed on stage but actual human sacrifice.

In the midst of all this, everyone works on a shoestring, and that shoestring is often frayed and tears easily. Physical surroundings are usually tiny, invariable makeshift or even tackier than some of those off-Broadway. No one makes a living, or knows where the next day's bread is coming from. While recognition, “success,” if it comes at any time, is the hardest problem of all to survive. For with any kind of recognition inevitably comes exposure to the outside world, and with exposure contact, the possibility of corruption, and the progressive loss of focus and talents. Continuity, permanence, development, and growth—those crucial conditions for creative theatre work, the need for which led most of these practitioners to off-off-Broadway in the first place—are usually the most impossible conditions to hold onto before and after the Godot of success arrives, if it ever does. Only a poor handful manage to exist for longer than brief intervals. And even these—as Chaikin himself found out when he had recently to reduce the ranks of his Open Theatre from 18 actors to 6 (including two newcomers) and virtually start over—find the sands unsteady beneath their feet.

**Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf** by Edward Albee, Billy Rose Theatre.  
Production designed by William Ritman. October 1962.  
Uta Hagen, Arthur Hill  
Photographer: Friedman-Abels, Photography, Inc.





Nothing in New York comes easy. Or stays easy. Or is unaffected by New York's peculiar psychological pollution.

Nor is it so simple outside of New York. For the Regional Theatre has its own set of problems, limitations, corruptions, disillusionments—as well as accomplishments. For a while, with a constant swelling in the ranks of the resident companies, Utopia and a truly nation-wide theatre seemed to be close at hand. But with quantity came less quality. Artistic achievements too rarely matched what had once been promised. Standards remained too low and often sank lower, and uniformity in matter and manner too widespread. Brochures and production styles have come to be barely distinguishable from each other. Actors and directors, as well as business managers and P.R. specialists move about from “company” to “company,” so that—as with airports—a visitor very often doesn't know what city he is visiting at the moment.

Lately, to compound the confusion, the Regional Theatre has suffered a real crisis of morale. Several companies have literally disintegrated, others are in severe financial straits. Whenever the nation's economy worsens, of course, the arts are the first to feel the pinch directly. And theatre, amorphous and tenuous at best, remains the most expendable item of the agenda.

The resident repertory movement was never, except in a few places such as Minneapolis and San Francisco, real “repertory” in the sense of a fabric of interchangeable productions. It has now almost ceased to be “resident” as well. More and more actors, it seems, are being “jobbed” in from show to show, or for a few shows in a row. In itself, that is sad news enough, but the rationalizations offered up in defense of this practice are even sadder. Theatre companies, it is carefully argued, are a peculiarly European institution, not a necessity for growth and excellence. The American rhythm and American individualism and energy require other and more individual forms of organization. And so on. The theatre always comes up with a Gresham's Law of its own. Real repertory happens to be expensive and a great deal of trouble; and we never have enough space to store all that scenery the way the Old Vic manages to do, so we find logical artistic reasons why it's really better to play one show for a definite run. Companies are impossible to hold together because our actors are always getting those other jobs—and they also tend to get tired of each other fairly

quickly—so we decide that “jobbing” is actually a superior method of working. After all, our audiences do get tired of seeing the same faces all the time. Logically, it would be easy enough to argue that it's more economical and certainly more efficient to have no individual theatres at all. Isn't it obvious that the idea of a bunch of theatres of different shapes and sizes and dispositions and interests and quality and all separately run is highly suspect to begin with? A network of standardized and systematized playhouses à la Howard Johnson with one standard show sent out in duplicate, perhaps, or several shows criss-crossing each other, would certainly save lots of time, trouble, and money.

And so it goes. The regional theatre, the “tributary,” indeed flowing a bit into the Broadway ocean. And Broadway habits and tactics flooding into the regional theatre. With costs rising, and regulations and the regimentation of practice tightening. Actors billed in off-Broadway's alphabetical order in programs printed by Broadway's Playbill. Actors starred above playwrights. Actors leaving before the end of a run in order to make films. While some of the “companies” and dreams and memories of what might have been happening too often languish or disappear—not necessarily in alphabetical order.

There has clearly been one major accomplishment. Apart from any special quality in individual productions—which sometimes, in Washington or San Francisco or Houston or elsewhere, are getting more polished and distinguished and often rank with the best results which the New York theatre has to offer. Apart from the working atmosphere certainly being more “professional” and pleasant than the ad hoc procedures and tensions and physical difficulties of New York. The real advance has come in the number and quality of the new plays being done, the new attitude towards presenting the hitherto unproduced script. There was a time, not too long ago, when the regional theatre could not get first-rate new plays, or would not do them even if available. Then came the Arena Stage production of *The Great White Hope* and the breakthrough. For the theatres—and for the playwrights. And, as in the case of expensive untried scripts like this one, many plays would not be able to get a first performance in New York without a previous successful showing outside. This practice should continue and grow now that the playwrights and their agents have begun to catch on that, in many cases, their plays might be receiving first-class produc-

tions and will, in addition, be seen by influential critics and intelligent audiences. They are now rushing, not walking, to the nearest regional theatre with every new (and old) unproduced script they can dig up. And, predictably, the managements of some of these theatres, looking for another big winner, are now fighting each other for plays and priorities with a ferocity that would make David Merrick jealous. And by this time they have learned what sort of deal to make beforehand.

There is no question that the regional theatre has, in some respects, surpassed if not quite forgotten about New York. That actors are getting more jobs and perhaps more interesting roles outside of New York than within the decreasing confines of the Broadway and even the off-Broadway theatre. At the same time, the much sought-after heightening of the American actor's talent, which the regional theatre was to send soaring, has not really happened as much as we had all once hoped. Some of those "company" actors are even getting a bit rusty or stale. It still doesn't seem possible to cast anything really well. Although, what cannot be denied is that Richard Chamberlain played Richard II at the Seattle Rep last season, and one of the critics said he was on his way to becoming John Barrymore.

Something else of the same sort is happening. Productions as well as actors are being "jobbed" in. Arena Stage brings in Jackie MacGowran to do his Beckett evening, and gets ideas of how to operate that second theatre once in awhile. The Guthrie Theatre books in a spring pre-season run of *1776*, and it is so successful that the Guthrie is only sorry that *Hair* was not available. As Mr. Gresham told us so long ago, bad money drives out good. Or is it, in this case, so bad?

More important to note, the Guthrie will have a largely Canadian company this season. For obvious reasons. The new Artistic Director, after all, comes directly from Stratford, Ont., which has always been the Guthrie's Canadian cousin anyhow. In recent years, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago and the Meadowbrook Theatre near Detroit, among others, could easily have passed for typical English provincial Rep companies. In personnel and in acting styles. And our André Malraux (plural intended) in Washington, last year talked about opening the Kennedy Memorial Center with a company from the British National Theatre. Jolly news for those of us who labor in or still have faith in what we laughingly call the American theatre.

My implied objection, or at the least concern, about all these inter-cultural influences is not, I hope, nationalistic but artistic in nature. I am, personally, entirely in favor of the freest possible exchange of theatre ideas and talents—even when those same British directors who put up the portcullises when we approach their constituencies, come over, in increasing numbers, to direct all those plays, on Broadway, off and way off, for which there are not, it must say somewhere in small print, any suitable American directors. We must learn from each other, and we do. And we must be ever grateful to those towering world figures, as diverse as Guthrie and Grotowski, who have come to heaven and transform our theatre. But, eventually, if we want truly to find our own way for the future, we must do our own work, stumble as we may. Apart from a series of brilliantly choreographed and colorful productions, at the creation of which he has few equals, what will the Guthrie's new master eventually bequeath to our next generation when he leaves Minneapolis as he will some day to go home to the Old Vic? Will the Guthrie again hesitate to place an American as his successor as it did when Guthrie left? Will we still be struggling with the basic problem of how American actors and American directors should be doing Shakespeare? Or all the classics? Or pronouncing the "ah" sound in the word, "dance"? Will we still not have any actors under forty able to play anything but a succession of taxi-drivers and waitresses? And any actors over forty to play ministers, prime or otherwise? Will we again be a generation behind ourselves—and everybody else?

When all these details have been forgotten, the health of our theatre depends entirely on the attitudes we bring to it. Ultimately, psychology is more potent than either real estate or subsidy. For it is only by knowing what the theatre really is or could be that we can make it more than it is now. Only by caring enough.

I shall never forget a visit I once paid to the Mossviet (Municipal-Party) Theatre in Moscow to see its director, Yuri Alexandrovitch Zavatsky, for whom I once had the good fortune to serve as interpreter when he directed some scenes from *The Cherry Orchard* in New York. Zavatsky had a rehearsal of his new and highly untraditional production of *Crime and Punishment* scheduled for eleven o'clock that morning. He wanted me to see it—even though it wouldn't be opening for some time—and had asked me to meet him at his office at ten o'clock for a talk and a brief tour around his theatre. Naturally, he sent his car (with chauffeur) to bring me there. The doorman



# **Saved by Edward Bond.**

Left to Right: Donald Warfield, Richard Cox, Tom Leopold, Stefan Hartman.

knew who I was, and also who Zavadsky was (an experience not always duplicated at such places as the Lincoln Center). I was immediately escorted down copiously carpeted corridors, up splendid elevators and down more carpeted corridors, into the comfortable anteroom to his office, where his secretary made me comfortable while he was concluding a conference with a production aide. In a few moments, Zavadsky came out, smiling, to welcome me.

Led into his palatial Hollywood producer's office, grander by far than David Merrick's red-walled inner sanctum, I was most impressed with the numerous books, periodicals, mementoes and other theatrical memorabilia which overflowed everywhere. We talked about New York, the state of the theatre in our respective countries, his thoughts about the "new" production. I wandered about, ate cucumber sandwiches and sipped tea until another aide said it was time. More lush and mysterious corridors, a look at various studios

and rehearsal rooms, finally our entrance into a hushed, splendidly equipped and gilded auditorium, each seat dust-covered nightly by a staff of what must have been dozens.

What really got me was that half a row of seats in the center of the hall had been removed to make adequate leg-room for the Master. In front of his seat was placed a medium-sized circular table, on which were a pile of virginal white pads, some newly-sharpened pencils (lots of them because he liked sharp-pointed pencils), a small lamp, an intercom mechanism so modern that it didn't seem to need wires—which meant he could easily pick it up and move around—and a vase of fresh-cut flowers. A seemingly endless crew was awaiting him, all in new-laundered blue smocks, bustling about onstage, ready to respond to his every gesture. The actors were quietly talking, finishing their tea, working together on scenes.

The production had been in rehearsal for several months. Today, Zavadsky was concen-

trating only on one or two moments, which needed some slight adjustment; but the entire set was up and all the lighting equipment. Just in case he would like to see something or try some effect. Some of the company who had not been called were there because they wanted to watch the rehearsal. Slowly, quietly, almost unnoticeably, he began to guide the actors and staff towards the paths he sought. There was absolutely no sense of hurry, of a deadline, of strain, of concern for anything except the artistic problems involved. When they wanted to talk about something, they talked about it. And the actors, always respectful, responded immediately and almost objectively to what was required of them. The actors were clearly among the most gifted and sensitive I have ever seen. And only the director's intentions—and ability—set the tone and the limitations for what took place. I watched for an hour or two, time didn't seem to exist, and marveled. Then I had to leave. It was too much like visiting the fortunate inhabitants of another solar system.

Not that comfort is all. I found the same working atmosphere at the Sovremennik which is considered the leading theatre in Moscow, though in much less luxurious surroundings. It's the atmosphere and attitude that counts. When I come into a theatre in New York to rehearse, I am little better than an outsider. I throw my coat and brown paper bag, containing my wife's daily cheese sandwiches and apple, on the seats, hoping that no one will steal anything, and that those over-talkative cleaning ladies will stop yelling to each other before I get to a quiet scene. Sometimes, if I play my cards right and we are getting close enough to opening so that someone has accidentally cleaned up, I can leave my coat in one of the dressing-rooms—if that's OK with the actors who belong to them. Once in awhile, I've been lucky enough to share a room of some kind with the stage manager—but that usually means climbing five or six flights of stairs in case I forget anything.

If I am really in good with the house crew, I can usually get some friendly fellow to lower the front curtain a foot or two—without paying anyone anything—so that the 1000-watt brightness of that damned work light won't give me migraine. Only once in my entire Broadway experience have I ever been able to rehearse with the set and the actual props before the day of technical rehearsals; and now those rules which made possible that arrangement for *Virginia Woolf* have been amended. When we get to technical rehearsals, we usually throw a board across a couple of seats, some-

one digs up an old goosenecked lamp (which usually works) and an older intercom mechanism (which doesn't); I spend most of the rehearsal time hoping that the paper cup with the coffee won't get knocked over on the light-cue sheet. And so on. Among other fond memories of the way we work, I remember on one production I had to stay up all night, night after night, after the day's rehearsals in order to work out the programming of some slide projectors. Had I worked on them during the day—even had there been time during the three weeks of rehearsal—the labor costs would have been prohibitive. The costs on my nervous system were pretty prohibitive too, but that hasn't been unionized. Yet.

And always, wherever, the moment the legal rehearsal time is up, I have to stop, even if I happen to be in the middle of an immortal syllable. That's seven out of eight hours, not counting time for getting ready, struggling with the lines, or arguing about interpretation. And if I'm on schedule, I can usually get eighteen good days of rehearsals plus a couple of technicals before we face an audience. (The scenery and the lights and everything else has to be moved into the theatre each time, and that takes a while.) In Rumania, one director told me that a production of *Danton's Death*, which I particularly admired, had rehearsed for a year. Too long, I thought. But I wouldn't mind seven or eight weeks, especially if they would let me rehearse four hours a day and then spend the rest of the day thinking, swimming, going to museums, or just plain walking around. Living and breathing, that is, while in rehearsal instead of stepping into a long dark tunnel that runs from the first reading until we've opened. The only time that I have ever gotten out of that tunnel was when I went to Israel to direct *The Cherry Orchard*. That's a long way to go to avoid tunnels.

But it's not only logistics that affect the delicate balance between pleasure and pain which governs most rehearsals. Not only the rigidity and stupidity of most of the things we have to take for granted as our artistic lot, not only the silly schedule we always hew to, as though all pairs of theatrical trousers are exactly the same length. What hurts most is the very air we breathe, literally and metaphorically. Wild horses tied together for the first time in a chariot race through flames could not pull in more different directions than the elements involved in a Broadway production. Because each element, human and mechanical, is involved with considerations of the stakes of success, and of how often one can succeed at the expense of the others. The stakes are

just too great each time, life or death. For if one's work, one's ability and opportunities to work, are affected because the notices on the last show happen to be bad, or because one is out of favor for the moment, that is a kind of death. Not as serious, of course, as what can happen to an artist in Eastern Europe, but serious enough when one has a wife and kids.

In fifteen years, I have directed some twenty-five Broadway productions and about the same number off-Broadway. Only twice after all those election-result opening nights, have I ever managed to make enough to put a portion of it aside for harsher days. After *Virginia Woolf* and *You Know I Can't Hear You When The Water's Running*. Even though many if far from most of those productions received favorable notices and, in some cases, had respectable runs. What would have happened, on a practical level, had I not gotten lucky with those two? Or does "talent," once acknowledged really go up and down like Steeplechase Pier?

Nor are matters improving in this regard as the years go by and productions cost more and more. In the past two years, among other happy days, I've had three productions, at least one of them demonstrating work as good as any I've ever done, close in one night.

In such a system—and only a few highlights have been recorded here—it is not surprising that many more theatre people than ever before, on all levels, are giving serious thought to leaving the theatre. Unable not only to bear the steadily intensifying vagaries (after all the uncertainty is the one certainty of our profession) but conscious of clearly and definitively shrinking opportunities, as well as the spread of mediocrity, amateurism, and madness almost in inverse proportion to the declining number of worthwhile works each season; confused by the ever more menacing Babel of styles and approaches; wondering how much longer the mess can go on in the theatre as it is going on outside of the theatre; they are for the first time in their lives facing a future outside of that profession to which they had at one time in a much different past given their emotional and physical selves.

One day, it is an actor, reasonably well established and successful—whatever that means—but increasingly without roots, who meets me on the street and asks me for a smaller part in a play than he would have accepted a year earlier—and in the next breath wonders if I would like to get out with

him and set up some sort of business: Portuguese ceramics? Antiques? Or, last summer, a serious young actor, in New York for more than ten years, writes a carefully thought-out piece in the *Times* on "The Irrelevance of Being an Actor," in which he confesses to simple puzzlement, not to say bewilderment, at his growing inability to survive economically or, more vital, spiritually. Or the founder of one of our more interesting Regional Theatres quits one day, without warning, in order to try his hand as a stock broker because "that's where the money is."

Or our two leading "star" directors on Broadway, Elia Kazan and Mike Nichols; the old timer sulking like Achilles in a different tent, at an age when his European colleagues are producing their master works; the relative newcomer, already soured and panting for the next film, after a phenomenal record of half-a-dozen smash successes in as many tries. We are, after all, a nation of sprinters. (Wasn't it Mike, by the way, who said that the only reason he went on directing plays at all was because that was less boring than going to them?)

Or, the other side of our coinage, the loneliness of our long-distance runners: a whole generation of talented and once-confident stage performers now located somewhere out past Hollywood and Vine, sitting on those horses and making some kind of living playing themselves, only older and sadder. Or haunting agents' offices along the Strip waiting for those bit parts to fall in their direction before it is too late. If the theatre really existed, would they all be out there?

And yet, and yet. Speaking not personally but as a member of the theatre; for with George Devine I feel that after "one has gotten rid of one's desire to exhibit oneself" the really only interesting thing left is the "creation of conditions" in the theatre. Chaos has indeed come again, but the chaos is somehow congealing into something. Or, to change the image, something is stirring somewhere, slowly but more and more perceptibly, something like Tennessee Williams' violets cracking the rocks. For the rocks are cracking, there is no question of that. Harold Clurman used to say that the best thing that could happen to the theatre would be for all the Broadway buildings to burn down—or be blown up. Burned down, or some other way, they're getting fewer and fewer. And the whole basic idea of the theatre as a business for private profit is giving way to the idea of the theatre as a communal necessity.

At the same moment that the American theatre is supposedly most impotent, it somehow manages to exert a vital influence all over the world. Theatre people from everywhere devour news of our "underground theatre," no matter how extreme or inept we sometimes feel it may be; and when they land on our shores they make an immediate bee-line to Fourth Street and La Mama. And even Peter Brook, hard at work in his Paris laboratory to discover the essential secrets of the theatre-to-be, admits his great allegiance and debt to the work done by his American juniors.

Not a week goes by without new groups of young people coming together in some way to find their own path through the theatre's tricky labyrinth. Dissatisfied with the forms and processes of the past, they are looking for and in some cases finding processes and results which are truly their own. I am thinking specifically of the Company Theatre's work in Los Angeles, but I'm sure there are others who will find new ways (or, perhaps, refresh some of the old ways) of creating and organizing valid relationships between performer and spectator—participants both.

There are never any actors, and there are always marvelous fresh talented young people acting—as I find every time I walk into a theatre somewhere. There are never any directors, and there are always people (young and not so young) who can direct, as we always find out when we get desperate enough. There are never any worthwhile playwrights, but there are always playwrights—and I know more talented, original, fascinating, innovative young people writing plays now than ever before—if only we would give them more places to get their plays done, decently. There is never any theatre, and there is

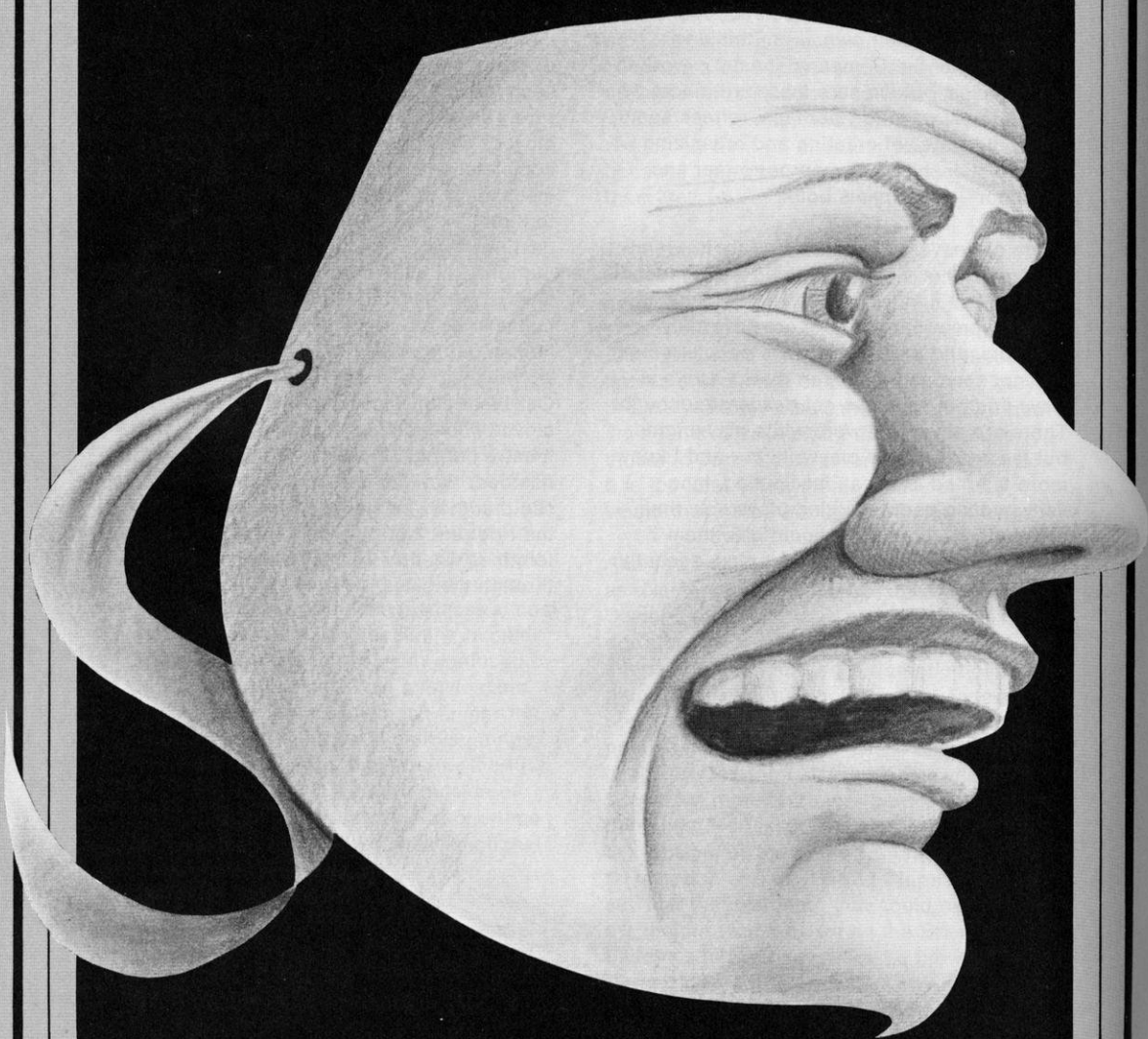
always, in the most surprising places and ways, always marvelous theatre.

Last winter, Anne Jackson and Eli Wallach came out to my small upstate village of Hastings-on-Hudson, to help raise money for our Drug Council, to spend an evening reading aloud to us. They "performed" in our high school auditorium, about as antiseptic a place as any Senior Class play has ever survived. Annie and Eli didn't do a "play" of course. Apart from some lecterns, a couple of stools and a table with a water pitcher and a rose, there was no "scenery." There were some lights but, luckily, no microphones. We didn't need any. Such was the force of the Wallachs' presence and humanity, together with the magic of the words they chose to share with us, that the evening turned out to be one of the most powerful theatrical experiences of our lives. They read or rather spoke with such eloquent simplicity, such warmth, such directness that I have rarely seen an audience as strongly held or moved. What was more important, it was a completely human evening, nothing artificial or mechanical put between us, and we responded to it on a human level. Actors, words and gestures that evoked images in our minds, a platform, an audience. Will not the theatre always remain with us so long as there remains in us any vestige of human quality and human perception?

Our theatre's wings have, indeed, given way to cloven hoofs, as Lorca said. And with that theatre our nation is now coarsened and benumbed. But one has only to look around to see that the wings are still there, and that it is the rider and not only the horse who determines whether we may once more soar through the skies.

Here Bigyneth or Requiescat in Pace:  
An Aesthetic and Structuctural Meditation  
on the State of the American  
Theatre in the 1970's

James L. Rosenberg



1.

To begin at the beginning.

In the beginning was the Word. According to one of several old books (Aristotle, Shakespeare, Dante, Bertolt Brecht) which have recently been consigned to the symbolic bonfires by the New Barbarianism of the new mutants (cf. Leslie Fiedler; cf. phoniness as charisma).

Truly we live in bad times. If there is a single overriding impulse in the field of literature, theatre, and the arts generally, it is a vast revolt against the Word, which means a revolt against the principle of Reason, that hidden spirit of which the Word is a visible and outward manifestation.

2.

But why—we may well ask—did this general revulsion come about? Obviously, because a great many people began to feel that the Word, as a viable symbolic form, had become played out; that Language had degenerated into rhetoric; that dialogue, far from being a means of communicating ideas and feelings, had become distorted into a means of *avoiding* ideas and feelings (cf. any play by Harold Pinter). If language has become, then, a mere empty formalistic shell, devoid of significant human content, it is altogether understandable that people might feel impelled to turn back toward a pre-verbal, pre-rational world of gesture, sound, and image.

(Although it is, at best, debatable whether this turning-back has brought us the desired and expected fresh insights and renewed creative impulses. Can we honestly say that *Dionysus* in '69 takes us deeper into the human mystery than does *The Bacchae*? Or that *Paradise Now* gets us nearer the heart of the matter than, say, *Hamlet*? To anyone inclined to answer these rhetorical questions with a ringing "Yes!" I can only say, "You must have a pretty funny idea of the human condition." And maybe that, right there, is the true nub of the matter.)

3.

But even if we grant that the Revolt Against The Word has been—or is potentially—

artistically liberating and refreshing, what does this do to our critical perceptions?

(Who cares? We all *should*.)

Specifically: we live at a time when it is almost literally impossible to determine whether a new work of art (film, play, painting, song) is a piece of utter shit or an expression of transcendent genius. And I speak here, not of that great beast, the mass public, which never knows what to make of anything until the "experts" tell it what to think, but of the "experts" themselves, critics and scholars with genuine claims to intellectual distinction. (Read through the New York reviews of the past five years, particularly those of the "experimental" new plays and films.)

Has there ever before been a historical period in which figures such as The Beatles and The Rolling Stones could quite seriously—and quite favorably—be compared with Bach or Mozart? When an Andy Warhol could be discussed in terms that would do credit to a Rembrandt or a Michelangelo?

4.

"Intelligent (in-'tel-ə-jant) *adj.* 1. Having intelligence. 2. Having a high degree of intelligence; mentally acute. 3. Showing intelligence; perceptive and sound. 4. Guided or motivated by the intellect; rational."

5.

We have had, within the past few years (things move fast these days; yesterday's *avant-garde* is today's fad and tomorrow's cliché), the Theatre of the Absurd, the Theatre of Cruelty, the Theatre of the Ridiculous (amen), the Theatre of This, That and the Other Thing. Maybe it is time to call for still another breakthrough: The Theatre of Intelligence.

6.

"Intelligence" has always had a bad name in the American theatre (like "morality" in the whorehouse). To most actors, directors, teachers in drama departments, etc., it's a knee-jerk term of opprobrium. Who needs it? (There's an answer to that.) Was Shakespeare a university man? Did Moliere have a Ph.D.? Questions like this are clearly designed to

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reduce the defender of intelligence to embarrassed silence, but I think that what they do, rather, is to reveal the rather peculiar way in which American society and American culture (if I may be forgiven a contradiction in terms) have come to understand "intelligence."

7.

"Intelligence," in the general American view of things, is: dry, sterile, inhuman, dull.

It has to do with the amassing of facts and figures, the reading of books, the use of big words, and is generally manifested by a sort of snotty superiority.

"Intelligence" is, in a word, pedantry.

And that the world of art should so eagerly embrace this definition is little short of a disaster, for it leaves us all incapable of coping with the fact that a Pablo Picasso, however he might score on an I.Q. test or a college entrance examination, is one of the great creative intelligences of our time.

The true pedants (in the most profound sense of that word) are the Broadway producers and directors.

8.

Let us (to bring it closer to home—closer to *my* home, anyway) look at the operation of "intelligence" in drama departments in American universities.

Can we deny that on most campuses (there may be a quirky exception or two) the drama department, far from being regarded as the liveliest and most intelligent department on the campus, is generally thought of as being intellectually beneath contempt, staffed largely by rather weird maiden ladies of both sexes with bachelor's degrees in fields like "Speech" and "Education" (or perhaps no degrees at all), and with ideas about the theatre which have not changed since 1935 and which were not altogether the last word even then. These departments usually have one Resident Intellectual On Detached Service to provide a sort of accreditation window-dressing; he generally teaches the tangential and unpopular courses in Dramatic Literature and the like, is viewed by his colleagues with a mixture of awe and suspicion because he knows things like the date of Racine's *Athalie*, but is under no circumstances allowed to have anything directly to do with the department's training or

production programs—since, as we all know, a little learning is a dangerous thing.

Out of these departments come many of the actors, directors, playwrights, and designers of the professional theatre in America. They are nearly all bad. The handful of good ones come usually from departments of English or History or Mechanical Engineering—or, more likely, from no university whatever.

9.

In other words, the primary trouble with the American theatre is that it is a theatre of dumbness, not of intelligence; that the keenest and most imaginative minds in the country are not attracted to it, are indeed rather systematically excluded, with the result that the second-rate intelligences take over by default. (Which may, indeed, be the game plan.)

Few members of the general public have any idea of the sheer intellectual incompetence which underlies most professional Broadway shows, the panic-stricken guesswork as to what will "work," what the public (that mysterious god) will "buy."

If law or medicine or engineering were practiced at this level of competence in America, the nation would be in a state of collapse.

Fortunately, the theatre is not that important.

10.

But should it be?

Well, now, that is a rather tangled question. If you are going to measure importance on the scale of life and death in terms of immediacies and practicalities, you are going to have to give pride of place to garbage-collectors and plumbers, without whom we would very quickly be in a pretty pickle, and work your way far, far down to esoterics like poets and actors.

But shouldn't theatre, like any respectable art or craft, be able to make some kind of claim as to its ultimate importance? What is theatre's claim?

11.

Question: If all the theatres in America disappeared tomorrow, would it make any real difference in the life of the nation? A sobering thought.



**Design by John Ezell.**

What if all the hospitals disappeared? An even more sobering thought.

But, say the defenders of theatre, it is unfair to put theatre in such a light. Actors and playwrights may not, like doctors and surgeons, deal with literal first and final causes, but man is something more than a mere physical body, a simple biological process, and it is traditionally this "something more" that drama, like all the arts, has concerned itself with.

Granted.

To what extent, then, are the drama schools of today leading their students toward an ability to express that "something else"? To what extent does the professional practice of theatre in America express it?

Like Brutus, I pause for reply.

12.

"Relevance": that's the new key word.

What is wrong with the theatre—what has

been wrong with the professional Broadway theatre for the past fifty years or so—is that it was not “relevant” to the life of the times.

Hence, any current play which aims at “seriousness” must have the Obligatory Black as a member of the cast, and, if possible, some kind of reference to VietNam and the evils of war. Indeed, it seems to be enough to characterize a play as “important” nowadays to simply describe it as “anti-war.” (How many “pro-war” plays have we had since *Le Cid*?)

This whole approach strikes me as being, not only simplistic, but wrongheaded, and, as a result, *truly* irrelevant. Great art should deal with great themes rather than trivia, to be sure, but the converse—that the choice of great or relevant themes will guarantee the creation of great art—is by no means true. In fact, a host of perfectly rotten plays have been written (and are still being written) on “great” subjects; it is, to tell the truth (Shakespeare being the prime example), far more common to find the great play whose subject matter or theme is terribly unimpressive to the naked eye.

All of which leads us to the crux of the matter: The theatre is to be judged, not in terms of sociology, but of aesthetics. It is an art form, not a kind of surrogate journalism or a branch of politics or a pseudo-science.

The proper questions, then, are not: “What political or philosophical stance should the theatre adopt?” or “What themes should it present?” but rather: “What is its proper form?” “What are the qualities and the limitations which distinguish this art form, structurally and aesthetically, from the other analogous arts such as film and television?”

These questions have gone, not only unanswered but unasked, largely because the practitioners of the arts of the theatre, through a failure of basic intelligence about their work, have failed to see that these are the central and vital questions, and that fascination with tricks of technique, gimmicks, fads, and attitudes is not only trivial and tangential, but ultimately suicidal.

13.

Lessing, in the *Laocoon*, proposed this simple aesthetic question some two centuries ago: What are the *essential* differences between the various aesthetic forms—music, sculpture, lyric poetry, drama, etc? How strange that

almost no one since has returned to the question! And how noteworthy that theatre, always the retarded child of the arts, has suffered most from this neglect, limping along for the past couple of centuries or so in fumbling attempts to imitate other art forms—the novel for most of the nineteenth century, the cinema in more recent times. Needless to say, the theatre has taken a bad beating on both counts; you can’t compete with the novel on its own grounds any more than you can with the film. To attempt such a competition indicates that you suspect you have no worthwhile aesthetic structure of your own, or else that you simply don’t recognize what you are doing—probably the latter.

No wonder people outside of theatre tend to regard people within it as rather quaintly and pathetically dumb! Plumbers have a far better concept of the nature of their particular mystery than do theatre “artists.”

14.

What, then, is the aesthetic essence which makes “theatre” “theatre” (as opposed to literature, say, or film)?

For one thing, its essence is not narrative (like the novel) but dramatic. Which is to say that the theatre’s prime function is not, and never has been, the telling of a story *per se*; it is (to go back a bit) “the imitation of an action,” and they are not the same thing. Just in terms of verbal expressiveness, a novel, a story, is univocal; it is a monologue—even though the storyteller may disguise his voice and adopt other “characters” from time to time as he tells his tale. Drama is multi-vocal, choral, involving the actual, physical interplay of voices and persons. Drama occurs, not within the speeches, but in the interstices *between* the speeches. (Chekhov understood this perhaps better than any playwright before or since.)

Even more important, though, is the fact that a drama, a performed play, is a “real” event of fleshy and physical immediacy; its tense, as Thornton Wilder has expressed it, is the “perpetual present.” By contrast, a film, or any other kind of electronically recorded performance, is a “pseudo-event,” a technological record of the *real* event, which took place several months or years ago on a sound stage in Hollywood or New York or London. (When you stop to think of it, what a weird experience film-going is—sitting there in the womb-like dark watching those mechanized shadows flickering against the wall, shadows that will

go on flickering and speaking in exactly the same way, whether you are present or whether you leave, whether you applaud or whether you throw eggs at the screen. In the movie house, we are back in Plato's cave with a vengeance!) Looked at in this way, the film, far from being something for the theatre to envy and emulate, may be seen as a totally "dead" form, a mechanical record of life, like the Rosetta stone or the Venus de Milo, while the staged performance before a live audience is the "real" event, and, just as the interplay between live speeches is the essence of the drama, so the interplay between live performers and live audience—impossible in the movies—is the essence of theatre.

Which leads to still one more conclusion: it is as vain for theatre to compete with the film in terms of "spectacle" as it is to compete with the novel in terms of narration and "character." (Theatre is, indeed, the home of "plot.") The extraordinary ways in which electronics can compress, elongate, and distort time and space are simply not available to the live stage. But, rather than grieving over this as a crippling and humiliating limitation, why can not theatre people be aesthetically perceptive enough to see it as an exciting and positive advantage? The essential nature of the live stage performance is to be physical and immediate, rather than to be dead and recorded; to be small, sharp, and focused rather than vast, sprawling, and extensive. I have heard theatre workers lament: "The film has put the stage out of business!" This is patent self-pitying nonsense, and no more true than the turn-of-the-century lament that the camera had put painting out of business. What the camera did was to put one *kind* of painting—representationalism—out of business (thereby freeing the graphic arts for a more exciting and meaningful role, as most artists were intelligent enough to very quickly discover). What the film (and TV) has done is to put Aristotle's category of "spectacle" out of business, thereby freeing the stage to fulfill its far more exciting and essential role of presenting to us the very form and pressure of our time through vivid, intense, three-dimensional living metaphors. And if the contemporary theatre is too dumb to see and grasp this opportunity, it will, like the dinosaurs it so richly resembles, deserve to die.

15.

Will it do so?

If the evidence of the past is any indication, the prognosis is not a cheery one.

The revived interest in spontaneity, improvisation, simplicity of means, symbolic statements, etc., as manifested by groups like the Polish Laboratory Theatre, The Open Theatre, The Performance Group, The Living Theatre, etc., are evidences of an at least groping awareness of the nature of the problem. Yet some of the specific actions and choices of these groups (arranging performances so that very often actions and speeches are literally inaudible and invisible to the audience) are so stupid or perverse (or both) as to make one despair of theatre and theatre people for all time. If we cannot agree on the most basic intellectual precepts—that a live staged performance should be visible and audible to its audience, that a literary composition should be composed in words comprehensible to its readers—then where are we? (As Eric Bentley says, in his *Life of the Drama*, "there would seem to be something a little suspect in claiming to solve the advanced problems if you haven't solved the elementary ones.")

Will the American theatre of the '70's, then, be described by an epigraph—"Here bigyneth"—or by epitaph—"Requiescat in pace"? All the experience of the past would suggest the latter, but even as reactionary a form as the American theatre does not *have* to remain tied to the past.

I believe that it will, however, until it quits its endless tinkering with techniques of craftsmanship which were outmoded and irrelevant fifty years ago and turns its attention to the aesthetic and philosophic questions I have been raising here, until it begins to listen seriously, that is, to its "intellectuals," its advisors, its dramaturgs. Finding better techniques with which to do Philip Barry is surely not the answer. The answer is to find our own soul.

On this one, the jury is still out.

They should be coming back in very soon.

Norris Houghton

# If the Russians Can Do It, Why Can't We?

## A Plan for Training Theatre Companies

Only in recent years has this country discovered the satisfaction to be derived from the organization of the theatre into repertory companies. Although as long ago as the early 1920's the Moscow Art Theatre and the Abbey Theatre of Dublin journeyed to our shores and showed us what glories could be derived from ensemble playing, and although those of us who traveled abroad discovered that most of the theatres of the European continent were so organized, it was really not until the last couple of decades that the American stage has begun rather widely to explore the idea. True, Eva Le Gallienne had pioneered the way with her Civic Repertory Theatre in New York at the end of the 1920's and the Group Theatre, also based in New York, came into being as a permanent company at the beginning of the 1930's, but they were isolated examples in our professional laissez-faire world.

The reasons for America's reluctance to follow the European example were largely, I believe, economic. The cost of maintaining a troupe of sufficient size and versatility to give substance to a whole repertoire of plays was—and still is—enormous. Indeed, it presupposes some kind of subvention. But whereas the theatre was looked upon abroad as an art deserving the same kind of patronage and subsidy as orchestras, museums, opera, ballet, libraries, in our country it was forced to live in the marketplace and depend upon its commercial viability to endure. (Miss Le Gallienne's company, for example, could never have existed, I am confident, had it not been for the patronage of that great philanthropist of the arts, Otto H. Kahn.)

The Rockefeller Panel that studied and reported on the state of the performing arts in the mid-1960's noted, however, that "in the theatre a process of reorientation and reorganization is already under way, altering the theatrical structure as it has existed." What

was happening, it announced, was a "by-passing" of Broadway, the center of commercialism, with some fifty resident professional theatres, most of them established as "non-profit" enterprises, operating across the country. Attention was called to the sources of their support (the Ford Foundation, a major benefactor, having contributed more than \$6 million even by the time the Panel Report was issued in 1965), and a long-term goal was enunciated: a permanent theatre company for every "metropolitan area with population over 500,000."

This objective was not an unfamiliar one to me. I had written in *Advance From Broadway* more than twenty years earlier (1941) that I envisaged "the establishment of resident professional theatres on the order of the resident theatres of the smaller European cities, each with a permanent staff, directorate and acting company." And five years before *that* (1936), on returning from six months in the Soviet Union, I had written in *Moscow Rehearsals* that "such a collectivization seems to me essential to the development of higher art in the theatre of our country."

I was prompted to sponsor this cause because I had learned, even before I went to Russia and was just entering the professional theatre as a member of a young troupe called the University Players, that an ensemble approach to dramatic creation was the most truly fruitful way of bringing to life this most collaborative of artistic expressions: only when actors, directors, designers, technicians, business staff and (with luck) a playwright or two were banded together over an extended period of time could these varied elements be welded into a cohesive whole possessing its own unique style and personality. This was what the University Players had sought to do in its beach theatre on Cape Cod and later in Baltimore and New York forty years ago; this was what thirty years later Ellis Rabb

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A scene from "The Craftsman," a play by Stoyanov, a Bulgarian playwright, staged by the Sovremennik Theater in Moscow. Novosti Press Agency Photo

and William Ball and the Becks and Joseph Chaikin were showing the world was still a valid idea through their ensembles, the APA, the ACT, the Living Theatre, the Open Theatre.

This rather lengthy historical disquisition seems a necessary preamble to a presentation of the academic planning that has gone into the creation of the Division of Theatre Arts at the State University of New York's new College at Purchase. For this college, which will open its School of the Arts in the autumn of 1972, proposes to turn out not simply well trained young professional artists; it proposes to turn out whole theatre companies. It is perhaps inevitable that this would be the objective, when I explain that I am the man who is charged with planning in this field.

I recall being struck on my first visit to Moscow by the program of the Central Theatre Technicum. There I observed that students, after training together for four years, during which they were welded into an ensemble entity, then were sent forth to Omsk or Tomsk, to Minsk or Pinsk to become the resident theatre in one such city. On my last visit to Moscow in the spring of 1970 I was struck by the fact that the newest and brightest theatre there today is the Taganka which was created in the selfsame fashion: it consists of the members of the 1964 class at the Vakhtangov Theatre School which upon graduation simply *became* the Taganka with its principal instructor, Yuri Liubimov, leaving the Vakhtangov to become its Artistic Director. If the Russians can do it why can't we? And why shouldn't we?

I am deeply concerned by two problems; one facing the American professional theatre, the other facing the American educational theatre. If the challenge of the Rockefeller Panel is to be met—resident professional theatres in all our cities with populations of over a half-million—and if all the "art centers" that have been and are being built across the country with nothing to put in them, are to become the vital centers they must, how will these objectives be obtained?

The second problem was summed up in a *New York Times* feature article by Howard Taubman at the time the Purchase program was announced in 1966. He concluded his description of its basic objectives by saying of Purchase that "they have a chance to create a model center within a university for the training of professional artists. All that will remain will be to find ways to employ the talent they train. We are back to a national problem."

Indeed it *is* a national problem, one which must trouble all honest theatre educators in the wee small hours. Are we, especially we who preside over professional training programs, preparing young people for a profession that does not exist? I am not satisfied to hand out diplomas to young graduates with a shake of the hand and a few words of advice: go to the Theatre Communications Group auditions and see whether Zelda Fichandler or Nina Vance will hire you in Washington or Houston; or go to Off-off Broadway and offer yourself to Ellen Stewart at Cafe La Mama; then if none has a place for you, come back to Purchase and let us fit you out with a master's degree that will lead to you know what.

What about resolving the two problems in terms of each other? This is the proposition that Purchase supports; and this is how we propose to do it. We begin with the assumption that all candidates accepted into our 4-year undergraduate program have a high degree of talent, backed up by a deep commitment to the art they wish to profess. These students, numbering some sixty to seventy-five when Purchase is going at full pace, will spend their first year in what the Army and Marine Corps call "basic training." Upon successful completion of this, those students who are drawn to the idea of becoming members of a permanent repertory theatre (and while not all may be, I am convinced that at least two-thirds and probably more will—especially this generation that speaks so enthusiastically of "togetherness"), will henceforth no longer be students enrolled in courses, but will become members of a company pursuing a common objective.

The next three years will be devoted to developing the *esprit de corps* on which the whole enterprise depends, to discovering the common style most appropriate to the group, to uncovering the leadership around whom the theatre will revolve, to perfecting the craft of the individual members. Today's students demand some voice in fashioning their own education. I envisage, therefore, the establishment in the third year of an artistic council of the company. This body will provide an opportunity for the members of the company to begin to beat out their own artistic path and also instruct them in the problems attendant upon it and the responsibilities of management. The council will include some faculty as associate members, for it will be recognized as an integral part of the learning-teaching process.

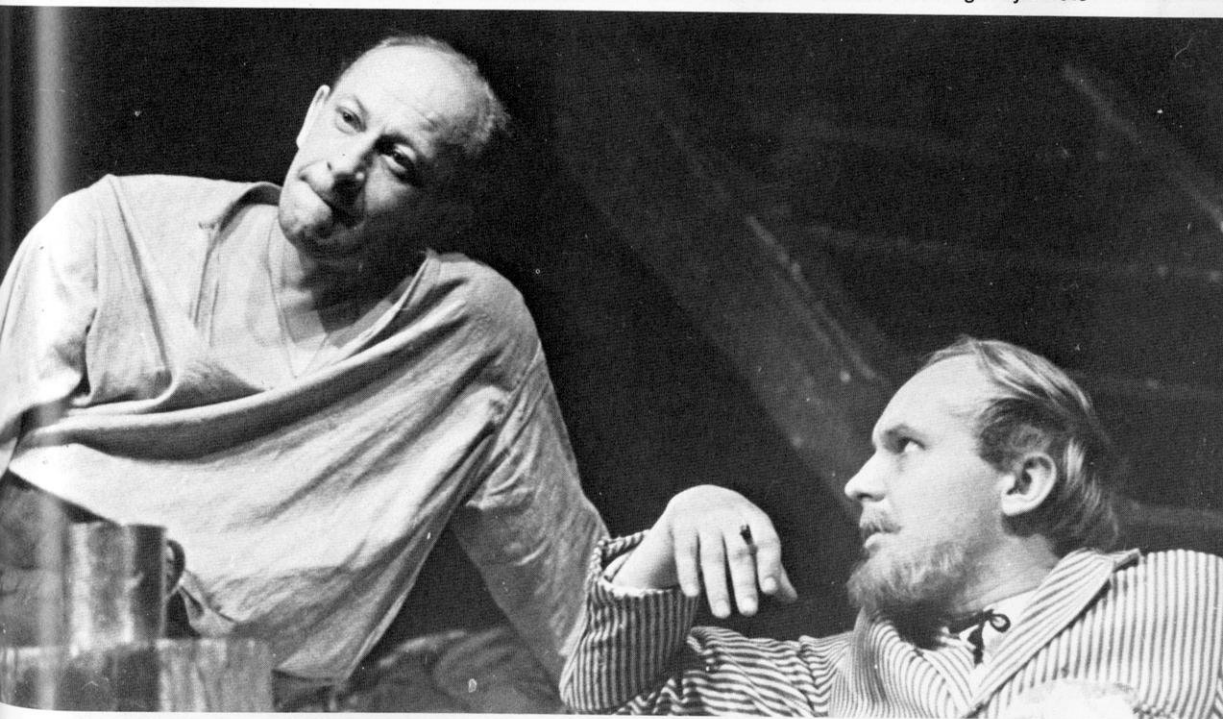
As the fourth undergraduate year gets under way the final composition of the company will begin to be set. Those students (or "members") who wish to go forward and are accepted will be asked to commit themselves to three more years of work together. The first of these years will be preceded by a summer of rehearsal and preparation at Purchase. Then in the autumn the company will embark on a ten-to-twelve-week tour of New York State. The State University has sixty-nine campuses and if one-third of them welcome the Purchase troupe for five days of playing in repertory, autumn and spring tours (separated by a Christmas break and a 6-week refresher at the home base) twenty-three weeks of performing will have taken place. If fewer than one-third of the campuses are interested, the remaining time can then be allocated to other non-academic communities, which might indeed broaden the group's experience.

As the company enters its sixth year, it returns to the College at Purchase where it becomes the professional repertory theatre in residence. The use of the word "professional" implies that the members are now paid, although obviously not at the scale at which the College would have to pay an outside company. It is possible that at this stage of development it may be desirable to add a few more seasoned performers to handle older

character roles and provide added weight to the admittedly youthful ensemble. That decision will depend upon the capability of the group to handle the age problem as it asserts itself in casting.

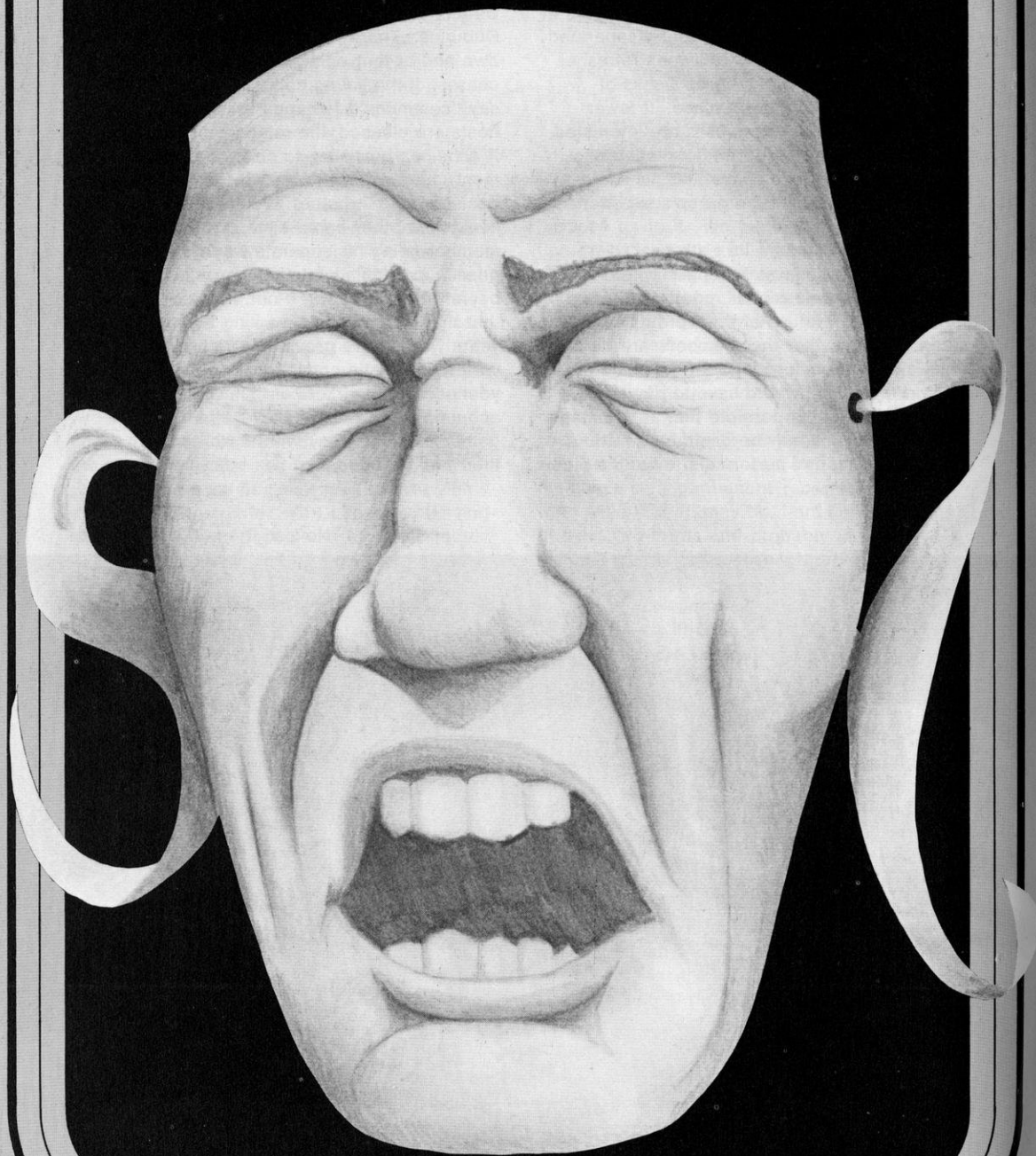
Upon completion of its year in residence (a sort of collective internship), the company will be ready to go forth to its Omsk or Tomsk, Minsk or Pinsk. The College at Purchase will have undertaken, insofar as it may be able, to find a home for a year for the company in Duluth, say, or Des Moines or Denver or Dubuque. There it will establish itself on its own and at that point the College's obligation ceases. If the young collective (or should I say "commune") is happy in its home and its hosts are pleased, the relationship continues; if either party wishes to conclude the arrangement, the company is then faced with the decision as to whether to remain together seeking another home or to disband, each member going his separate way. One would hope a continuing relationship might have been forged, but even if not, I am convinced that the experience of working together for six years would have provided a richness and variety of artistic endeavor such as few other young theatre workers of their age could have acquired. So, whether they go forward together or alone, they will be able to say that their theatre education has been unique.

Novosti Press Agency Photo



Theatre in the Community:  
A Brief Survey and Appraisal

Edward L. Kamarck



On the assumption that the battle for the survival of living theatre in the United States must finally be fought and won beyond Broadway within the countless communities of America, there have been persistent efforts during this century to fashion an institutional prototype that might unlock the possibility for vigorous growth and development of a truly national theatre expression. Though often sentimentalized, trivialized, and debased, this quest has had at its core a most substantial idea: that without a firmer rooting in life, there can be no vital future for American theatre.

The first tangible manifestation of theatre in the community appeared in the United States during the early 1900's. Over the years the press of cultural and social change has shaped it to varying roles and institutional formats. Denoting successive attempts to relate the complex amalgam of community resources and relationships to an informing idea of theatre, the most distinctive prototypes have been: *little theatre*; *community theatre*; *resident professional theatre*; and *adult education theatre*. Because these prototypes strongly interrelate within a causal evolutionary pattern the essential nature of each can best be grasped by viewing them on a historical continuum.

### Little Theatre

The little theatres were started around 1908, chiefly as a reaction to the shoddy professional theatre of that era, which both on Broadway and on the Road, was a big-business enterprise structured to be a purveyor of mass entertainment. In the first years of this century, the influence of the experimental art theatres in Europe (most notably, the Théâtre Libre in Paris, the German Freie Bühne, the London Independent Theatre, and the Moscow Art Theatre) had begun to filter into this country. Dedicated to the breaking of economic shackles, and to experimentation with new literary and production approaches, these groups furnished the model for an independent theatre movement in the United States. In 1911, the spectacular financial failure of The New Theatre, a somewhat grandiose endeavor to develop an art theatre on Broadway, gave impetus to the animating genius of little theatre. Shifting their efforts to American communities, the leaders of the new movement developed theatres on a scale which made creative experimentation economically feasible. Large in idea and scope of mission, these theatres were only "little" with respect to number of participants, operation, and size

of the playhouses. The extensive use of local amateurs, another distinctive feature, had both a practical and economic basis.

Four important little theatres were begun in 1912: Mrs. Lyman Gale's Toy Theatre in Boston; The Little Theatre of Maurice Browne in Chicago; the Plays and Players Club of Philadelphia; and the Little Theatre of New York. Then the movement spread fast, and by 1917 there were theatres in most cities and regions of the United States. Among the more notable were: The Wisconsin Dramatic Society (1911); the Little Theatre of Philadelphia (1913); the 47 Workshop of Harvard (1913); the Little Country Theatre of North Dakota (1914); the Prairie Playhouse of Galesburg, Illinois (1915); the Washington Square Players (1915); the Neighborhood Playhouse, New York (1915); and the Provincetown Players (1916).

Led by theatre idealists, who in many places identified themselves with the broadening social-humanitarian aspirations of their day, the little theatre movement attracted a cultural and intellectual elite, who brought a high sense of purpose and dedication to their endeavors. Creativity and innovation in production were strongly emphasized, as were the encouragement of a native playwrighting, and translation and production of the outstanding European plays. Strongly imbued with a sense of mission, these theatres consciously sought to play a role of responsible cultural leadership in society.

The movement proved to be intensely seminal and influential. The Washington Square Players, which started out in the back room of a store in Greenwich Village, in four short years evolved into the celebrated Theatre Guild, the artistic bellwether of the Broadway scene for the next two decades. From the Provincetown Players emerged the giant figure of Eugene O'Neill, who became the exemplar of an important new direction for American playwrighting. *Theatre Arts* magazine, started by a little theatre in Detroit, was moved by its editors to New York to become a nationally influential critical voice. Many other of the movement's leaders subsequently were lured into the professional theatre as directors, producers, playwrights, and scene designers. As a result, Broadway in the 1920's overnight became the focal point of experimentation and creative growth in the American theatre.

Other of the little theatre leaders—among them, Sam Hume, Thomas Wood Stevens, and Allen Crafton—gravitated to the beginning college and university theatres, whose founding

was undoubtedly influenced by the liveliness of the movement.

America's entry into the First World War can be said to mark the end of the little theatre phase. At War's end, theatre in the community enjoyed a new period of growth, but because the imperatives of leadership had passed elsewhere, the ensuing era saw the evolution of an essentially different kind of institution, one with markedly limited artistic aspirations.

### Community Theatre

In the 1920's the growing ascendancy of the middle class in American life, accompanied by a spread of leisure and the desire for participation in self-expressive activities, brought in a leadership and an outlook to amateur theatre activity more closely tied to the mean of the community than its advance guard. (It is around this time that the term "community theatre" begins generally to replace "little theatre.") Further, while the collapse of the Road and the local professional stock companies in the late 1920's stimulated the establishment of community theatres, it largely impelled them to conform to popular tastes.

During the 1930's the community theatre movement grew rapidly, spreading even to the smaller cities and towns. The greatest spurt followed the Second World War, during the period of the so-called "cultural explosion." It has continued to proliferate at a fantastic rate. While estimates of the extent of the movement vary, they all confirm the fact of its wide diffusion. The statisticians have chiefly been thwarted by the high mortality rate among groups, and the constant flux of the movement—the erratic organizational histories, frequent changes of name, discontinuity of activity, formation of splinter groups, etc.

During the 1950's *Life* magazine estimated that there were 150,000 drama groups which could roughly be classed as community theatre organizations. In 1962 the Stanford Research Bureau, restricting the genre to groups that presented a *regular* season of plays, estimated 18,000. Probably only about 5,000 are likely to be more than transitory efforts, in the sense of having a continuity of existence for more than several seasons. The number of well-established groups, those with stable organizations and a record of continuous production for ten or more years, is very small, indeed; there are perhaps no more than several hundred.

Lacking a vital sense of mission and predicated on a broad base of participation and support, community theatre has quite naturally come to reflect and magnify all the ambivalences and weaknesses of the popular arts in America. The prototype has been deeply flawed, both artistically and institutionally. It has been the participants who have especially given the movement its distinctive stamp of mediocrity. Activated more by hobbyist inclinations than a sincere interest in artistic expression, they have fashioned jerry-built organizations that uniquely mirror the insubstantiality of their motive and understanding. With a few notable exceptions, community theatres have been dogged by characteristic shortcomings: inadequate leadership; a constant diet of trivial plays; a lack of discipline and dedication; untrained performers and technicians; and lack of contact with the mainstreams of theatre art.

The sheer prodigality of the phenomenon has suggested to observers that with good leadership the movement might well serve as a means for bringing about a wide acceptance of live theatre in the United States. Indeed, as the Broadway theatre began to experience increasing financial problems during the 1930's and 1940's, the thought was frequently expressed that the movement was already furnishing in its better examples an emergent pattern for the development of a great American art theatre. While this has proved to be a naive hope, it remains true that a small number of outstanding community theatres have pointed the way toward a more substantial role for the movement. In all instances the more successful theatres have been led by energetic, well-trained individuals with a notable ability to weld volunteer help into smoothly-functioning organizations and to charge them with a sense of purpose.

The Cleveland Playhouse, perhaps the only wholly extant survivor of the little theatre movement, was able to man a stalwart defense of its original objectives and standards largely because of the able leadership of Frederic McConnell, who became its first professional director in 1921 and remained until 1958. During the thirty odd years that the Playhouse largely depended on volunteer amateur actors—it subsequently became a completely professional theatre—the group was a continuous pace setter for the community theatre movement. It was among the first to build its own theatre, to develop a program of actor training, and to move to professionalization of its staff of technicians, designers, and executive personnel. One would presume that much of the

# THEATRE · GUILD · PROGRAM



A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

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theatre's growth was due to McConnell's ability to mine the rich community resources of Cleveland. The Playhouse plant, consisting of three theatres, was mainly financed by outright gifts from local individuals.

The Pittsburgh Playhouse was started in 1934 by a group of interested playgoers who felt that their city needed to have more theatre. Led during most of its history by Richard Hoover in the role of General Manager, the Playhouse in its operational functions became one of the most successful community theatres in our time. Deeply rooted, with strong support from the financial interests and philanthropists of the city, it developed a debt-free, two-and-a-half million dollar plant, which included three theatres, a restaurant, and an acting school. In addition to offering a busy season of adult plays, the Playhouse trained future audiences and participants through its on-going children's theatre, a program of touring to schools, and a program of extension classes for adults. The acting was mainly sustained by experienced volunteers, who were paid a small stipend to offset contingent expenses. However, the staff members as well as the heads of the various departments were wholly professional. In its best years the Playhouse played to audiences of up to 150,000 people per season and its operating budget exceeded a half million. When the Playhouse faltered in the mid 1960's it was for artistic rather than organizational reasons.

A dozen or so other community theatres have shown the imprint of a strong and devoted leader. Among them is the Omaha Playhouse, which was started in 1935 and experienced a surge of growth after the War under the direction of Kendrick Wilson. It now boasts its own theatre building, a staff of ten, and a membership of 6,000. The Midland (Texas) Community Theatre, one of the outstanding amateur organizations in the Southwest, has been directed since 1946 by Art Cole, who has become a national spokesman for community theatre. Groups whose long histories and steady growth attest the skill of successive mentors include the Des Moines Community Playhouse, which claims to be "one of only three community theatres with over fifty years of uninterrupted production"; the Tulsa Little Theatre, founded in 1921; the Kalamazoo Civic Players (1929); and the Fort Wayne Civic Theatre (1932).

But even the best-led of the community theatres have come up against the dilemma of having to reconcile a conflicting duality of purpose: the recreative one, on the one hand,

and the artistic, on the other. The cultural ambience in which these theatres developed left a deep imprint of amateurism on the institutional prototype, which has consistently thwarted the most gallant aspirations. Though the acquisition of adequate resources has enabled the most solidly-established of the groups to produce technically competent and at times even exciting fare, by and large their efforts have remained in the realm of popular rather than high culture. This fact can be substantiated by an examination of the playbills, which will be found to be overwhelmingly weighted toward musicals, light comedies, mysteries, and melodramas—what is often referred to as "warmed-over Broadway."

Powerfully creative theatrical expression, on a level that is invigorative of the art form itself, demands far richer resources of talent, a far deeper and more disciplined sense of dedication, and a far higher level of expectation than most of the community theatres are likely to command.

### Resident Professional Theatre

During the 1950's and early 1960's an exciting, new pattern of growth and leadership evolved for theatre in the community—resident professional theatre (also occasionally referred to as regional repertory theatre). Abandoning the old hopes and patterns, the young leaders of this movement built afresh, impelled by a sense of awakened possibility within the cultural milieu. Their cumulative courage and vision fashioned a mold for theatre which has given rich promise of creative achievement.

The most influential of the precursors were Margo Jones, who founded her theatre in Dallas (1947); Nina Vance (Alley Theatre, in Houston, 1947); Zelda Fichandler (Arena Theatre, in Washington, 1950); Herbert Blau and Jules Irving (Actors' Workshop, in San Francisco, 1952). Premised from the outset on professional standards and objectives, their theatres were started with bare-bone budgets in largely makeshift quarters. But the times proved ripe for such ventures. The deteriorating Broadway theatre, caught in the tightening vise of rising production costs, no longer exercised as compelling a hold on young talent, and gradually resources and energies began to gravitate to the new theatres. Their idealism and audacity soon riveted national attention on the prototype, and financial support began to arrive. Massive grants from the Ford Foundation triggered other philanthropic help. In 1963, the widely-publicized

opening of the Tyrone Guthrie theatre in Minneapolis endowed the prototype with social respectability. From that point on, businessmen and civic leaders everywhere joined in campaigns to form resident professional theatres in their communities. It became thought of as an effective way of enhancing the prestige and image of one's city. By the late 1960's over fifty such theatres had arisen in cities across the country.

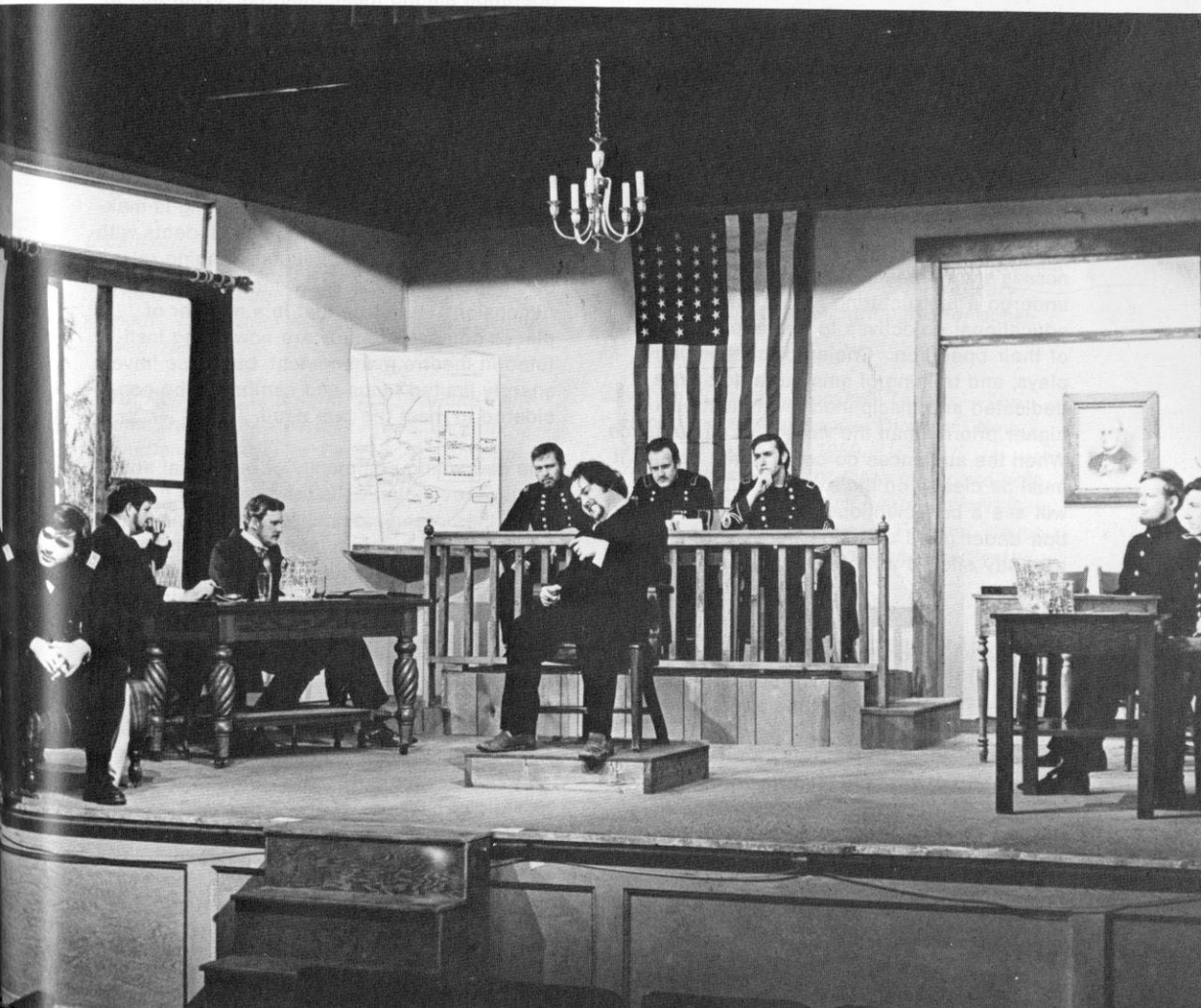
Though these theatres continue to confront much the same kinds of institutional and artistic problems as the community theatres, they are able to grapple with them on a significantly higher level of aspiration and with far richer resources. Most important, their communities are learning to tolerate and on occasion to applaud their efforts to move to an art theatre role. It must be noted, however, that even their most sanguine supporters acknowledge that the resident professional theatres have yet to fully prove themselves as creative innovators. While the prototype itself continues to offer indubitable promise, the

movement still awaits the evolution of a wholly new kind of theatre man, one whose leadership skills are predicated on the broadest understanding of the dynamism of American culture. Indeed, all our faltering arts institutions today strongly evidence the same kind of need.

### Adult Education Theatre

The development of the resident professional theatres put into sharper focus both the ambiguities and limitations of the community theatre prototype, and it has largely stripped the movement of its fond pretensions and hopes. In their endeavor to find a more realistic definition, many of the more cohesive community theatre organizations are now putting an increasing emphasis on the educational role as a rationale for their activities. This is a most salutary development, one which could help to stabilize the movement and also give it a more significant cultural impact.

**Andersonville Trial.** Jan. 71. Janesville Little Theater



In the history of the community theatre movement there have been many endeavors to give primacy to the educational function. The many amateur theatres founded by settlement houses in the slums of our larger cities were all primarily designed to use theatre as an instrument of social betterment. A number of the state universities through their extension services have sought to encourage and guide the growth of community theatres as a means of regional enrichment. North Dakota was the pioneer in this effort with the first program established in 1916 under A. G. Arvold. Other universities that have undertaken a variety of efforts have been Cornell, Iowa, Minnesota, North Carolina, and Wisconsin.

Over the last several decades the growth of adult education services on a municipal level has furnished a pattern of educational orientation for community theatre that looks most promising. In an increasing number of cities such tax-supported institutions as boards of education, departments of recreation, park departments, and vocational schools have subsidized community theatres on the presumption that their activities have educational value for the citizenry. Such support has included the salaries of the professional staffs and rent-free use of a theatre. It remains true, however, that by and large these programs have as yet lacked a sufficiently significant implementation of the educational function. Though the municipally subsidized groups demonstrate better direction and somewhat tighter organization than the average community theatre, many of the other major weaknesses are still manifest. These theatres must undergo a restructuring which will permit educational objectives to pervade all aspects of their operation. Choice of challenging plays, and training of amateur actors on a dedicated and disciplined level must have higher priority than the wooing of an audience. When the audiences do come to the theatre it must be clearly on the expectation that they will see a conscientiously-prepared production under good direction but nevertheless honestly offered as the work of aspiring amateurs.

The role which community theatre is now inherently best prepared to fulfill is the educational one of furthering broad appreciation of the art of theatre by providing extensive opportunities for amateurs to participate in play production. If the theatres are to be successful in this role then they must make the experience as artistically vital as possible; further, they must surround and reinforce that

experience with the ambience of a substantial educational program.

### **Training and Preparation for Leadership**

Colleges and universities have largely neglected the training for leadership roles in community theatre. The flux of the movement and its stamp of mediocrity have caused most educators to doubt the essential validity and potential of a professional career in this area. With the growing orientation of the movement toward an adult education role, the need to develop adequate training programs will become more apparent.

While training for leadership roles in resident professional theatre has unquestionable validity, educators have been slow in establishing adequate programs. Much of the current training has been provided within the movement itself, through apprenticeship programs in the area of management and through the informal educational programs of the Theatre Communications Group, which was formed by the Ford Foundation to further cooperation among these theatres. Programs to train professional actors for the resident theatres have been instituted at the Julliard School of Lincoln Center, New York University, Oakland University, the University of Washington, and Yale. These and other universities also have programs designed to further the artistic development of directors. But as yet no institution of higher learning is making a concerted effort to provide students with an insight into the infinitely challenging roles of theatre leadership in its community-societal dimensions. It is true that in a number of places courses of study are now being instituted in theatre management, but these have a sharply limited focus and can hardly be considered to meet the real need.

The deepening complexity of our social and cultural revolution calls for something much more than organizational experts, money raisers, audience builders, and image fashioners. What we urgently require are creative thinkers and shapers—strategists, really, of cultural experience—who are capable of envisaging and making real new and richer possibilities for theatre in our time.

The most social of all the arts, theatre finds its natural milieu in the community. But it can only prosper there as a living force—as an existential interplay of talent, stimulus, response, and vision. It is for that reason why leadership of a high order is so crucial.

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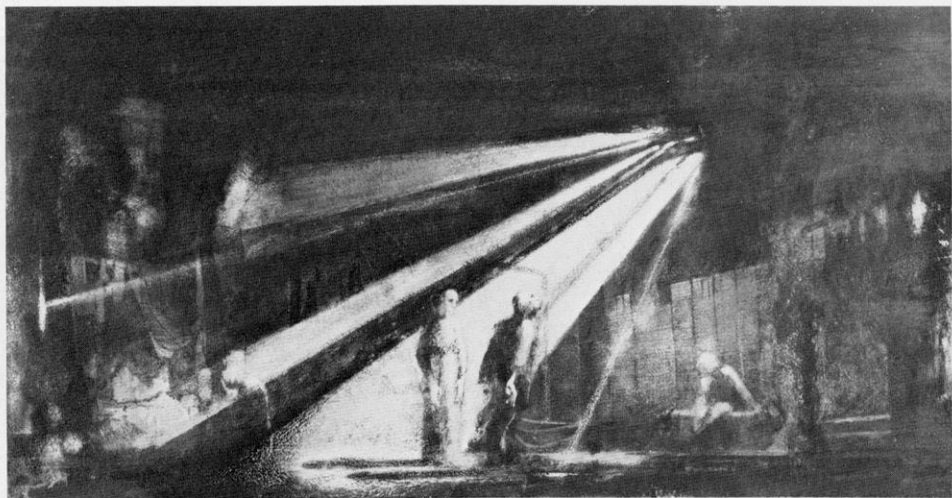
# Portfolio of Designs for the Theatre

## by John Ezell



MACBETH by Giuseppe Verdi. Act Three—The Apparitions. Model of Unit Set. 1964

*John Ezell is Professor of design for stage and television at the University of Wisconsin and designs sets and costumes for University Players productions. A professionally accredited designer, he has worked on productions at the St. Louis Grand Opera Guild; the St. Louis Municipal Opera; the Williamstown Theatre Foundation; the Robin Hood Theatre, Wilmington, Delaware; the Berkshire Playhouse, Stockbridge, Massachusetts; and the Washington D.C. Opera Society. His designs have been exhibited in many museums; most notably they were chosen in competition for the National Exhibition for Scene Designers Under 35 held at the Museum of Contemporary Crafts in New York in 1963. His works were recently shown at the Wright, Hepburn, Webster Gallery in New York City.*



THE LOWER DEPTHS by Maxim Gorki. A Lodging and "The Waste," an area in its rear: A cellar resembling a cave. Gauche and Ink. 1970

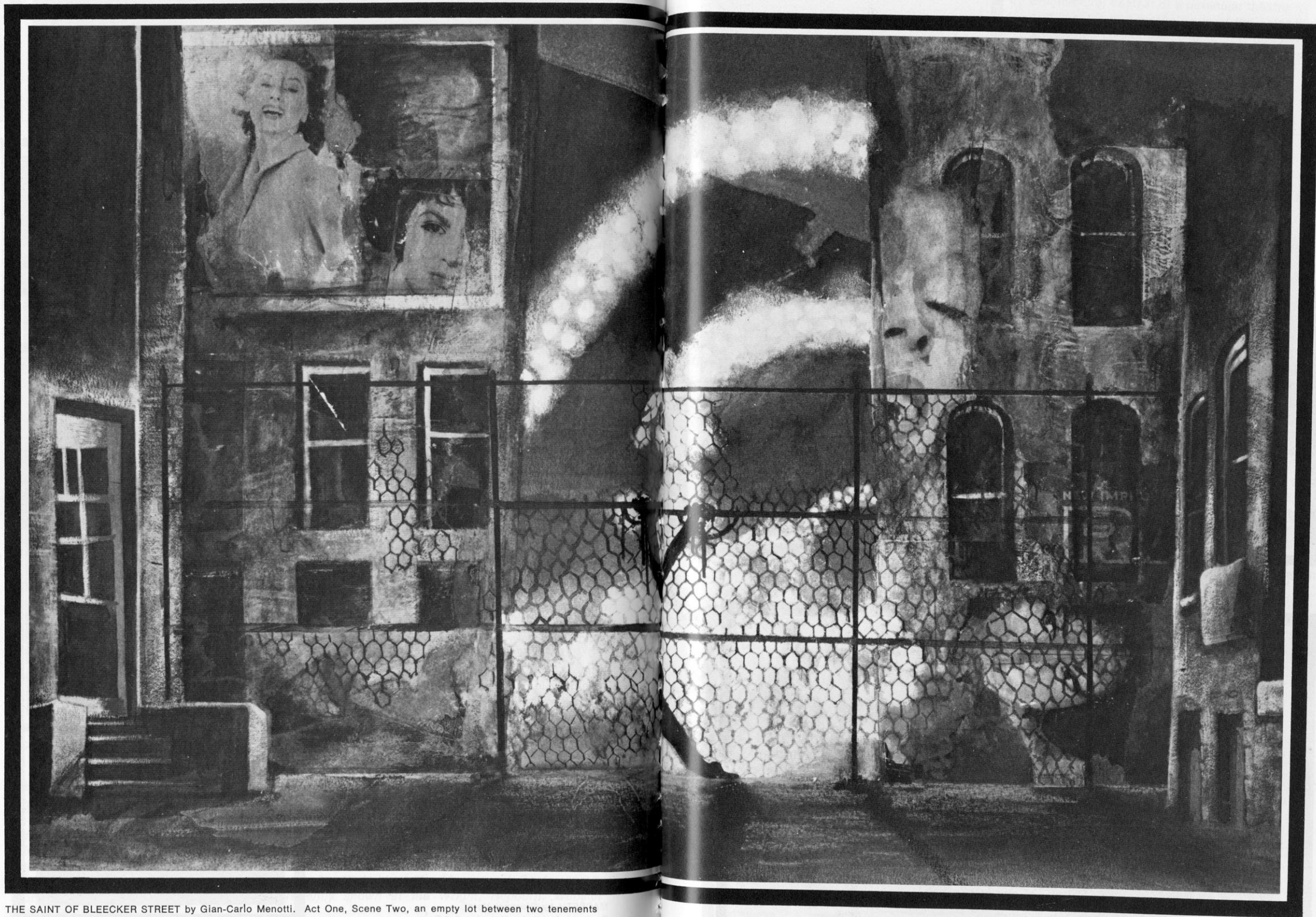
I have found implicit in every great play a proportion which is peculiar to each play. This is to say, a special ratio of height to width, and sometimes depth, which is the essential characteristic of a stage design. I have found that this proportion can invariably be maintained regardless of the nature or the size of the theatre in which one works.

The visual aspects of some plays are expressed best in two dimensions; the visual statement is made exclusively in the vertical plane, or in the case of a steeply raked arena theatre, exclusively in the horizontal plane. One can imagine the surface of a floor which is within the spectators' line of sight providing as eloquent and complete a horizontal "background" as a more conventional vertical "backdrop" in a proscenium theatre.

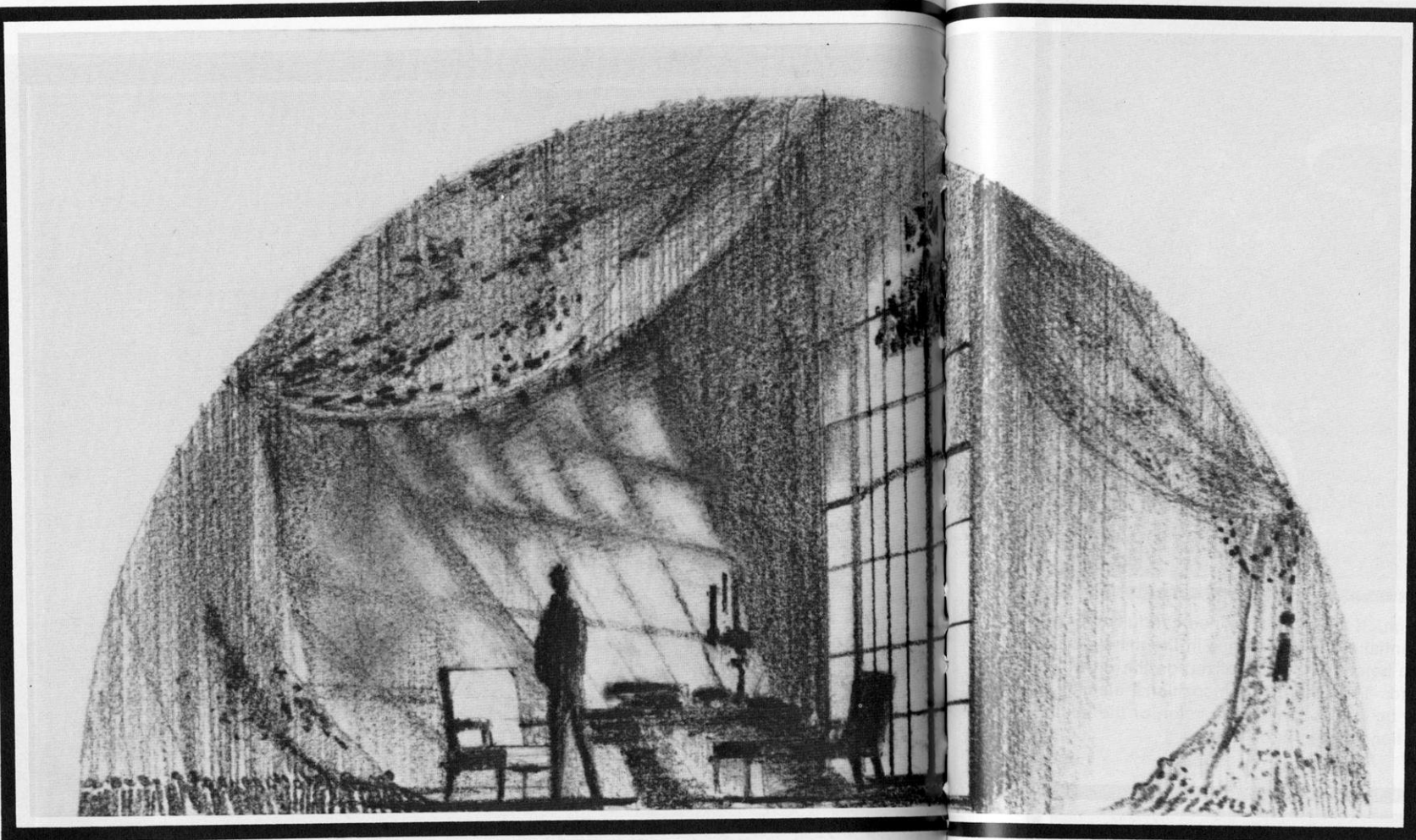
In most instances the designer works simultaneously in two planes. The vertical plane against and through which the actor moves and the horizontal plane across and through which the actor moves. One seeks to discover the ratio of these planes and to arrange meaningful objects within them.



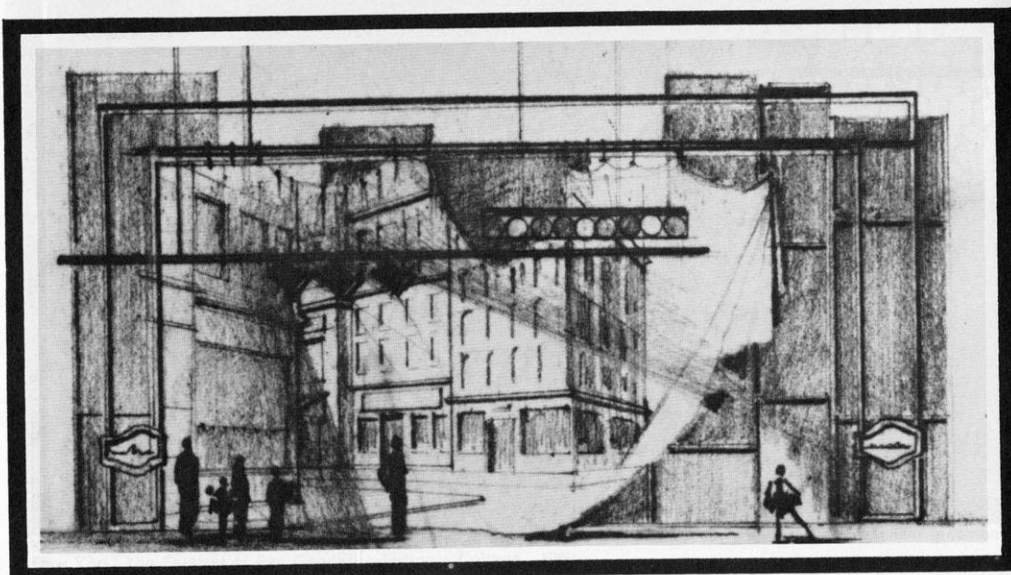
MACBETH by Giuseppe Verdi.  
Costume design for Malcolm, Act Four.



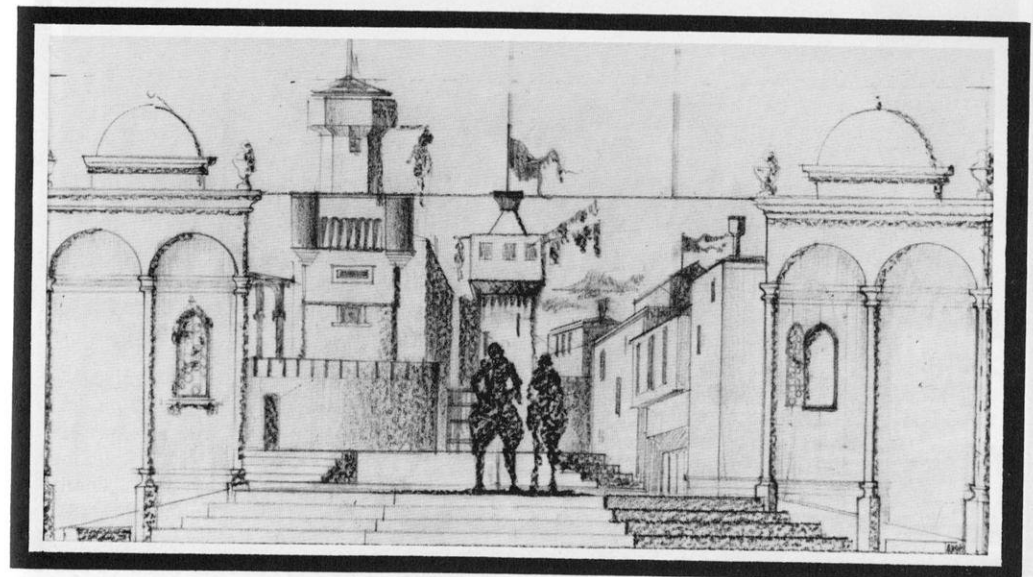
THE SAINT OF BLEECKER STREET by Gian-Carlo Menotti. Act One, Scene Two, an empty lot between two tenements in New York; The Festival of San Gennaro. Tempera Collage. 1960



THE STUDENT PRINCE by Sigmund Romberg. Act One, Prologue, A room in the Palace.



GYPSY by Arthur Laurents. Act One, Scene Two, Seattle: The stage of a vaudeville theatre half set for the rehearsal of Uncle Jocko's Kiddie Show.

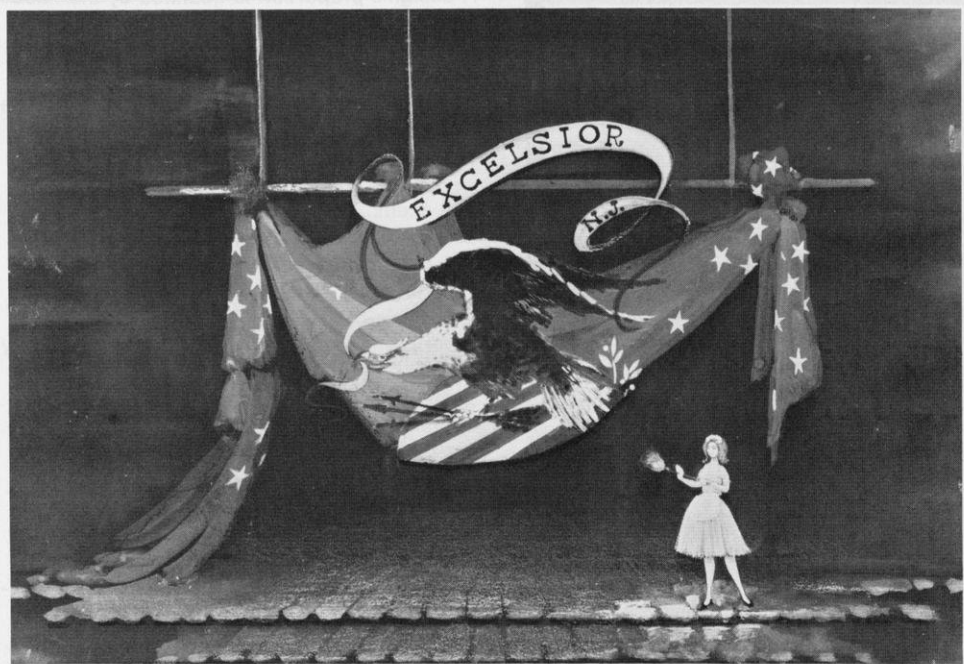


VOLPONE by Ben Jonson. Act Two, Scene One, Before Corvino's House, off the Piazza of St. Mark.

A design's proportion is qualified by the fixed architectural context of a particular theatre and is measured by the *scale* of the actor in the given architectural context. It is through the adjustment, not of proportion, but of *scale* that various productions of a play are accommodated in different theatres.

The scenic concept of a play embodies two aspects: the objective illusion which the designer is compelled to provide and the subjective reality which he wishes to define.

Proportion, scale, and color are determined by objective analysis of the text. The designer endeavors to distill the essence of the dramatic situation and heightens that situation with scenic elements that are appropriate and theatrical. These scenic elements have a practical function (they are brought into physical contact with the actor) and a metaphorical meaning (they are brought into emotional contact with the spectator). Theatrical images have literal and figurative meanings. The literal meaning or use of properties, furniture, and even the appearance of the actor, is explicit in the text. The figurative meaning of these elements can only be implied. The designer applies verbal and literary forms in the first phase of the development of the intellectual concept of the production. In the second phase, he resorts to a graphic language of color, texture, line, and shape for expression of the subjective reality of the environment he wishes to create. The design process is paradoxical: it is both rational and phenomenal.



In the theatre the transcendental is often embodied in a multitude of familiar little things. One may take pleasure in the composition of familiar objects into new and unexpected, yet appropriate relationships. I have become increasingly aware of the essential compositional element, the irreducible minimum, of a

design. If a play is examined carefully the essential element emerges in the mind's eye even before it is materialized on the drawing board. The essential compositional element may be a line, a texture, a color, or the juxtaposition of several of these.





A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM by Shakespeare. Costume for Lysander.

My designs have been profoundly influenced by my study of history. The theatre, perhaps to a greater extent than the other arts, is preoccupied with its historic and literary heritage. As a result of our discontent with existing forms and methods, new forms and modes of expression continually occur reinforced by many ancient traditions. Accessibil-

ity to the art, architecture, music, drama, and cultural history of the past is the educated designer's chief asset. The theatre, however, should not be thought of as a museum, for the use of history does not inhibit creativity; rather it liberates the mind and stimulates the imagination. Having understood history the designer can depart from it, with authority.

Daniel Gerould

## Discovery of Witkiewicz

On one of the portraits he painted in the late twenties, Witkiewicz wrote the following inscription: "For the posthumous exhibit in 1955." He proved to be remarkably prophetic. Playwright, painter, novelist, aesthetician, drug expert, and philosopher, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, or Witkacy, as he called himself, 1885-1939, was discovered in his native Poland only after the liberalization of 1956 when he played a major role in the freeing of the arts from the yoke of "socialist realism" and in the formation of the new Polish avant-garde theatre. His twenty-three surviving plays were published in 1962, and Witkiewicz has now become a contemporary classic in Poland, despite the fact that many of his works remain on the border of the official repertory because of their highly charged political allusiveness.

The process of Witkiewicz's discovery by the West is just beginning. Madeleine Renaud has recently achieved a great success in Paris with *The Mother*, and for several years university theatres in America have been presenting *The Madman and the Nun*, *The Crazy Locomotive*, and *The Water Hen* to enthusiastic audiences. In order to make an unknown and long dead author seem contemporary and important, Witkiewicz is usually hailed as a precursor of the theatre of the absurd who anticipated Beckett and Ionesco by thirty years and foreshadowed the theories of Artaud.

*Gyubal Wahazar*, or *On the Mountain Passes of the Absurd* (1921)<sup>1</sup> is often cited as a prime example of Witkiewicz's creation of an absurdist drama long before the fact. I wish to use this play—one of Witkiewicz's unquestioned masterpieces—to support my contention that his differences from the theatre of the absurd are much more important than the similarities and are, in fact, what make him

most interesting. Witkiewicz's importance and appeal lie elsewhere, and it is time to assess him for what he is.

"There aren't any tortures in Hell. There's only waiting. Hell is one gigantic waiting room," says one of the petitioners in Act I of *Gyubal Wahazar*. These lines are quoted, not only as evidence that Witkiewicz anticipated Sartre's *Huis Clos* and existentialism, but that he forecast *Waiting for Godot* and the entire waiting motif in contemporary drama. The parallel, however, is verbal, and really serves to illustrate some fundamental distinctions between Witkiewicz's theatre and the theatre of the absurd. The crucial difference lies in the conception of dramatic action. Whereas the absurdist presents an eternal human condition from which action is eliminated, Witkiewicz shows a dynamic world in which events are viewed sequentially, moving faster and faster through time. Institutions, exceptional individuals, and masses of people collide: History is being made.

The crowd of petitioners in *Gyubal Wahazar* talk of having waited for weeks, even months, but the play itself does not portray endless waiting, but sudden happenings. Unlike the non-appearing Godot, Wahazar—the "cruel god" for whom all the characters are waiting—rushes out within the first ten minutes of the action and begins to shout commands, abruptly disposing of the lives and destinies of his subjects.

Waiting in Witkiewicz is one of a handful of essential human activities (along with philosophical speculation, artistic creation, sexual attraction, and physical combat), but it is always a build-up to an explosion. The characters are waiting for something to happen, for an intolerable situation to blow up—and sooner or later it does. Without belief in himself, or in the past or present, the typical Witkacian "hero" longs to begin a "new life"

<sup>1</sup>Extracts from the play are presented in this issue of *Arts in Society*, beginning on page 657.

Daniel Gerould is a Playwright and Professor of Theatre at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Portrait by Witkiewicz  
Courtesy: Slupsk Museum



—which most often turns out to be a sinister anti-individualist social order ushered in by a revolution overthrowing the existing political system. Someone or something new comes to power at the end of each play; in Witkiewicz, the *coup d'état* precedes the final curtain.

If the ideal form of the theatre of the absurd (as best seen in *Waiting for Godot*) is circular, ending where it began, and its conception of dramatic action is stasis, the characteristic design in Witkiewicz is a spiral which mounts higher and higher until it flies off into space—with the creation of a new world or the departure into a new dimension. Instead of an absence of action, there is often an excess of action in Witkiewicz's plays; despite long stretches of waiting and talking in which unbearable tension mounts, events occur with lightning rapidity, especially at the end of the plays where violence breaks out with the accelerated tempo of a silent film.

The terror and farce in *Waiting for Godot* is that nothing happens or can happen; the situation will never change. In *Gyubal Wahazar* the problem is quite the opposite: absolutely anything can happen at any moment—one can be arrested, sent to jail, shot, turned into a masquette or a mechanical mother, have one's glands transplanted, become Wahazar. Arbitrary power rules the world of *Gyubal Wahazar*, but it is not simply the fixed and eternal arbitrariness of the universe and Mr. Godot—it is the treacherous and shifting might of human institutions, individuals, and social and religious forces. If Godot manifests himself by his absence, Gyubal does so by his terrifying presence—he plays God at his most actively insane.

What is most characteristic about the world of *Gyubal Wahazar* (and that of all Witkiewicz's plays) is its social and political instability—which is reflected in the central figure whose explosive nature continually causes the action to erupt. Such a world can go in any direction—it veers to the right and to the left, it slows down and speeds up, it stops and starts. As Father Unguent, High Priest of the perfidious sect of Perpendicularists, puts it, Gyubal himself is the "driving force" behind these events; his expansions and contractions propel the play forward. He has wild bursts of creative energy, then lapses into terrible apathy and inaction. Because of the elasticity of Gyubal's character, his size actually seems to change throughout the play; he grows bigger and smaller as we watch.

Endless flux is the only constant in the arti-

ficial sixth-dimensional superstate of the future, where mysticism, biology, politics, religion, diplomacy all exist in a surrealistic mixture. Not only is Wahazar changing all women into either masquettes or mechanical mothers, but also, as a result of his experiments with glands, Dr. Rypmann will soon be able to turn anyone, or anything—even a hyena, jackal, or bedbug—into a Wahazar. Already there is a Wahazar doll for Piggykins to play with, in Albania someone is pretending to be Wahazar, and Father Unguent will turn into Wahazar II after receiving a transplant of his still warm glands. Before he is killed, Wahazar reaches a state of ecstatic indeterminateness in which he feels that he is everything.

Witkiewicz portrays the ceaseless transformations of the human personality and of whole societies on a grand scale. At about the same time Pirandello explored the question of individual identity in his plays; many of Witkiewicz's heroes are likewise bewildered by a multiplicity of selves. However, loss of identity in Witkiewicz does not remain on a personal, psychological plane; it exists on a mass social and even biological level. Metamorphoses spread throughout society in the form of group hysteria and chronic insanity.

Witkiewicz is pre-eminently a dramatist of sudden violence and the *coup de théâtre*, which is the dramatic equivalent of the *coup d'état*. Act I of *Gyubal Wahazar* is constructed as a series of mounting tensions and explosions, diminuendos and crescendos as Wahazar and the surrounding world that fears him draw together and collide. The events leading to Wahazar's first entrance become more and more disturbing: first the complaints and groans of those waiting; next the sounds of Wahazar's swearing and a man's moans behind the closed door; then the appearance of Oskar von den Binden Gnumpen, commander of the guard; and finally the sensational on-stage arrival of the peasant capitalist Clodgrain, kicked through the door and covered with flour from the sack he is carrying which breaks open as he falls.

These tremors prepare for the central quake: Wahazar's entrance, frothing at the mouth and roaring, issuing orders to have the Second Lady thrown out and bodily carting off the First Gentleman himself and slamming the padded red door violently after him. Witkiewicz is a specialist at such sensational entrances and exits in which characters hurtle through doors or are kicked and thrown on and off stage. In Act III, when all his victims

languish in jail, Wahazar himself is shoved "by someone from above" through the huge iron prison door and rolls down the stairs to the floor. There is always someone above even the topmost kicker, to kick him in turn—the mysterious THEY who really rule by secret conspiracy.

**Portrait by Witkiewicz.** Courtesy: Slupsk Museum

Swearing—of a sixth-dimensional sort—accompanies the kicking and is an essential Witkacian form of aggression, along with fist fights and pistol shots (most of Witkiewicz's characters seem to be amateur boxers and almost all carry revolvers in their pockets, even their pajama pockets). When Wahazar



re-appears in Act I, kicking the First Gentleman in before him "hard in the rear," he explodes in a frenzy of oaths, cursing everyone ferociously. For Witkiewicz, explosion is both a technique and a view of the world; explosions of language and explosions of violent action punctuate the normal flow of words. Suddenly corpses and insults pile up. The plays are full of volcanic upheavals, eruptions from below—from the lower parts of society or of man's anatomy, producing revolutionary turmoil, fits of sexual passion, and obscene invective, blows, and gun fire.

Besides Wahazar's repeated actions—foaming at the mouth, swearing, kicking, falling into abject states of stupor, and waking up with frenzied energy—there are recurring motifs throughout *Gyubal Wahazar* that create a dense texture and pattern of ritual: the movements of the crowd, the court ceremonies, and the arrivals and departures of the guard, the hangmen, and the rival sects of Perpendicularists and Barefoot Pneumatics.

The aim of much modern theatre has been a return to ritual—to the ritual of the Christian church, of Greek drama, of Asian theatre, of primitive tribes—in order to recapture the magic and mythic functions of drama. In the preface to *Tumor Brainard* and in *The Introduction to the Theory of Pure Form in the Theatre* Witkiewicz points out that although drama originally arose from religious rites, since these have long ago died out as living faith the same sense of mystery can now be created only formally. In fact, Witkiewicz creates a new mythic world. Instead of trying to revive dead mythology and ritual from the past, he looks to the future and imagines the social ceremonies, government agencies, and religious and scientific practices for social systems and institutions yet to come.

In *Gyubal Wahazar* we see the power of the political-religious complex of the Non-Euclidean state and its ideological organs and apparatus: the Commission on Supernatural Selection, the High Commission on Derivative Sects, the mechanization of mothers, gland transplants, arbitrary shooting of old women, transformation of insufficiently maternal women into mascolettes, diplomacy through the appointment of traitors as ambassadors.

The satirical and parodistic in Witkiewicz is not based on distortion of bourgeois realistic drama or *reductio ad absurdum* of senseless

banalities from everyday life, as in Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* or Albee's *The American Dream*. In fact, in plays like *Gyubal Wahazar* there is parody of something that does not precisely exist—but may or might. This purely invented quality of the rituals being parodied gives Witkiewicz's surrealist nightmares of the future a prismatic allusiveness to many different times and places. Parody in Witkiewicz is left open to future fulfillment, and the subjects of his satire are still being created by society. Each country and generation makes its own contribution.

Citizen of a country that did not exist for the first thirty three years of his life and which once again plunged into non-being on the day he committed suicide, firsthand witness of the revolution in Russia as well as of Papuan tribal life in New Guinea, Witkiewicz was able to project in his plays with unusual accuracy the inner feeling of Europe's subsequent historical experiences of chaos, violence, dictatorship, and ideological insanity, precisely because he used such subjective techniques of dream-like distortion which made him appear something of a madman to most of his contemporaries. In Poland now Witkiewicz undoubtedly seems more of a realist.

*Gyubal Wahazar* remained in manuscript for forty one years. It was presented on the stage for the first and only time in Poznan in 1966 for a total of eight performances. Two later productions did not go beyond the dress rehearsal. The first of these was at the student theatre Kalambur in Wroclaw in 1967, the second at the National Theatre in Warsaw in March of 1968 at the time of the demonstrations over Witkiewicz's romantic drama *Forefathers' Eve* playing at the same theatre. The final rehearsal of *Gyubal Wahazar* came on March 8, the day of the student riots.

Witkiewicz is a political surrealist, the greatest there has been. The dream world that he creates in his plays is not a private psychological one, but a nightmare about future society. His is a vision of instability, violent change, and revolution in a self-destructive world where everything is about to fly to pieces and blow up. Perhaps herein lies the appeal which Witkiewicz can have for us and the special need which he can fulfill. Even in America we are now ready to accept and understand a political surrealist, a chronicler of the sixth-dimensional state.

or

On the Mountain Passes of the Absurd

A Non-Euclidean Drama in Four Acts

by

Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz

1921

EXCERPTS

from ACT I: "Gyubal Wahazar's Principles  
of Government"

WAHAZAR I'm sacrificing myself for all of you. None of you can appreciate that and I don't expect you to. I know you say atrocious things about me. I don't want to know anything about that. I don't have informers and I'm not going to, any more than I have ministers. I am alone, like God. I alone rule everything, and I'm responsible for everything, and only to myself alone. I can condemn myself to death, if I feel like it—if I become absolutely convinced that I'm wrong. I don't have any ministers—therein lies my greatness. I'm a single solitary spirit—like the steam in an engine, like the electrical power in a battery.

...

WAHAZAR Dr. Rypmann, don't let anyone in to see me today until two P.M. I have a meeting with the Albanian ambassador. Some nobody there's started pretending to be me, and they're having trouble with him. Pretending to be me! Ha! Did you ever hear of such a thing, Dr. Rypmann! Eh? And they're asking me for advice. Ha! Ha! I'll teach them a little Albania. We'll send the prince of Valpurgia there as ambassador. He'll show them a thing or two. Appoint traitors as ambassadors. A superb method. The sixth dimension! The Non-euclidean state!!!! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! (He chokes in an attack of infernal laughter, frothing at the mouth.)

from Act II: "Gyubal Wahazar Relaxes"

PIGGYKINS Grandpa, look me in the left eye. (Wahazar leans over and looks her in the eyes.) I see your soul, your tired little soul. It's blue and walks through moss and squashes little bugs which are in love. (Wahazar sits as if hypnotized in front of her on the ground.)

WAHAZAR You're taking my loneliness away from me, Piggykins. (closes his eyes) With you I'm not alone. Somewhere very far away I see a completely different world, a kind of meadow in the middle of the woods. I see you as a young lady, with a big dog and a young man . . . Oh, God! It's me! (Piggykins strokes his hair. Wahazar covers his closed eyes with his hand.)

PIGGYKINS (quietly) Keep on going and look! Don't turn your eyes away from what you see.

WAHAZAR God! It's me. How long it's been since I've seen meadows and trees. I see butterflies: chasing one another . . . Lead me wherever you want, Piggykins. I'll do anything you say.

"Gyubal Wahazar Creates  
Darkness"

WAHAZAR (roars) Haaaaaa!!!! That's enough—I am alone!! (to First Hangman) Let there be night! (First Hangman covers the window with a

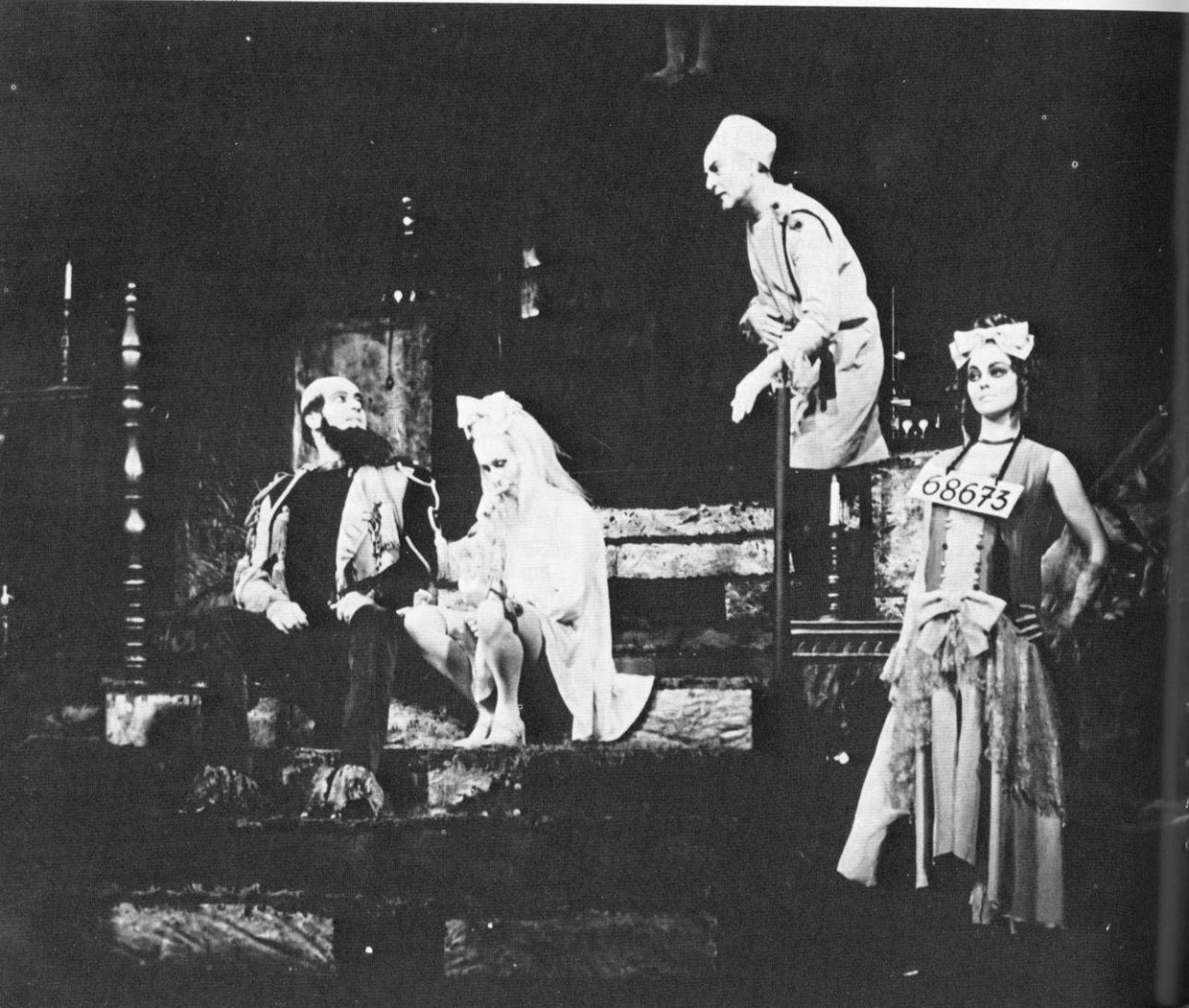
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\*Pronounced Júbal Vaházar.



# **Gyubal Wahazar**

Dress rehearsal for production scheduled for Teatr Narodowy. March 1969.  
Directed by Wanda Laskowska with Stanisław Laczyk as Gyubal Wahazar and  
Barbara Krafftówna as Piggykins.



black drape. A moment of complete darkness. Third Hangman lights the electric light above. To the Fourth Hangman) Morbidetto, you'll never kill me. You're a lying guttersnipe just like them. Splattered up to my ears in the molten lava of mysteries, I'll forge on to the very end, to those final precipices. I'm like a black star against the white-hot night!

from ACT IV: "Gyubal Wahazar's Death"

WAHAZAR I live in indeterminateness. I feel I'm everything. I'm glutting myself on all Existence. Everything is stretching out into Infinity. Kill me, or I'll burst with delight at my own self. Oh! What happiness! What bliss! Not to know who one is—to be everything!!! (He stretches out his hands in front of him in wild rapture. Piggykins gets up.)

PIGGYKINS Grandpa, grandpa! Stop being so beautiful! Don't talk that way . . . (She goes numb with rapture, looking at Wahazar.)

FATHER UNGUENTY (giving a sign to Morbidetto), Morbidetto, it's time, its high time! (Morbidetto dashes from the door and throws the lasso over Wahazar's neck. Wahazar falls back with his hands held out in front. Morbidetto pulls the noose tight, standing with his foot on Wahazar's chest. Wahazar kicks a couple of times with his feet and dies. Silence.)

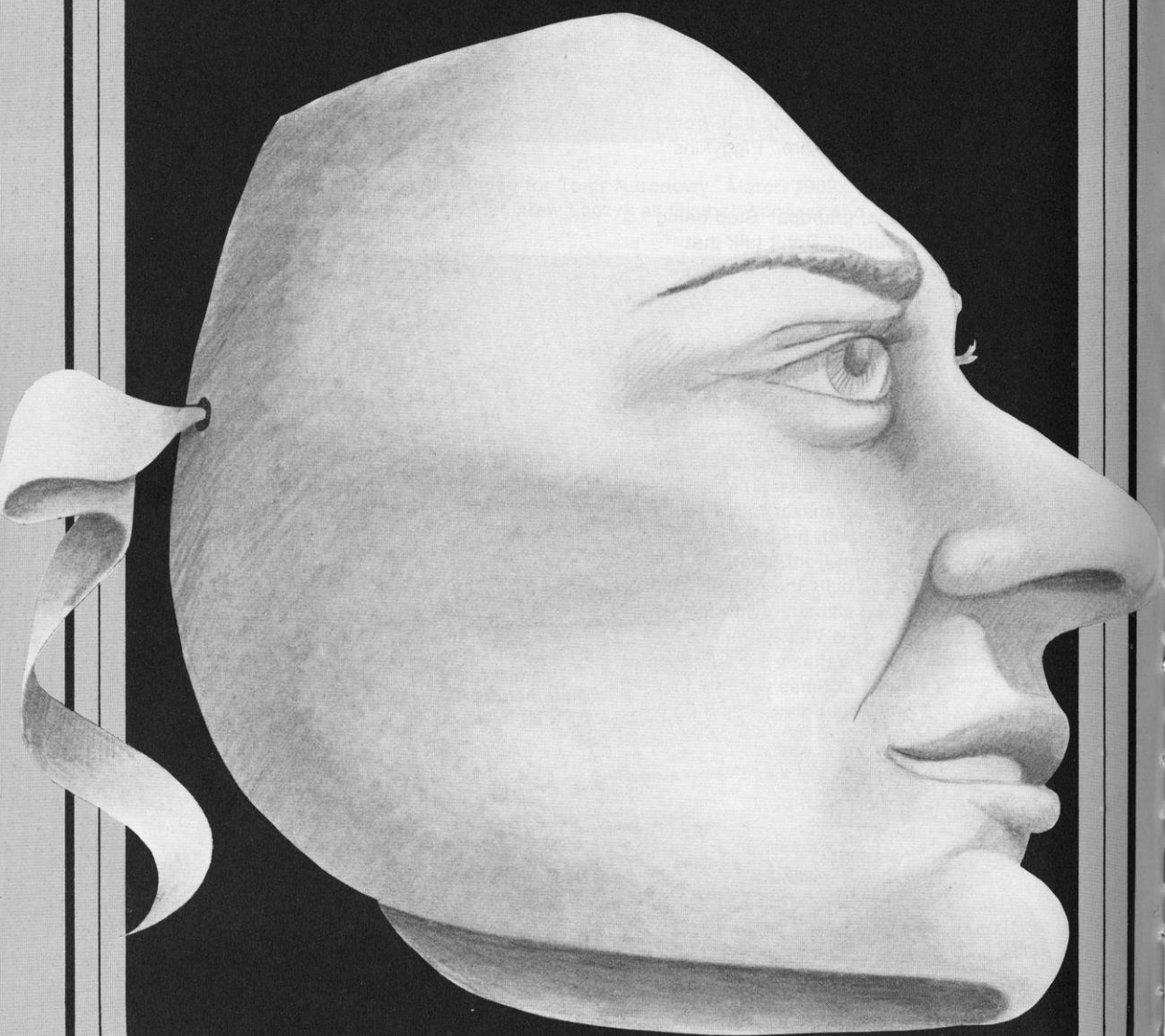
PIGGYKINS (falls on Wahazar's corpse) I loved him and only him!!! (She embraces him and freezes in that pose.)

FATHER UNGUENTY It's happened! We're free! Dr. Rypmann, cut out his glands immediately, those—you know—Carioxitates Rypmanni, and prepare a transplant for me, while they're still warm. I'm old, but I have the strength of ten. All right, Dr. Rypmann, get moving. (Murmur in the crowd. Father Unguenty whistles through his fingers. Through the left door the guard runs in with a platoon commander dressed just like Gnumben. Through the center door Father Pungenty pushes through the crowd with two Pneumatics.) Drive them all out into the courtyard. A new edict will be read there. Now I am Unguenty-Wahazar in one person. I've always been. Fix bayonets!!\*

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\*Translated by Daniel and Eleanor Gerould, © Copyright 1970. Six plays of Witkiewicz appear in *The Madman and the Nun and Other Plays* (University of Washington Press), a seventh, *The Cuttlefish, is in Gassner / Dukore*, A Treasury of the Theatre (Holt, Rinehart and Winston). Gyubal Wahazar will be included in a new collection of five plays, *Metaphysics of a Two-Headed Calf*.

Toward a Playwright's Theater:  
The American Place Theatre  
The Chelsea Theatre Center  
The New Theatre Workshop



## THE AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE

by Wynn Handman

*I am for the proliferation of good contemporary theatre; right now, there is this chance. Worthwhile plays and playwrights do exist. Most of these writers are of the post World War II generation and there are audiences, actors and directors for them on campus and off campus. We must make a deliberate effort to increase the heterogeneity of audiences—this is essential.*

*The shared experience and live engagement of all peoples is a rightful purpose for the theatre. It is indeed a responsibility, for the live theatre is still and finally the arena where people can be reached, penetrated and changed.*

Since the beginning of The American Place Theatre, the Writers Development Program has been its *raison d'être*, and this policy shall continue; when the Theatre moves to its new building at 111 West 46th Street this fall there will be four productions each year of new plays by living American writers. Developmental and experimental work is expected to increase and be continuous because of additional space and greater flexibility. The concept of the program shall not alter. At its inception in 1964 the following was stated:

*We will be working with writers of recognized talent and stature from other areas who wish to write for the theatre, as well as serious new playwrights who, in our opinion, have a meaningful potential. The selection of writers will not be confined to any particular group, style, or point of view; the choice will be eclectic, the primary factor being: is the voice worth hearing on the stage?*

The Theatre has adhered to that concept; plays of poetic nostalgia such as William Alfred's "Hogan's Goat," historical dramas such as Robert Lowell's *The Old Glory*, works from outstanding writers from other disciplines: May Swenson, Anne Sexton, and Joyce Carol Oates; works by new black playwrights Ed Bullins, Ronald Milner, and Charlie L. Russell, and new trends in theatre language and form with the works of Sam Shepard, Ronald Ribman, Ronald Tavel and

Steve Tesich. It remains the only theatre institution in the country which relies solely on the produce of this country's great natural resource—its own talent.

The Writer's Development Program is set into motion with a submitted script. Several hundred scripts, both solicited and unsolicited, are sent to the theatre each year. After an initial perusal some are rejected because the quality of the writing is not sufficiently high; more than half are given complete readings by trained readers under the supervision of the Artistic Director. Most are returned with no specific criticism; those warranting more attention are given useful suggestions and encouragement. In many cases an author is encouraged to send forthcoming works, and in cases where he has made a very strong impression, he is asked to come in for a conference. This initial conference may be followed by additional conferences, developmental work, some financial assistance, or serious consideration of the script for full production—or a combination of several of these procedures.

The determining factor in the decision to work with an author is not whether the script itself is a polished, ready-to-be-staged "property" but whether it is felt that the author's voice is one worth hearing on the stage, one evidencing a genuine potential for theatre writing. A script may be rough and imperfect yet still show promise. The collaboration between playwright and the theatre staff gives both an opportunity to grow together. Of the American Place Theatre's twenty-six full productions, seven were the result of extensive development work and revision at the theatre.

Every phase of the developmental work—up to, and often including, full production—is designed for the author's individual needs and the special requirements of the material. *Who's Got His Own*, for example, was originally done as a rehearsed reading; actors worked with script in hand for two weeks, and then performed for invited audiences. During the following year, the author conferred frequently with the Artistic Director and on the basis of these consultations and on the experience derived from the reading, the author proceeded to revise the play and to create the script that was finally produced the following season. A similar process was used for *Mercy Street* and *Five on the Black Hand Side*. (No

Wynn Handman is Director of The American Place Theatre.



audience was brought in for *Mercy Street*, since Anne Sexton didn't want one.)

The theatre has found that some writers are best served by a procedure called Studio Production. In this instance plays not ready for full production but whose author shows sufficient promise to be able to benefit from a total theatre experience are given fully rehearsed performances without sets before audiences.

In all its productions the American Place Theatre seeks to find the "right" director and cast. Unlike many other theatres, it does not have a resident company or staff directors or a scenic designer; the variety of styles, genres and tones, represented by the selected plays demand a more individual approach to each play. A director is never imposed on an author. If the author has a specific director in mind, he is given very serious consideration, and in most instances he is chosen.

Once a director has been set, meetings are held with the production staff of the theatre, and the period of casting begins; it may extend anywhere from two to six weeks, depending upon the size of the cast. The actors who audition are drawn from the large pool of trained professionals in and around the New York area, providing the opportunity for a wide selection.

Once the production has gone into rehearsal, every attempt is made to prevent outside pressures and commercial considerations from interfering. In the case of a rehearsed reading, the writer is given the option of deciding whether an audience should be present for the performance. Since he may decide at any point not to have an audience, development work at the American Place Theatre is never promised to the participants as a "showcase."

In case of a full production, the writer has the option of not having the play reviewed by the press. When invited reviewers are asked to come, it is during the middle of the run so that the "opening night" and "hit-flop" syndromes are avoided. The author knows from the beginning that his play will run to capacity audiences for a full six weeks regardless of the critical reaction to the play. This fact gives the author learning time. It also gives him a sense that he will not be

peremptorily rejected by the group after the morning review. He has found a place that will give him room, and he can expect an audience made up of a real mix of people, not a clique or a coterie whose response is automatic, and not a group of homogenous people whose responses are all the same. This cultivation of a heterogeneous audience is an important strategy in The Place's work.

Another aspect of the American Place Theatre's program for writers is its provision of financial aid, in the form of grants, to talented writers in need of assistance. No conditions are attached to these grants; writers are not required to work on a particular play, nor to produce a play specifically for the American Place Theatre. The grants are intended to fill a financial gap, so that the writer can continue his playwriting with somewhat reduced financial pressures. They are also a gesture of confidence at those times in a writer's career when confidence seems most needed.

**Pinkville** by George Tabori, American Place Theatre.  
Sergeant: James Talkan  
Jerry: Michael Douglas  
Photographer: Martha Holmes



**The Judas Applause** by Gary Munn, Chelsea Theater Center of Brooklyn.  
Photographer: Jerry Kean

**AC/DC** by Heathcote Williams, Chelsea Theater Center.  
Photographer: Alan B. Tepper



## THE CHELSEA THEATER CENTER OF BROOKLYN\*

By Robert Kalfin

The Chelsea Theater Center of Brooklyn is a subsidized theatre. As such, we feel obliged to fulfill needs that are not fulfilled otherwise.

We produce plays that no one else produces—the kind of plays that people usually talk about, read, see abroad or that circulate to both commercial and non-commercial producers who don't have the guts to produce them—or the finances or the ability to take risks. They are also the kind of plays that we feel would leave America behind if they were left unproduced. They are plays which we feel—because they are exploring something in the theatre which has not been explored before and because of a uniqueness of style or content—will change theatre by their effect on both playwriting and audiences.

The Chelsea Theater Center is organized totally around the works we choose, rather than any particular theory of acting technique or theatre practice. Production style, rehearsal technique etc. evolve out of the play itself, and vary from production to production. Physically, we totally change our theatre space to accommodate the work we are doing—having no preference but what will work best for the play. Sometimes we end up with a “total environment” for a production (*Slave-ship*, *The Universal Nigger*); an elegant arena (*The Brass Butterfly*); video-proscenium (*AC/DC*) or something else. The space and how it is used evolves organically.

Plays and works considered for production at Chelsea come from all over the world. Sometimes we hear of scriptless projects which people have been working on in remote places and we go and see them. Sometimes a friend writes us about some great thing he's seen

in Kazakhstan—and we somehow find a way to follow it up.

Here are some of the plays we've done over the last six years that I think were the most valuable: *The Communist* by Archie Shepp, (which we produced a second time, two years later under the title *Junebug Graduates Tonight!* so that people could get a second look at it and which was produced again last year at Howard University); *Three Days Before Yesterday* by Kevin O'Morrison (about the Vietnam debate in Congress—but set during the Peloponnesian Wars); *Johannes* by Bill Gunn; *Edith Stein* by Arthur Giron (produced last season at the Arena Stage in Washington); *Christophe* by John Gay; *The Innocent Party* and *Wax Museum* by John Hawkes; *The Black Quartet* (plays by Ben Caldwell, Ron Milner, Ed Bullins and LeRoi Jones); *The Judas Applause* by Gary Munn (a play about assassination in America); *Slaveship* by LeRoi Jones; *The Brass Butterfly* by William Golding; *Candaules*, *Commissioner* by Daniel Gerould (a true anti-colonialist play); *The Universal Nigger* by Gordon Porterfield; *Saved* by Edward Bond; *Tarot* by Joe McCord; and *AC/DC* by Heathcote Williams.

Each of these was praised and damned in about equal proportion—a critical response we've learned to expect and which comes like clockwork. (It's become a bit of a bore to find our productions vilified and then re-evaluated three to five years later with praise for our “courage” and “foresight.” But, the converse is also true: sometimes we decide our own work is crap, though other people might love it). Anyway, we're turned on by what we're doing, and that's what keeps us going.

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\*The Chelsea Theatre Center is located in the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

## THE NEW THEATRE WORKSHOP

by Stephen Aaron

*The New Theatre Workshop's* commitment to the young playwright is based upon an obvious and urgent need in the contemporary theatre for developing such talent. A playwright must learn about his craft through practical experience; no amount of seminar discussion can substitute for this kind of training. And the work must be done in a relatively unpresured atmosphere. The writer—indeed, all the creative people involved—must be free from the career pressures and the monetary burdens that inhibit honest investigation.

The word "workshop" is used rather loosely these days; it has become a catch-all phrase for organizations of very different goals. For example, *The American Place Theatre*, the *Cafe La Mama* and the *Chelsea Theater* actually present a new playwright to the American public. They are fulfilling a vital function in the theatre by presenting adventurous plays of high artistic merit which the now commercially oriented off-Broadway theatre ignores. *The New Theatre Workshop* makes no pretense at this presentational performance situation. We set up for the writer a controlled and protected environment in which he can explore the potentials of his craft.

In this respect *the Workshop* supplies three things for the young writer: a first-class theatre audience, experienced actors and directors and continuous artistic guidance before, during and after the actual Workshop production. A writer is accepted into our workshop only on the basis of several plays; at first we are more interested in the writer than in any particular script at hand. It is only after much preliminary discussion that we decide which of the writer's plays to perform. The question asked at this stage is as follows: which play-in-performance will be of most value for the writer at this special time in his creative development.

A play, once chosen, is given a staged reading. First of all, this tests out the relationship between the writer and his director. We ask our directors to function on two levels: not only must they get the play up on its feet; they must also function as the writer's artistic sounding board, attempting to relate this single experience to the writer's entire body of

work. Second, since these readings are scheduled far in advance of the regular production, the writer has a chance to do as much pre-rehearsal re-writing as is necessary. Too often a cast is overburdened with countless re-writes during the rehearsal period. This is particularly true with a young writer who, after hearing his play read aloud for the first time, is usually alerted to new ideas which then results in major revision.

The basis of *The Workshop's* Program is its *Monday Night Play Series*. Here the play is given four performances after four full weeks of rehearsal. These are productions without scenery although full use is made of the New Theatre's lighting and sound equipment.

Obviously the control in this experiment is the experience of the actors and the director. A serious workshop, such as ours, demands actors of the highest calibre so that the young writer may bounce his ideas off the perspective of the actors' craft. The Workshop is proud to mention a few of the actors who have worked with us in the past: Eli Wallach, Richard Kiley, Geraldine Page, Hiram Sherman, Rosemary Murphy, James Broderick, Peggy Cass, Rip Torn, Lois Smith, Salem Ludwig, and James Earl Jones. There were many others.

The major problem that *The New Theatre Workshop* now faces is one of funding. By its very nature the Workshop must exist outside of the commercial theatre community while it must continually recognize its ultimate goal: to feed, and hopefully transform, the commercial theatre. The Workshop depends entirely upon donations and grants from individuals, foundations and government agencies. Unfortunately, these groups tend to measure success in terms of financial rewards, looking to the Workshop to become self-supporting. We are continually faced with statements from the larger philanthropies to the effect that the New Theatre Workshop is a high risk venture for them because we are in the nature of a bottomless pit when it comes to funding.

Naturally, we measure success in different terms. We must! Our "success" is not based upon the number of our productions moved directly into commercial situations. Unlike *The Washington Arena Theatre*, for example, where they can participate directly in profits developed from a commercial production (*Indians*, *The Great White Hope*), *The Workshop* finds itself in a different situation. Because we

Stephen Aaron is the Artistic Director of The New Theatre Workshop.

work with writers at an early stage in their development, it is often years after their direct association with us that they move on to write a play which is ready for public exposure.

Although this commercial dilemma is discouraging, it does, in fact, define the very essence of the New Theatre Workshop's policy. The playwright's development is indirect, circuitous, underground. We offer the writer the initial push which sets him off on a long, sometimes mysterious journey. We stay in

contact with him in later years; our facilities are always at his disposal. Essentially, we offer him the opportunity to experiment even to the point of failure. It is in this kind of community that we believe the American theatre can best be served. The Workshop is now concluding its sixth year of operation; its future is uncertain. It depends upon whether we will be able to mobilize within the theatrical industry itself, the public sector of the economy and the major foundations, the necessary financial support and commitment for our program.



**Richard III** by Rip Torn, New Theater Workshop. Left to Right: Christopher, Giles, and Michael Eyre.

Tunc Yalman

## The Regions Through a Perspective

Among the myths and misconceptions that surround the so-called regional theatre scene in this country the most prevalent and probably the least accurate is the tendency to refer to a resident theatre "movement." There is no such movement. A ripple perhaps. Barely a wave. Each theatre has its own problems, its own schedule, its own way of doing things, and is lost to the outside world, more often than not, in a never ending struggle to make ends meet, and, if lucky, to survive—for one more season, which may well be the last.

If the above evaluation of the regional theatre scene sounds pessimistic it is not meant to be. I, for one, do not agree with a by now proverbial statement which Alan Schneider is supposed to have made about U.S. resident companies having turned into so many "Howard Johnsons." There are far worse fates than running into a neat dependable Howard Johnson restaurant while driving along a bleak highway, especially if you're thirsty and hungry, just as there is a less desirable alternative to living in a city which has and supports a professional resident company—namely, living in one with no resident company at all.

One can't really evaluate the problems and ironies of the regional theatre scene in the United States today without reference to the larger pattern of theatrical activity. In most other so-called civilized countries we generally find two key institutional thrusts: 1) government or city subsidized companies which create and provide the bulk of the serious work; and 2) commercial ventures which aim for profit, and when successful provide "entertainment." Alongside these principal sources of dramatic output, there exists a certain amount of amateur theatre (mostly in academic institutions) and a few, more often than not state or city subsidized, training schools or conservatories which enable the necessary talent to be properly trained for and fed into the existing com-

panies. Except for the chanciness of the commercial ventures, which as far as basic motivation goes have as little concern with the aim of perpetuating the art of theatre as would an ordinary gambler whose principal urge is to make a fast profit at a gaming table, the European theatre system makes sense and works. Crisscrossing the continent, from Ireland to Turkey or from Norway to Portugal, the art of theatre exists, is subsidized, is supported and is taken seriously (alas, it's also taken for granted, but that's another story). The main thing is that it is part of a nation's life, and a source of civic pride. (While clearing the rubble of World War II the Germans rebuilt their theatres before anything else.)

There is nothing wrong with Broadway (or its current adopted child off-Broadway) beyond the fact that it virtually personifies the American theatre. It presumes to take itself too seriously (producers and press agents see to that), and what is worse is taken too seriously by millions of otherwise perceptive and intelligent citizens. (Think of all the people you know who will go to see a "Plaza Suite" or a "Cactus Flower," but who would never dream of wasting part of their lives reading a novel of an equivalent caliber.) Every country which has an active theatre has its counterpart of a Broadway, but it also has subsidized companies affirming and maintaining the tradition of theatre alongside the commercial operations. Just think of the dramatic change in the English theatre scene since they finally adopted the continental approach. Broadway, thanks to its musicals may on the whole compare favorably with London's West End commercial scene, but the Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Center and the Public Theatre are hardly enough to balance against the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre and the Royal Court! What we miss is a sense of tradition and that implies a respect for the past and a concern for the future.

*Tunc Yalman* was until recently Artistic Director of the Milwaukee Repertory Company.

Penelope Reed as Mary Stewart and Erika  
Slezak as Elizabeth, Queen of England in  
Milwaukee Repertory Company's production of  
Friedrich Von Schiller's **Mary Stewart**.



Which brings us to the incredible paradox of the American theatre scene: the educational theatre. Actually the above concerns are met, or at least paid lip service to, on the nation's campuses. Over 2,500 colleges and universities supposedly give degrees in theatre in one form or another through their Speech and Drama or in rare cases, their Drama, or Theatre departments. And at least one hundred campuses operate what they claim to be professional University Theatres presenting theatre seasons to students and the general public. In other words, the sense of tradition, of respect for the past and concern for the future, which the American commercial theatre necessarily lacks, *appears* to be more than made up for on a national scale by incorporating the theory and practice of drama into almost all of the nation's institutions of higher learning. If the alternative to having the departments is *not* having the departments, let's have them by all means, but might it not be wiser to subsidize twenty drama schools to really train professionals, rather than have over two thousand that do little more than train teachers to train more teachers to train yet more teachers? And could the rest of the indirect subsidy that their public support represents not be turned into a direct subsidy for professional companies keeping the tradition of theatre *alive* in every sense all over the country? As a member of the theatrical profession I can only be happy at the existence of so much teaching of drama, and yet knowing the problems of the profession it somehow doesn't seem to make sense to encourage thousands of inadequately trained young hopefuls to seek employment in a field where there isn't enough work to go around for even the exceptionally well-trained and talented. Besides, going back to my argument on the necessity of keeping the tradition of theatre alive in the civilized world, I don't believe that university drama schools, any more than the commercial theatre, are capable of assuming that role.

The community theatre scene, which is another almost exclusively American phenomenon, active and commendable as it may be, has really as little to do with the art of theatre as Sunday painters have to do with art itself. Nothing short of total commitment will do.

And now for the regional professional resident theatre scene, which has been my scene for the past five years. First of all what makes a theatre company qualify as a member of the regional resident theatre movement—or wave? To quote from "A Study of the Development and Growth of the Milwaukee Repertory

Theatre," an excellent thesis presented by Michael A. Pedretti to the University of Kansas in 1969 in partial fulfillment toward his M.A.:

*A professional resident theater is a non-profit organization, maintaining its own permanent facilities for performance and operating with some continuity in terms of policy, staff and acting personnel. These theatres are cultural rather than economic enterprises; their aim is to offer top quality presentations for a minimal fee, enabling almost every member of a community to afford a ticket. To offer the best dramatic fare at a nominal fee necessitates support from subsidy, grants, and/or donations. As stated in the major study of the performing arts in America, the Rockefeller Panel Report, the 'non-profit performing arts organizations should not be expected to pay their own way at the box office. Indeed, they cannot do so and still fulfill their true cultural mission.'*

At the beginning of 1971 twenty eight such theatre companies, presenting seasons of at least six months or longer were still in operation in the U.S. This may not be much when you consider the size and width and wealth of this country, but thanks to the Ford Foundation that initiated the wave in the early 1960's, and to Rockefeller, and in some cases HEW, and later National Endowment grants that dribbled in, and above all thanks to the herculean efforts of the thousands of citizens that raised and/or donated funds in their own communities, and the belief and faith of hundreds of theatre professionals who devoted their talents to the cause, regional theatres do at least exist and their very existence has assured us a kind of "civilization" as opposed to living by the laws of the jungle (i.e. the commercial theatre).

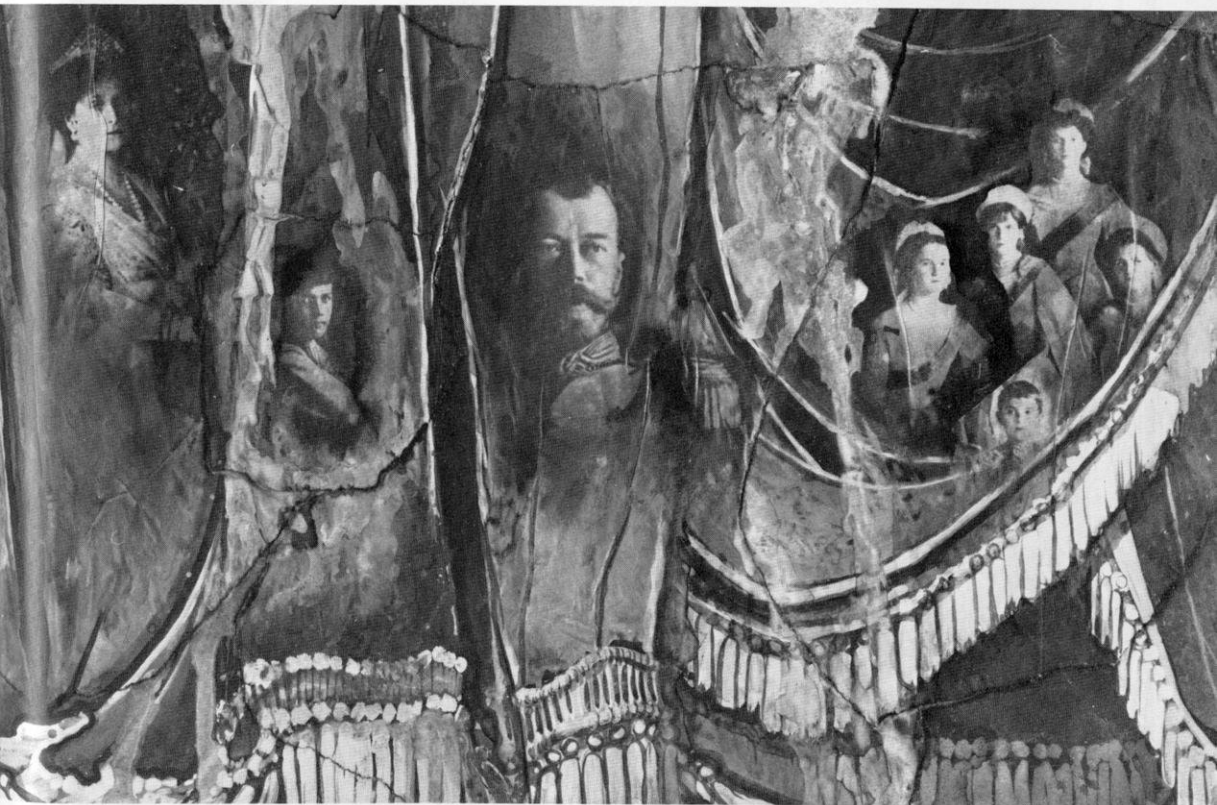
By the time this piece is published several of the twenty eight companies may have ceased to exist. And unless federal subsidy for the arts substantially increases within the next few years more are bound to give up the struggle and quietly bury themselves. On the whole the regional theatres do fulfill their functions, as do the audiences who subscribe, come, gripe, show interest, and fill the seats. And from season to season they certainly grow in numbers. My optimism is of course largely based on the growth and expansion I have witnessed in the past five years in Milwaukee. I do believe that the potential for artistic growth and expansion on the one hand, and the building up of a large and interested au-

dience on the other can be achieved anywhere in this country. The talent is certainly available and so are eager audiences. It's just a question of bringing them together and persisting. And yet, unlike its government and/or city subsidized European counterparts, even the most successful regional theatre operation in this country necessarily lacks a feeling of being solidly entrenched within the framework of the community it aims to serve. The planning of a "next season," if there is to be a next season, always depends on the success of the next "fund drive," and a fund drive is as successful as the zeal of the citizens who volunteer to beg other citizens to make contributions, so that "our repertory theatre" can "proudly continue" to operate—for one more season. As a man of the theatre, grateful as I am for the existence of these large numbers of volunteer fund-raisers, I still find it demeaning that the survival of a theatre company in a civilized community should depend on what amounts to a collection of charity. But evidently this is the only way for the time being, and perhaps the sheer persistence of the Boards of Directors and the volunteers, and above all of the actors and designers and staff who make up the companies, will eventually,

one hopes, pave the way to the day when each of the fifty states proudly supports its resident (or touring) hospitals-of-the-soul where man joins man to participate in the ritual of looking at and ever re-evaluating himself.

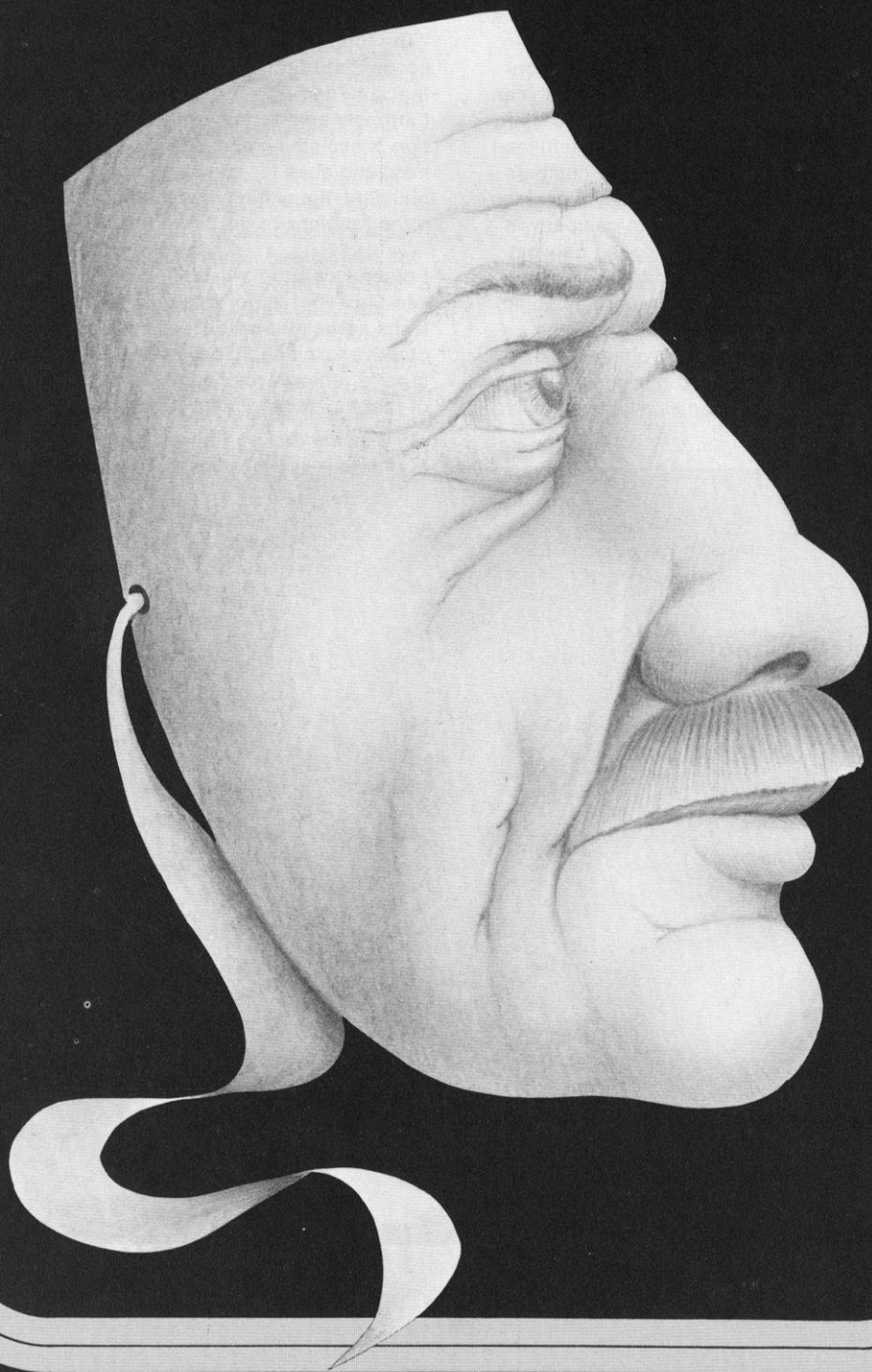
As Coriolanus says: "There are other worlds." And there is one more scene: that of the Open Theatre, of the LaMama, of the Performance Group, of "Alice in Wonderland" and the Manhattan Project. A vibrant scene, a searching world, and, as far as the future goes, the one perhaps that holds the "eggs" (Ionesco: "The future is in the eggs."). It is toward that scene that I find myself turning, fascinated by the work and by the nature of the dedication. I strongly believe in perpetuation, but *exploration* is something else again. Regional theatre may, and does for me, symbolize "civilization," but *what*, if anything, lies in the as yet unexplored regions of the art of theatre itself?

I recently left the artistic helm of the Milwaukee Rep—not out of frustration—the five years I was associated with it were stimulating, creative, exciting, happy—but because the urge to renew myself and be open to the call of that theatrical *unknown* was too irresistible.



Design by John Ezell.

# BOOK REVIEWS



## TWO VIEWS OF DANCE

by Marcia B. Siegel

*Kirstein, Lincoln, Movement and Metaphor: Four Centuries of Ballet.*  
New York, Praeger, 1970. \$17.50

*McDonagh, Don, The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance.*  
New York, Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1970. \$6.95

Not long ago a friend who is a well-known commentator and historian of the arts asked me what was the biggest problem in dance criticism.

"Where to get published."

"No, I mean the biggest problem in writing it."

"How to describe movement."

Wrong tack again. What my friend was after was a description of aesthetic approaches or philosophical positions, and I had to admit that dance criticism hasn't reached a degree of sophistication where such questions apply.

Most dance critics fall into one of two categories: journalists and fans. For the reasons I indicated, though perhaps not in that order, dance criticism is not a profession; for most people practicing it, it's not even a full-time occupation. Almost the only place to get experience doing it is New York, and the publishing opportunities here are severely limited. Outside of New York, where there's relatively more demand for it, very little dance goes on and the critic is deprived of colleagues he can talk to about his work. On the more gentlemanly side, dance has no academic structure to support research, encourage serious publication, develop methods of observation and the vocabularies of analysis, or find students who will carry on the work.

Small wonder that dance critics don't have "styles" or belong to "schools" of thought. As a matter of fact, that's not all bad. Dance is a physical art, and I think the over-intellectualized kind of writing, where the writer detaches himself from all sensory ephemeral qualities and emotional connotations, is just about worthless. The one inescapable fact about dance criticism is that you have to be in contact with the real live thing as it is performed. Yet the path between evading the dance event

through mental gymnastics and condemning it to superficiality through journalism is far from clear, and it's found mostly by instinct at this point.

The issues of dance criticism today are almost exclusively practical ones. Not only reviews but essays and even books tend to get written to suit some editor or publisher who probably has only the vaguest idea what constitutes dance, let alone good dance writing, but interprets his readers' desires anyway. Apart from the handful of people whose dance writing jobs earn them a livelihood, the prospective serious critic has to find a "home base," a publication that's comfortable with his point of view, for which he can write regularly enough to qualify for press tickets. Then, because he has more to say or doesn't want to be circumscribed in a certain format, he gropes around for other outlets. If he can make a living without having to hold a job or take more lucrative assignments outside the field, he's considered a prodigy.

Under these conditions, the investment of time and thought needed to produce a book is hard to come by. I once pursued a book idea for two and a half years, attempting to get either the money to write it or a publisher to take it after it was written. Finally I lost my enthusiasm for the project, and that book will probably never be written. It was, at the time, an important and potentially valuable idea. The particular choreography that was to be its subject can no longer be seen, or else is being performed in a different style from its original version.

The literature of dance is impoverished because so few people are writing it, and few new people are interested in adding to it because there aren't enough models. I often have the feeling that people think dance criticism is supposed to be dull because so much of it is; that dance is not assumed to be a

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Jacques Cesbron

subject fit for serious aesthetic study because virtually no writers have studied it seriously. Many dance books are accidental by-products of the chaotic system I have described—collections of articles and reviews that may, with luck, add up to a unified aesthetic, but often, understandably, don't. The more available histories, biographies, memoirs and artistic credos can support but cannot substitute for the hard, clear light of concentrated critical analysis.

Lincoln Kirstein's *Movement & Metaphor* and Don McDonagh's *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* are extended studies in this exceedingly rare form. Both authors take a new look at a large body of dance achievement and ruminate on how it goes together. I have serious reservations about both books as literary products, and I'm not particularly in sympathy with either man's version of the world. But I sincerely admire the sustained effort their books represent—the maximum breadth of my own focus being about 500 to 800 words.

\* \* \* \* \*

As observers and synthesizers of the long flow of dance evolution, Kirstein and McDonagh take opposite positions. Kirstein maintains that the present moment, specifically George Balanchine, is the supreme and probably final outcome of history. Thousands of years of civilization and 400 years of dance have led us to where we are, and this is also where it stops. McDonagh announces a new era untroubled by the past. History has served us

badly, so badly in fact that we need consider it only as the doormat on which to scrape our feet at the entrance to the New Jerusalem.

Kirstein, co-director of the New York City Ballet, has been associated with George Balanchine for more than 35 years. I doubt if there has been a more fruitful partnership in all of American art. Balanchine, the creative genius. Kirstein, the organizer, proselytizer and fund raiser who gave him the means to work. Kirstein met the young Balanchine in 1933 and, finding himself in perfect accord with Balanchine's view of art, persuaded him to come to this country and spearheaded the long drive to provide the choreographer with his own school and company.

As early as 1937 Kirstein was arguing the case for Balanchine, in his pamphlet *Blast at Ballet\**. Opinionated, intemperate, brilliant, sometimes maddening but always interesting, Kirstein set out to discredit Balanchine's critics, disparage his rivals, and point out the virtues of the then neglected protégé. As early as that he had decided that modern dance was a passing aberration because it had no academic system of body training, had singled out Nijinsky as a misunderstood choreographic innovator and jeered at Massine as superficial and repetitive, had praised an incredible number of awful ballets, and mapped out a strategy for building a dance-conscious America that his own organizations were to follow with outstanding success.

\**Blast at Ballet—A Corrective for the American Audience. Reprinted in Lincoln Kirstein's Three Pamphlets Collected, Dance Horizons, 1967.*

Since *Blast at Ballet* Kirstein has delivered a few more diatribes, but the springboard for *Movement & Metaphor* seems to have been the re-issue, in 1969, of his much more sober and less provocative history of dance, written in 1935.\* Mulling over the intervening years in an introduction to the reprint, Kirstein had some new perspectives on dance. He speculated on what, out of all the ballet activity here and in Europe over these three decades of growth, would qualify as great choreography, and how one would recognize these works. He named four ballets then: *Lilac Garden* (Tudor), *Fancy Free* (Robbins), *Agon* (Balanchine) and *Enigma Variations* (Ashton). With one more, Balanchine's *Orpheus*, they comprise the entire post-Diaghilev achievement as Kirstein sees it in *Movements & Metaphor*.

His plan for the book was to trace the development of ballet by describing 50 crucial works with special attention to the "syntax and structure" of choreography. Each entry is discussed according to Priority, the reason for its inclusion; Precedent, the artistic forebears of the work; Politics, the social climate of the time in which it took place; Plot or Pretext; and Production, the scenic presentation and the style of the dancing. He precedes his study of individual ballets with a general look at the development of choreography, gesture and mime, ballet music, costume and decor.

Beginning with the *Ballet des Polonais*, presented for the French court in 1573, and concluding with *Enigma Variations* of 1968, given by Britain's Royal Ballet, what emerges is a fascinating, panoramic impression of upper class Europe through four centuries. There are intrigues and scandals, flattery and favoritism, the rise of empire followed by the overthrow of kings followed by more emperors and more revolutions, but always the aristocracy survives. Ballet, once danced by kings, becomes their entertainment, now as then under the protection of the state. Ballet celebrates noble beings and courtly behavior, and though it receives life-giving transfusions from time to time, from the peasant classes or exotic distant countries, blueblooded it remains. Occasionally it moves out of royal theatres and acquires a more democratic audience, but it's still about princes and princesses, it still presents the dancer as an idealized human being—remote, meticulously selected and trained, and altogether superior to those who observe him.

\*Dance—A Short History of Classic Theatrical Dancing, reprinted by *Dance Horizons*, 1969.

As with any ten-most list, one could quarrel with Kirstein's choices and omissions, especially from the more accessible 20th century repertory. But I think his selection is consistent with his own specialized and rather ascetic view of dance. Diversions from the line of academic development that Kirstein sees as culminating in Balanchine he glides past in silence. The "pure-dance" ballets of Ashton are ignored, as are the impure but very popular efforts of people like Gerald Arpino, Maurice Béjart and John Cranko. Only one American-born choreographer receives attention, Jerome Robbins, and that for his first ballet, *Fancy Free*, which, as a jazzy character work, could be termed a vulgarization and in no way competitive with Balanchine.

There's no reference to the symphonic ballets of Nijinska and Massine, and much putting down of Isadora Duncan, who brought into the 20th century the idea of personal, expressive, non-academic movement. "Duncan danced, explored space, new music, and the floor, but left no immediate issue," Kirstein writes. Yet he includes three of Nijinsky's ballets, which were a choreographic dead end—his most sensational and ambitious work, *Le Sacre du Printemps*, lasted six performances. Modern dance is still anathema to Kirstein: "Idiosyncratic innovators outside academic discipline, from Isadora Duncan to Mary Wigman, Martha Graham, and their epigones, have had fringe effects far weaker than the impact of parallel developments in music or the lyric imagination."

It would be extremely interesting to see a book sympathetic to these "fringe effects," because clearly modern dance has exerted a profound influence on ballet and on the whole dance audience. Whether modern dance as embodied by Martha Graham will survive or will survive in modified forms, and whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, one has to be pretty narrow to go on denying it any validity at all.

This narrowness is most succinctly revealed in Kirstein's discussion of decor. He laments the fact that easel painters are no longer designing for ballets. Though conceding, in a footnote, to the sculptor Isamu Noguchi "a new plastic ambience"—something he no doubt discovered when Noguchi collaborated with Balanchine in 1948—his perception of dance decor obviously was arrested at least 20 years ago. The fact that Kirstein is unaware of the sculptural set as used so brilliantly by Noguchi for Graham and extended by Merce Cunningham and others into actual kinetic forms, of the highly specialized uses of dance lighting,

of the whole film and mixed-media field is not so unexpected when one looks at the old-fashioned sets consistently used by the New York City Ballet.

Kirstein is pushing himself, and his ballet, into a corner. I wouldn't dispute George Balanchine's genius, perhaps not even his superiority over all other geniuses now working in ballet. But Kirstein is building such an airtight case for that genius that he's eliminating all avenues of succession and all possible alternate means for the art to survive after Balanchine is gone.

*Movement & Metaphor* is not an especially easy book to read. Kirstein has done a huge job of scholarship and collating of material from many sources. He's pulled together ideas in a brilliant way. Yet somehow, he's almost neglected to write the book. He uses a terse annotational style and a monotonous sentence structure, with a few simple verb tenses all the time, so that it becomes difficult to tell how all these facts relate to each other in time and importance. Here is part of the section on Precedent for *La Esmeralda* (1844): "The archeological restoration of Gothic cathedrals and castles under Viollet-le-Duc replaced earlier preoccupation with Greek or Roman archeology. Notre Dame and La Sainte Chapelle were being refurbished. In *Le Ballet de la Nuit* (1653), Louis XIV's dancers were already in the original Court of Miracles, which had just been cleared of its derelict and destitute population." The reader has to know almost as much as the author not to get confused.

I find Kirstein most interesting when he's speculating most wildly, as when he senses a sinister philosophical relationship between the recurring metaphor of the doll in ballet (Coppélia, Petrouchka) and the increasing mechanization and dehumanization of man. But always, he's forced by the iron structure of his five categories to leave only hints and questions instead of developing the idea.

One more note. This is a book of immense scholarship, yet the reader has trouble isolating facts. The names of the choreographer, composer, librettist and other collaborators on each of the 50 ballets are buried in the text; some are missing entirely. Quoted accounts are given of ballets and reactions to ballets, but seldom does Kirstein give the source and date of these quotes. There are hundreds of illustrations of ballets and related sculpture and paintings, but the captions for all of them have been disastrously relegated to the back

of the book, making them almost useless as references to the text.

\* \* \* \* \*

Whatever Kirstein's shortcomings, he's not anonymous. The persona of the critic seems to me of considerable importance in establishing a dance literature. For too many reasons to mention, dance critics usually assume either a bland reportorial stance or a paternalistic advisory one. They tend not to assert their own personalities in overall theories or tastes the way Kirstein does. They take one thing at a time; they deal in novel adjectives rather than honest reactions; they would rather overpraise mediocrity than name a fraud. And they won't describe movement; some of them will talk about the most peripheral things in order to avoid describing movement. More and more I think that this is not because, as has often been claimed, movement can't be described, but because movement is at the guts of dance, and we writers have to get down into our own guts to find out what the movement is.

Don McDonagh does not exercise his option, to use one of his favorite phrases. He stands, a shadowy, passive figure, making plausible sounds and observations, giving us no reason to like him or dislike him or the dancers he's discussing. Even the vast inaccuracies and misrepresentations in his book are somehow inarguable. It's as if the whole thing had been done in automatic writing.

*The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* is a fad book posing as a serious book. It sets up a false premise—that "modern dance" somehow wore out, having been at best a petulant rebellion against ballet by a few selfish people—and then plays a rigged game of Heroes and Villains between the "generation" of the avant-garde and "historic modern dance."

McDonagh is wrong about modern dance, repeatedly and variously wrong. It was not developed improvisationally (p. 1). It was not motivated principally by "the desire to inform" (p. 10). It did not deal with "institutional themes" (p. 37). It had not "become overly dependent on boy meets girl stories" (p. 198). Or "stories" (p. 296). It did not maintain a "rigidity in demanding dramatic characterization" (p. 278). It was not always serious, with "little time for play" (p. 326).

Besides hammering at these gross misapprehensions, the writer rearranges history. Anna



Rod A. Rogers

Sokolow did not have to intercede between students and the "curmudgeonly old man" Louis Horst, because she worked as Horst's assistant in about 1930, when Horst was in his early 40's. Merce Cunningham and Erick Hawkins were not the only innovators to emerge from the supposedly devouring clutches of Martha Graham. Of the long list that I would name, McDonagh himself later recognizes Paul Taylor, Merle Marsicano and Dan Wagoner. Doris Humphrey was not beaten into doing pure agitprop ("social commentary in generalized thematic terms, generally displaying a concern for economic inequities or political imbalances") by initial condemnation of her lyric dance *Passacaglia*; in fact, she continued her Bach explorations until her death. The Graham company did not monopolize the American Dance Festival as McDonagh claims; it appeared at the Festival's first year, 1948, and then not until 1962.

As a dance reviewer for *The New York Times* for several years, McDonagh can't be so ignorant of basic history. I suggest that he is purposely distorting this material. He wants to present us with an artistic climate completely dominated by a few evil, egotistical individuals whose work was only minimally important, in order to emphasize the sweet, brave, youthful, honest and wise qualities of his main characters, the avant-garde. There certainly was some antagonism between the elders and their students, but I think it's long been spent; some of McDonagh's heroes are too young to have cared anyway.

Just who this avant-garde is and how one qualifies to belong to it is never made clear. At first you think it's Merce Cunningham from whom all blessings flow. He was, after all, one of the first to spite Graham and one of the most outrageous in his dissent. But then, Cunningham is only about six years younger than Anna Sokolow, who left Graham ten years earlier and broke from her dance ideas just as radically, though McDonagh classifies Sokolow with the villains and doesn't describe her work. Anyway, Cunningham is rapidly superseded by the Judson Group—the "post-modern dance" generation whose common ground seems to have been attendance at Robert Dunn's composition classes in 1962-63. But no, the very first choreographer McDonagh treats in detail after Cunningham is Twyla Tharp, who danced with Paul Taylor and had nothing to do with Judson Church except she once did a dance there, in 1965. If McDonagh is talking about figures of the stature of Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais and Yvonne Rainer, he also includes some distinctly minor

ones with only one or two works to their credit. He passes over very popular people like James Cunningham, very influential ones like Ann Halprin, and very singular ones like Murray Louis and William Dunas.

The only logic in a book like this one, and I would accept it willingly, is the writer's taste. But aside from the fact that he apparently likes the dancers he writes about, I have no idea what McDonagh makes of all that he sees. His tone is distant; he *never* gives an opinion about anything. He writes journalistically, as if reporting everything, though he couldn't possibly have seen it all. In separate chapters devoted to various choreographers he mixes accounts of dances with biographical material with information he might have obtained in interviews. ("[Meredith Monk] is strongly concerned with the communicative aspects of her theater work . . .")

McDonagh's descriptions of the dances that caused him to write the book are the most inexplicable thing about it. He writes the kind of straight, newsmagazine jargon that makes something seem important without really confronting its substance or significance. "Don Redlich made interesting use of his own filmed image in 'Dance for One Figure, Four Objects and Film Sequences.' In it Redlich contrasted the actual performing space on stage for himself with the vistas afforded to him in the portions that were filmed down long corridors." What is there in McDonagh's account of this work (choreographed by Anna Nassif and not Redlich as he implies) to indicate why he picked this film dance to mention out of all the other film dances that contrast actual with cinematic space? Why did he single out the image of the corridors when the piece also contained very strong images of Redlich running in a parking lot and carrying high stools and knocking them over, classical music and futuristic sounds, and various visual distortions of both the filmed and the live dancer? And above all, what was the quality of the dance—what was it like or how did McDonagh feel about it or what in the world did it mean or . . .?

There's no use going on with these questions because we don't get any answers. Only pieces of information, and misinformation, arbitrarily selected, noncommittally offered, as meaningless as a month's vacation in the card catalogue room of the New York Public Library. *The Rise and Fall and Rise of Modern Dance* is not a truthful book because its author won't look us in the eye.

## CHALLENGE TO THE ARTS IN ACADEME

by Jack Morrison

Mahoney, Margaret, editor,

The Arts on Campus: The Necessity for Change.

New York Graphic Society Ltd., Greenwich, Connecticut, 1970. \$6.50

"All of us who have shared in the writing of this book," says Jon Roush in the Epilogue of Margaret Mahoney's *The Arts on Campus*, "are convinced that a reformation of values is urgently in order, that the reformation must draw on artistic perception and discipline, and that such artistry cannot be regarded as the possession of professional artists alone."

In her chapter, "Overview of the Present," Miss Mahoney identifies some of the problems Roush's reformation needs deal with:

*The first of these is the absolute separation of the arts, with very little evidence of inter-departmental cooperation or recognition of common interests. The second problem is . . . there has been little recognition that new ways may have to be found to reach large numbers of students, and that student differences, not only in aptitude but degree of interest, are relevant in planning an arts curriculum. . . . A third problem that can be identified as a weakness in university planning vis-à-vis the arts is the lack of relationship or coordination between the regular curriculum and the extra-curricular. . . . The fourth problem is the lack of correlation between curriculum planning and physical design of facilities for the arts. . . . Finally . . . I have concluded that one major fault in college programs is the failure to acknowledge that what goes on in elementary and secondary education is relevant to college teaching. The fault goes deeper because of the failure of colleges to take any responsibility, and thus any real interest in what the schools do and do not offer.*

In a sentence of well placed compassion for those who have tried their hands at reformation, Miss Mahoney adds, "First priority should go to a reconsideration of program, but in fairness to the faculty and administration I admit that limited financial resources for such review or planning probably restrict thinking on the issue." Indeed they do. Especially

these days, they even restrict thinking to ponder the sheer mechanics of "how the hell do we cover the classes?"

This is only the second book, as far as I know, to deal exclusively with the problems of the arts in academe. Two years ago, Dennis and Jacobs brought out *The Arts in Higher Education* with a helpful chapter serving their problems by Edward Mattil called, "Teaching the Arts." But Dennis and Jacobs were concentrating on one serious problem—the accessibility of the arts in post-secondary education to interested students on as equitable a basis as the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities.

*The Arts on Campus* is the first book to deal comprehensively with a concept of the arts in higher education. It turns out to be a kind of act of brinkmanship. The current chaos, bigotry on campus and off, along with the real hope and promise for a flowering of the arts makes a climate for particularly hardy growth. This book helps penetrate what Clausewitz called "the fog of war" which surrounds the arts programs on most campuses today.

As Roush says there are two big problems: a) reformation of values for the arts based on artistic perception and discipline, and b) the inclusion of all in the experience of artistic encounter. Speaking to both points, Norman Lloyd has some lively things to say about teaching and learning music, ". . . the present musical revolution is giving us all a chance to redefine what we think music is all about." He speaks to both problems and his ideas for breadth and innovation would rejuvenate the tired blood in most music schools. It's clear to him that ". . . the rigid boundaries in the arts are breaking down . . . ."

James Ackerman focuses on the need and means for encompassing the arts in liberal education at the college level. "Having provided no means in our educational system for mediating between passions and thoughts, we should not be surprised when our citizens, and notably some of the best educated younger ones, express their dear convictions

violently." Mr. Ackerman proposes rather explicitly a plan "... intended primarily for the academic student rather than for the future artist. . . ."

Eric Larabee, writing as attractively as ever, makes the case for the arts per se. Noting Walt Whitman's observation that great artists need great audiences to nurture them, Mr. Larabee says, "... if one begins with a societal demand, with a felt and explicit need for which no other answer exists, then the obligation of universities to restructure and fortify their commitments to the arts will emerge forthwith." And, "... there is much to be said for ... defending the arts by professionalizing them. . . ." Mr. Larabee sees "... a rapid growth in university programs is not merely probable but inevitable."

Peter Caws' utopian chapter, "Notes on a Visit to a Distant Campus," is a mind-expander in that it projects the outlines of a radical program for long term change in arts education.

As Miss Mahoney stated, her study of twenty-five colleges was a limited one. One can certainly challenge her sample for being skewed toward the "elite Northeast." Robert A. Morison, in last summer's *Daedalus* observed that most comprehensive and innovative arts developments in higher education were appearing in state supported public universities. Further, timing made it impossible to include new, promising developments like the California Institute of the Arts, SUNY at Purchase, and York University in Toronto, all led by men who came from the established arts programs in

academe. Nevertheless, I don't think a more comprehensive sample would have changed her findings and those of her collaborators very much, if at all.

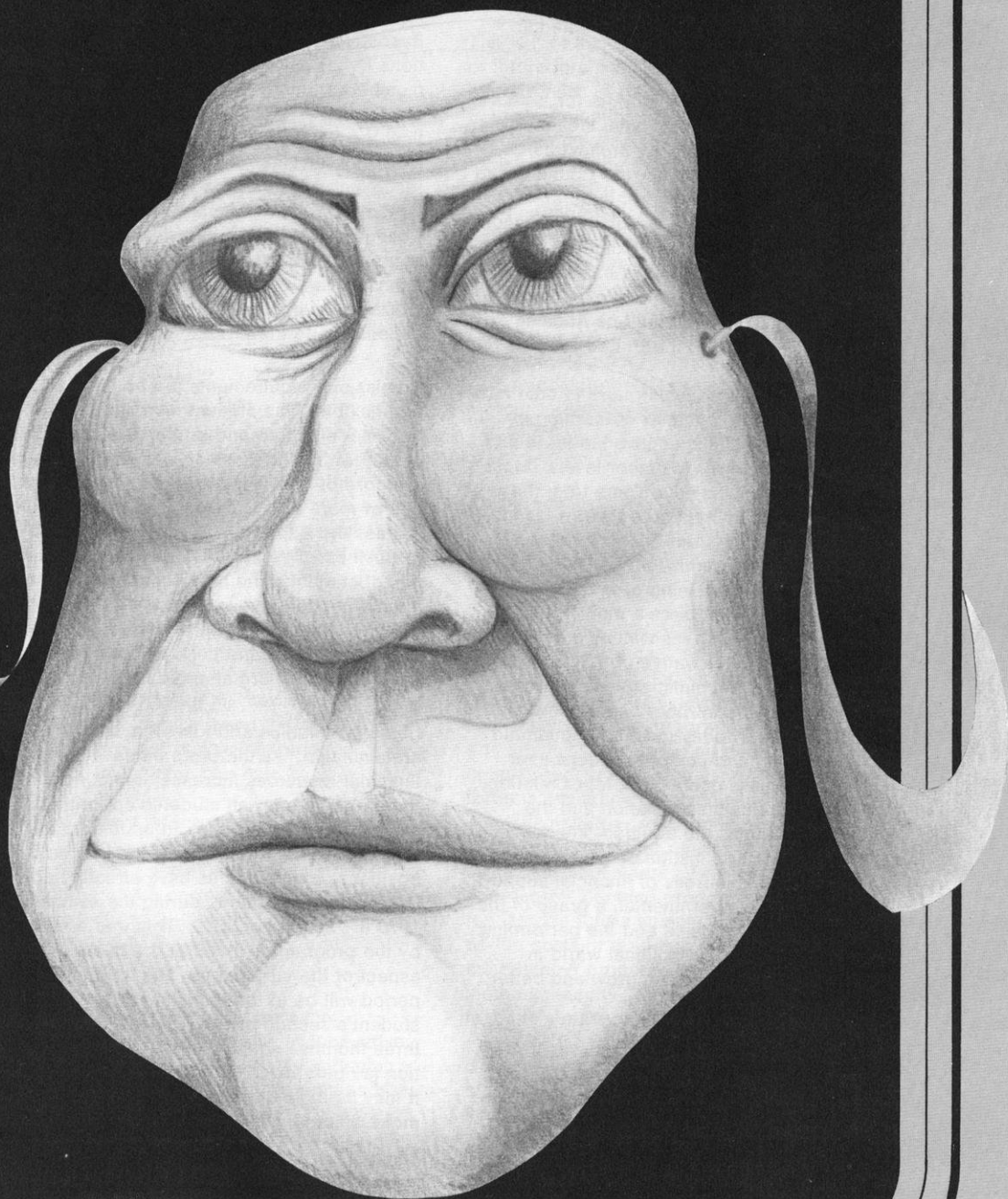
Today, each day is a critical moment for the arts in academe. As the demand increases, the support decreases or is simply shut off. Witness the plight of the School of Arts at Columbia University. This makes doubly difficult the two immediate problems: staying alive and being effective in terms of artistic perception and discipline. There are at least ten, maybe twenty-five, more or less comprehensive units of fine arts in colleges and universities in the U.S. But getting the arts together administratively is only a first, necessary act of convenience. The ultimate step is to work together on projects of mutual conceptual concern — not just jobbing in the choreographer or musician to do a chore for a fraction of a production or the film-maker to do something to liven an exhibition in the gallery. And who knows precisely the relationship of the arts in higher education to architecture, design and planning?

In my opinion, Miss Mahoney and her collaborators have not only identified key problems at a desperately critical moment for school and society but offered carefully conceived and developed suggestions for managing them. Artists, teachers, administrators and especially trustees, regents, state legislators and concerned citizens (like parents as well as John Gardner and the members of Common Cause) had better read this book and take a position vis-à-vis its ideas and suggestions because the flood of students is already here and rising.

The Editors wish to acknowledge an error on p. 473 of Mr. Morrison's article in Vol. 8:2 of ARTS IN SOCIETY. The misprinted sentence stated "... on the further fact that after World War II the Schiller Theatre in West Berlin opened in 1951 with a performance of *Professor Bernhardt* directed by Arthur Schnitzler's son, Heinrich." It should have stated "... on the further fact that, after the end of the *Thousand Year Reich*, the directorate of the new Schiller Theatre in West Berlin invited Arthur Schnitzler's son, Heinrich, to direct *Professor Bernhardt* which he did in 1953.

# NOTES AND DISCUSSION

Training the Arts Administrator



## THE ARTS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM AT UCLA

by Hy Faine

A Master's Degree Program in the special field of Arts Administration began in September, 1969 at the Graduate School of Business Administration of the University of California, Los Angeles. It now has a total of sixteen students: four in the second year of the program and twelve who were admitted in September, 1970.

The program trains administrators for organizations such as museums, theatres, dance companies, symphony orchestras, opera companies as well as Arts Councils and other institutions supportive of cultural enterprises. The Master's Program will occupy the student full time for approximately six academic quarters. These will include classroom work, laboratory and field experience with arts organizations in the Los Angeles area and other cities in the United States.

The training of arts administrators to date has been, by and large, a matter of learning by doing, moving up the executive ladder in arts institutions from lower to higher levels. Most directors of museums have come from the curatorial ranks; managers of theatre, dance or opera companies from the performing artists. The basic premise of the UCLA program is that the training of arts administrators, in the 1970's, requires a more specific and detailed approach, as well as a knowledge of many administrative principles and the acquisition of administrative techniques and skills available to other enterprises. An arts administrator today must be acquainted with accounting and computers, consumer behavior, business economics, labor relations, management principles, taxation and the behavioral sciences. In addition, the special character of the arts institutions requires a knowledge of the sources of financial support, both private and governmental, a grasp of the development of the visual and the performing arts and the social and political world in which these institutions can grow and better serve the public.

The Arts Administration Program at UCLA is centered in the Graduate School of Business Administration and has the close cooperation of the College of Fine Arts, including the

Departments of Music, Theater Arts, Dance and Art. Thus all the elements inherent in arts organizations which the prospective administrator will face are represented and are available to the students in this program.

In keeping with our belief that theory must be melded with practice and that the academic world must work with the arts institutions themselves, the Chancellor of UCLA has established an Advisory Committee on Arts Administration. On this Committee are the Executive Directors of all the arts organizations in Los Angeles as well as faculty members from the College of Fine Arts and the Graduate School of Business Administration, the School of Law, and the University Extension division. This Advisory Committee recommends to the Deans of the Graduate School of Business Administration and the College of Fine Arts proposed curriculum and course development, standards for student admissions, areas of research, the scope and character of internships as well as additional dimensions to the program itself.

Admissions requirements are both specific and flexible. The student must have a bachelor's degree and rank in the upper third of his graduating class as well as demonstrate a record of involvement in or knowledge of one or more artistic fields. He is also required to pass the Admission Test for Graduate Study in Business. We are attempting to achieve a mix of students who have just received their bachelor's degrees and those who have been out of college a few years. Letters of recommendation and personal interviews (when possible) are also required.

Some fellowships and research assistantships are available. As the program develops and financial resources increase, it is our intent to be able to offer all students opportunities as paid research assistants. In addition, most of the internships, it is our hope, will be paid positions. Two students have already had internship assignments during the summer of 1970 in Washington, D.C. This was arranged by the program as a test of the internship aspect of the curriculum. The internship period will be in the Fall Quarter of the student's second academic year, usually for three months except where the host organization is operative in the summer, in which case it may be extended to six months. Furthermore, since a thesis is one of the requirements

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for the M.S. degree, it is hoped that a number of the students will use the knowledge and experience they gain as interns as a basis for their Master's thesis. Thus, the complementary character of the program — learning and experience — theory and practice — will be exemplified in a concrete way.

The UCLA Arts Administration Program is conceived not only as a training center for future arts administrators, but also as a center for research in the problems of Arts Administration. Such research was begun last year with the participation of a number of faculty members of the Business School, the College of Fine Arts, and the Law School. Much of this research is preliminary in nature but as more is undertaken by faculty and students, it will become more comprehensive in character and will be published. This work will add to the present limited published material in the field of Arts Administration and fill a long-felt need for more detailed studies and investigation of basic economic, social, and administrative aspects and issues of this field.

Two other phases of the UCLA program should also be mentioned. One is our hope to make UCLA a center for the exchange of information, ideas and research by other faculties, researchers and practitioners in the entire field. A Newsletter has been published several times during this past year and two conferences were held in 1969 prior to the initiation of the program. Similarly, several arts institutions and organizations have turned to the program for assistance and research in a number of problems which they face. It is our belief that in the future more such requests will be received and that a full-fledged Center of Arts Administration Research and Training can result.

A second aspect, at the moment potential and in the planning stage, are seminars and conferences for present arts administrators to acquaint them with current advanced management practices as well as the future problems and issues facing the arts and cultural organizations.

Additionally, through a grant from the University of California program in Innovative Projects in University Instruction, continuing research into problem solving techniques is being carried on in the Arts Administration Program at UCLA. This program recently brought William J. Baumol, leading economist and co-author of the Twentieth Century Fund report, *Performing Arts: The Economic*

*Dilemma*, to the campus for a seminar with our students.

In summary, the UCLA program will train the future arts administrator, engage in research and the exchange of information and experience, serve as a center for publication and debate, and provide a bridge between what is being done today and what the future trends and development in American society and arts institutions may require.

The test of the basic premises and the value of the program will be in the quality and effectiveness of the students we prepare and in the germination of ideas and proposals which we develop. Thus we hope to be of assistance to the arts institutions and organizations in fulfilling their objectives and meeting the challenges which they face in a future uncertain but dynamic — of which one thing is reasonably certain, it will be different than it is today.

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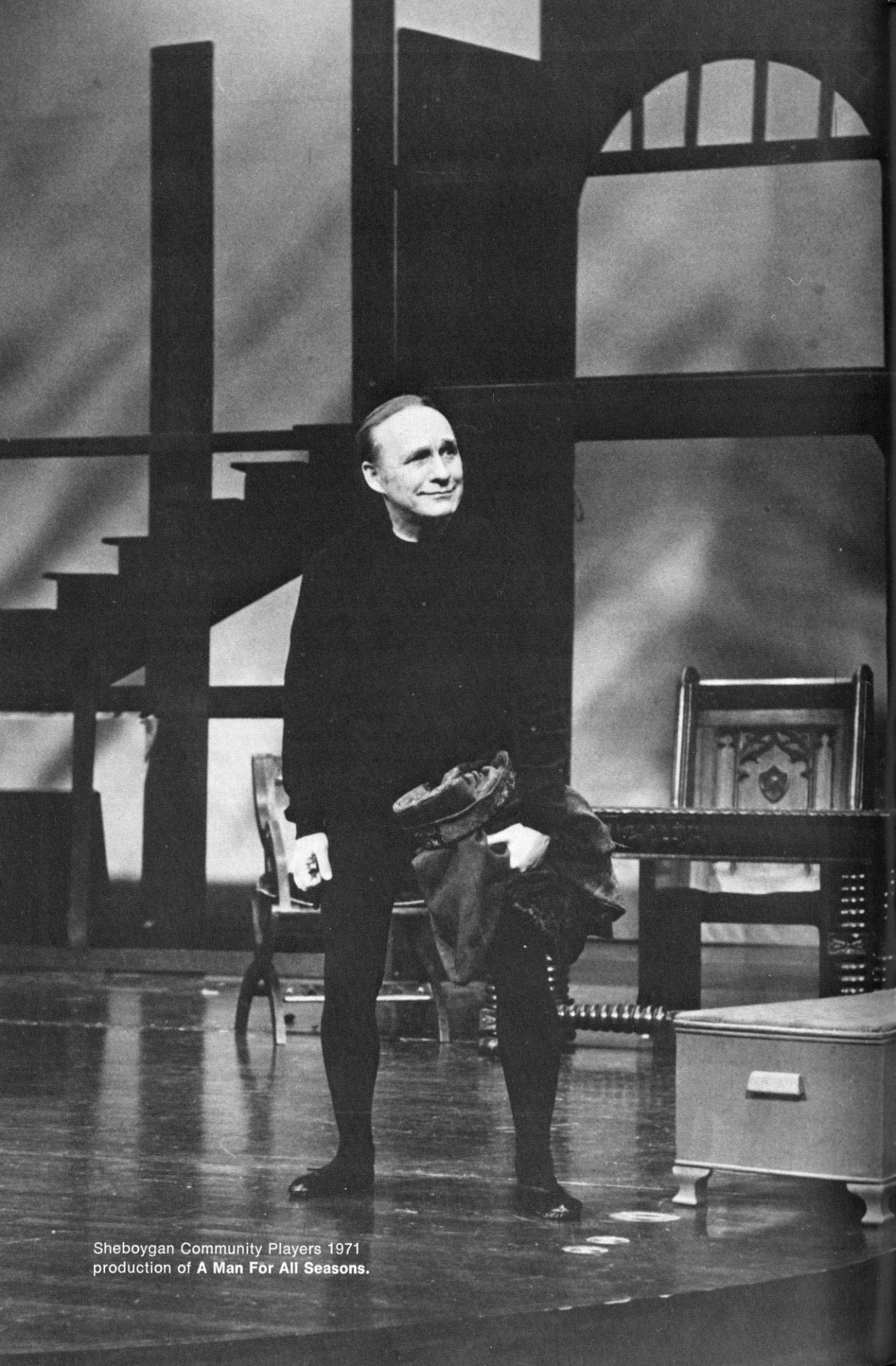
## ARTS ADMINISTRATION AT HARVARD

by Stephen A. Greyser

The Institute in Arts Administration at Harvard is under the auspices of the Harvard Summer School, and conducted its first teaching program in July 1970. Participants in the four-week intensive program were some 60 arts administrators from all parts of the country and from a wide variety of arts organizations, including community arts centers and councils, theatre groups, dance companies, orchestras, museums, university arts programs, and others. The two year old non-degree teaching program will be repeated in future summers. Specifics follow on the goals of the Institute; the objectives of the teaching program, its curriculum, teaching methods, faculty, and participants; and the Institute's research program.

*Goals* — The primary mission of the Institute is *improved management in the arts* — improved administrative skills and understanding to enable arts organizations to gather

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Sheboygan Community Players 1971  
production of **A Man For All Seasons**.

and employ their human and financial resources more wisely. The principal vehicle to help carry out this mission is a four-week summer teaching program, and associated research activities.

**Teaching Program** — The teaching program seeks to provide individuals with fundamental skills and practice in management relevant to administering arts organizations and activities. The goal is an understanding of *managing*, as distinct from performing, in arts organizations. The intended end-product is a person with *both* training in administration *and* sensitivity to artistic standards. The underlying premise of the teaching program is the applicability to training in arts administration of the same approaches that have proven successful in the field of business administration. For arts organizations, despite their unique characteristics, share many essential characteristics with business organizations, e.g., the need for defining an organizational *purpose*, the need for *planning*, the need for careful *financial administration*, the need for efficient *audience development and promotion* (marketing), the need for sensitive handling of *human relations*, and in the case of larger entities the need for effective *organizational structure*.

**Curriculum** — The integrated curriculum of the four-week teaching program focuses on three core areas:

- *Basic Management Subjects*, providing roots in business functions such as financial administration, audience development and promotion, management structure, human relations, etc.
- *Administering Arts Organizations*, presenting specific arts management situations wherein the basic management tools are to be applied.
- *Impact on Management of Artistic Criteria*, treating specific problems growing from the artistic context in which the arts administrator works, such as artistic and community standards, artist relations, performance evaluation for arts organizations, etc.

In addition, special interest is paid to public policy implications for the arts. In 1970, this interest was manifested by a series of sessions comparing international support and evaluation of the arts, with participants from Britain, France, Germany and the U.S.

**Teaching Methods** — The 70+ classroom sessions are taught primarily by the case method, i.e., using materials based on

problems and situations actually faced by administrators. Many of the cases have been developed from the experiences of arts organizations. (See "Research," below.) In addition to the case classes, the curriculum includes discussion sessions, readings, lectures, and field projects. Individual and group reports and presentations are also part of the program.

**Faculty** — Principal instructors are drawn from Harvard's Faculties of Arts & Sciences and Business Administration, with additional lecturers from both the arts and academic fields. Among the major instructors (and their backgrounds) in 1970: Thomas C. Raymond (management organization, environmental analysis), Stephen A. Greyser (marketing, consumer behavior), Nelson Goodman (philosophy, aesthetics), Alva Kindall (human relations), Mary Wehle (financial management), and Douglas Schwalbe (arts and the community).

**Participants** — The major orientation of the teaching program is toward those already committed to or involved with the field of arts administration, rather than those with no previous background. This year's 60 participants included men and women from community arts councils and centers, university arts programs, and a variety of individual arts organizations, as well as an arts critic and several graduate students in the arts interested in the "administrator's view." Participants receive a certificate of completion of the program.

**Research Activities** — The research activities in conjunction with the teaching program are principally an outgrowth of the personal interests and professional background of the participating faculty members. For example, the gathering and development of field case studies in arts administration in recent years has led to the publication of *Cases in Arts Administration* by Messrs. Raymond, Greyser, and Schwalbe. Largely through the efforts of W. Howard Adams (of the National Gallery), a member of the program's planning committee, the international panel on public policy in the arts was arranged.

Future plans of the Institute call for continuing the teaching program in basically its present orientation and structure. Associated research activities in the areas of case studies and public policy will likely be expanded.

Administratively, the Director of the Harvard Summer School Institute in Arts Administra-

tion is Douglas Schwalbe, Managing Director of Harvard's Loeb Drama Center and Managing Director of Harvard's Summer School Repertory Theater. Harvard Business School Professor Thomas C. Raymond is responsible for the Institute's educational program. Harvard Business School Associate Professor Stephen A. Greyser directs the Institute's research efforts.

Correspondence about the Institute and teaching program should be addressed to:  
Mr. Douglas Schwalbe  
Loeb Drama Center  
64 Brattle St.  
Cambridge, Mass 02138

## THE WISCONSIN PROGRAM IN ARTS ADMINISTRATION

by E. Arthur Prieve

More than five years ago initial steps were made at the University of Wisconsin to take the lead in establishing a program in graduate education in Arts Administration. At that time the Graduate School of Business at this University enrolled the first candidate in the United States for a Ph.D. in Arts Administration, as later reported in a Wall Street Journal article of April 5, 1968. The work of a feasibility study committee along with the advice and encouragement from arts administration practitioners prompted the Graduate School of Business to establish a program in graduate education in Arts Administration, leading to a Master of Arts Degree. Shortly thereafter the Regents of the University of Wisconsin and the State Coordinating Committee for Higher Education gave final approval for this degree, thus making the Wisconsin program in Arts Administration the first in the nation to be fully accredited academically on a resident campus.

The Wisconsin program provides a valuable supportive input which higher education can offer threatened institutions of the arts in the present day through opportunities for graduate training of arts administrators, inservice training in administration, individual study, research, and the dissemination of information in this field.

The Master of Arts degree in Arts Administration, designed for students interested in

pursuing professional careers in arts organizations, provides a sound but highly flexible curriculum which will combine solid, practical business experience of an "interning" nature in arts organizations, along with appropriate graduate course work. The course work also has a two-fold thrust — partly in business organization and management, accounting, marketing, journalism, law, and economics which give the tools needed for the trade; and partly in a broad fine arts area including music, theatre, dance, visual arts, and films to enhance the understanding of and sympathy for the arts and the artists.

Training in business and organization techniques, especially adapted to the needs of the arts is supplemented with a seminar in Arts Administration offered on a continuing basis. This seminar provides both students and faculty the opportunity to synthesize and critically review literature and research available in the field, and to develop and conduct empirical research, both individually and as a group, on contemporary issues and problems confronting arts organizations and their administrators, thereby making a valuable contribution to the knowledge in arts administration. In addition, periodic colloquium are organized and offered to generate dialogue with visiting lecturers and practicing arts administrators. Such activities provide opportunities for both the student and administrator to gain new insights and facilitate the transition of theory to practice.

Once the candidate has successfully completed the major portion of his course work, he is required to spend a period of time interning with an arts institution which sponsors this phase of the program. The University of Wisconsin on its several campuses has a long and rich history of arts activity which provide a variety of opportunities for interning and learning on the job, which is considered vitally important to successful instruction in this new career area. To date, students in the Wisconsin program have served internships in various capacities with repertory theaters, State Arts Councils, The Lake George Opera Festival, Marlboro and as cultural program coordinators for campus systems.

The Master of Arts degree in Arts Administration varies in length from three to five semesters. For those candidates who enter the program, having substantially met the

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undergraduate requirements for the Bachelor of Business Administration degree at The University of Wisconsin, the program will normally require three semesters or two semesters and either one or two summer sessions. For those candidates who enter the program with less than the equivalent of a Bachelor of Business Administration degree, the program will require a proportionately longer time. For example, students holding a Bachelor's degree but with little or no business or economics education would normally require five semesters or four semesters and either one or two summer sessions to obtain a Master of Arts degree.

It is necessary to evaluate each candidate's background and needs on their own merits. Consequently, a specific program for each degree candidate is developed in consultation with a professor in the field of arts

administration and approved by the Graduate Studies Committee of the Graduate School of Business.

At its inception, one objective of the Wisconsin program stressed maintaining a relatively small enrollment in order to provide close contact with the student and an awareness of his development. Those students admitted to the program are required to have a bachelor's degree, appropriate graduate admission test scores, and be able to demonstrate sufficient interest and a defined career purpose in the arts either through course work or past active experience with them to assure a continuing involvement.

Applications may be secured by addressing Professor E. Arthur Prieve, Graduate School of Business, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

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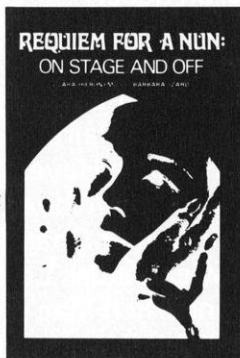
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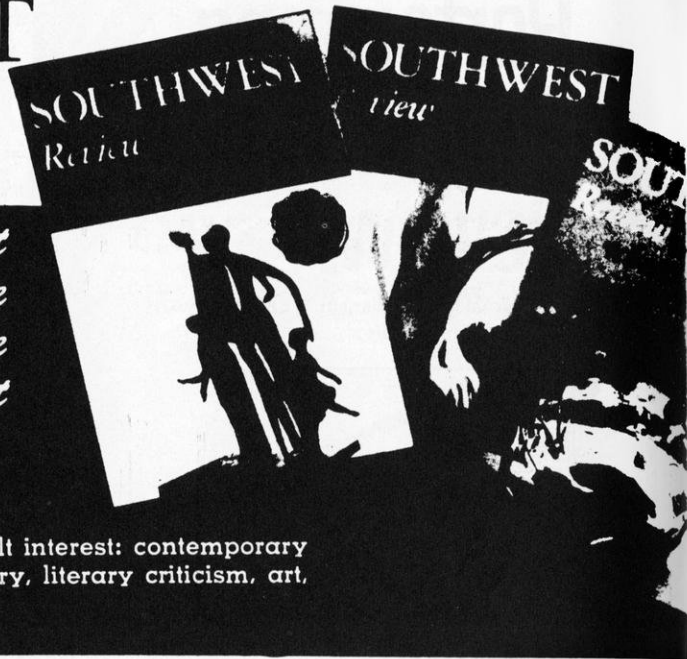
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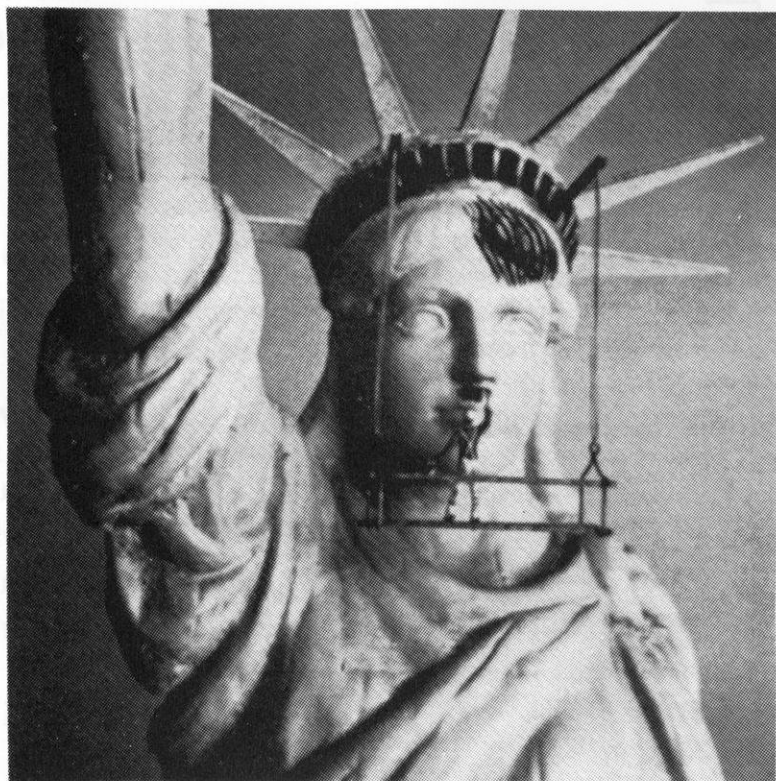


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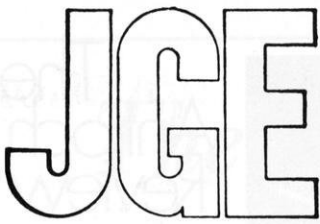
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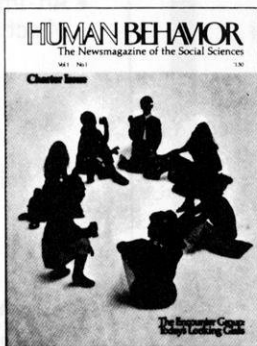
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